

# **Organisational Learning on ‘Another Map’**

Phenomenological Explorations with  
Ecological Epistemology as Practical Learning  
for Development-Aid Organising

Volume I

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for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other University and that it is entirely my own work.

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Sarah Elizabeth Barry

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## Summary

This thesis is a phenomenological description of organising practices *as* 'Irish Aid'. The Organisation is the division of the Irish Government Department of Foreign Affairs that manages Irish Official Development Assistance (ODA). The construct of 'organisational learning' is used as an overall perspective for considering development-aid organising practices. International ODA is currently ordered with a rubric of 'effective aid', formally structured and practiced with logical modelling. Critique of this approach, on the basis of the complexity of the aid process and organising practices generally, frames one strand of the literature, while another takes a technical perspective, thus leaving the social and discursive complexity insufficiently explored. During periods of participant research-practice over two years it was noted that organisational members seemed to continually make sense of their situation with discourses of 'gaps', 'lacks' and 'problems'. This interpreting practice was considered contingent, although unreflexive and disempowering. It was also judged to be a phenomenon appearing consistently with other organising contexts. The aims were therefore to explore and generate different understandings of interpreting processes as practical contingencies and empowering responses, to generate fresh resources to empower practitioners to learn creatively, and to construct 'learning for development-aid organising practice' as ethically relevant in ways to be accounted for.

Relational Constructionism was used as an ontological/epistemological frame to orientate the description with an 'Ontology of Becoming'. The phenomenon of 'relating processes' functioned to focus the enquiry. They are the ways by which meaning, knowledge and sense are made *as, with* and *for* a 'given' although always 'possible' world. A Pragmatics orientation to language was used to structure the description of several clusters of qualitative data generated. As a result 'practical' features of organising life emerged as the 'location' for new forms of organisational learning for development-aid. As relating processes they are explored and described as 'interpretations used' for learning and organising. They are considered here as 'problems'; as organising stories of 'coherence' and 'programme country strategic planning'; as language-*used* during a 'CSP Review Workshop'; and as dialectic patterns of complex dimensionality.

Through this process new resources for practical learning with development-aid organisational contexts have been generated. They are presented and described discursively and graphically throughout.

Chapter One describes Irish Aid and the thesis as 'textualising practice' by presenting the research topic, the context of international development-aid and the literature of organisational learning. The

relating process ‘contingency/complexity’ is identified as a core predicament figuring for the situation of practical learning and organising practice.

Chapter Two describes the research methods used and generated during the research process as contingencies for practical deuterio-learning *about* and *with* organising practice.

Chapter Three describes how Irish Aid members generate ‘learning’ and ‘coherent’ organising practice as ‘problematic’. By describing ‘another’ ecological approach the position is taken that such interpreting practices disable critical flexing capacity for deuterio-learning.

Chapter Four explores how a topographical description of a learning landscape can broaden horizons. This is a general orientation to the remainder of the thesis. It is also a frame for telling several ‘stories’ of organising practice as Irish Aid.

Chapter Five describes how an *orientation* was developed in order to explore *pragmatically* the language-used for Irish Aid strategic planning. It describes how relating processes of ‘contingency/exigency’ (figuring as Irish Aid *and* as research practice) generate ways to go-on *as* the complex relating process of ‘position/purpose-practice’. How this connecting pattern generates what features as ‘topic’ or ‘determination’ is also explored.

Chapter Six describes how ‘topics’ are generated with dialectic relating processes for ‘position/purpose’ with the frames of ‘ontological condition’, ‘syntactical language’, ‘learning cycles’ and ‘participation’. Irish Aid’s learning ‘problems’ are revisited from this perspective and interpreted as ‘predicaments’ and ‘patterns’ apt for practical deuterio-learning.

Chapter Seven describes ‘again’ the core insights generated with the research praxis and ‘tends’ them towards new contexts for practical learning as reflexive enquiry. It is ‘unfinished text’ that describes the contribution-generated as a path for new topographical descriptions for practical learning praxis.



‘Our only hope of understanding the universe  
is to look at it from as many different points of view as possible.’

J.B.S. Haldane

*Possible Worlds*

1927

I dedicate this work to:

My parents,  
**Brenda and Norman Barry**  
*for the kernal of difference*

My sisters,  
**Dorcas, Ruth and Joanna**  
*who I make sense with first*

My friend,  
**Ann O'Reilly**  
*who is solidarity every time*

My nieces and nephew,  
**Bethany, Ethan and Keziah Hart**  
*that they always hold possibility close to hand*

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## List of Abbreviations

AOB	– Any Other Business
APBs	– Area-Based Programmes
APSO	– Agency for Personal Service Overseas
CSOs	– Civil Society Organisations
CSP	– Country Strategy Paper
DAC	– Development Assistance Committee
DBS	– Direct Budget Support
DCI	– Development Cooperation Ireland
DFA	– Department of Foreign Affairs
DFID	– Department for International Development
DPG	– Donor Partner Group
DPs	– Donor Partners
DS	– Development Specialist
E+A	– Evaluation and Audit
EU	– European Union
GBS	– General Budget Support
GNP	– Gross National Product
GS	– General Service
HAPS	– HIV/AIDS Partnership Scheme
HO	– Head Office
HOD	– Head of Development
HOM	– Head of Mission
HQ	– Head Quarters
HR	– Human Resources
HRH	– Human Resources for Health
ICT	– Information Communication Technology
IDS	– Institute of Development Studies
INGO	– International Non-Governmental Organisation
IT	– Information Technology
JAS	– Joint Assistance Strategy
JICA	– Japan International Cooperation Agency
KA	– Knowledge Audit
KMWG	– Knowledge Management Working Group
LA	– Local Advisor

MAPS (I, II) – Multi-Annual Programme Scheme  
MDGs – Millennium Development Goals  
MfDRs – Management for Development Results  
MTR – Mid-Term Review  
NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation  
ODA – Official Development Assistance  
ODI – Overseas Development Institute  
OECD – Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development  
OLS – Organisational Learning System  
PA – Personal Assistant  
PAEG – Programme Appraisal and Evaluation Group  
PAF – Poverty Action Fund  
PC-A – Programme Country A (B-K)  
PMDS – Performance Management Development System  
PRSP – Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper  
RAPID – Research and Policy in Development  
S/O – Subject/Object, Self/Other  
SMG – Senior Management Group  
SWAp – Sector Wide Approach  
SWOT – Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats  
TORs – Terms of Reference  
UN – United Nations



## Chapter One: Organisational Learning on ‘Another Map’

‘And is it complicated? Well, it is complicated a bit’

*J.L. Austin*

(1979b: 252)

‘Organisations are somewhat like the city: organic, constantly recreating themselves ... Having no static essence the city can never truly be represented cartographically any more than organisations can ever be truly represented propositionally’

*Stewart Clegg*

(2002: 9)

‘Perhaps we are only required to recognize what it is that we are already doing in our relations to and with each other: to recognise and attend to how we ourselves do the work of making sense of ourselves and our world to each other, where before we thought ‘mechanisms’ beyond our control must be at work ... [we know now] as a matter of practical hermeneutics’

*John Shotter*

(2008: 5-6)

### **General Introduction to the Thesis**

#### *Learning as Organising Practice<sup>1</sup>*

To act or practice is to generate fresh experience – physical, material, temporal, spatial, modal; and always reflective as symbolic, relational, meaningful, according to some ‘sense making’ or

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<sup>1</sup> For these first two sections I have not referenced the many influences that will be apparent. I have done this to ease the flow of this somewhat poetic beginning. The key ideas of others that have helped form my understanding are amply referenced throughout the remainder of the text.

other. To act in any coordinated or systematic fashion – with others, ordinarily with purpose (no-matter how un-worked or obscure), with material givens, with limits, with a gamut of interpreting practices from the construction of logics to the management of ecological forces, with sound, language and movement, sign, signal and text – is to work-out details as organising practices going-on. Taking up ‘learning’ as an interpreting-text or position for ‘reading’, ‘viewing’ or ‘generating’ organising practice constructs an approach to ‘organisation’ – understood as action, energy or imagined entity – that is fundamentally future-facing.

Learning is for (more) learning, method is for method; practice is for going-on with. By pitching a position of learning/organising-practice the ‘field’ of enquiry is generated as deuterio-learning, a phenomenon of contextualising attentiveness that is continually a creation of complex flowing and forcing movements with persons, discourses, dynamics and materialities. This dialectic relating process of learning/organising-practice generates a multifaceted and always unfinished or contingent ‘surface’ where organising *becomes* a certain oppositional unity to learning and vice-versa. The dialectic relating of this dualism<sup>2</sup> is a way of *moving through* the exigency to practice with a generative intention, it ‘lifts’ the cycle out of closed circuit patterning in ways that will become apparent. The fixing-binary is softened, and a more complex appreciation is enabled as a resource for learning/organising-practice, while also making this a term for deuterio-learning.

While all experience *becomes* as reflection, not all reflection becomes reflexive – that is, attentive to its own processing or terms. Reflexive enquiry requires a second, double or deuterio turn. Learning to attend to this path towards ‘second’ knowledge or wisdom is an essential feature of and for ‘the learning of context’. With reflexive attending organisation becomes pragmatically constructed as ecologically attuned and responsive movements-through the marks or texts of particular ‘matters to hand’; topics that make logics that make topics. A *Figure of Practical Learning* (Figure 1) is presented from the outset as a fruit of research practice, a ‘picture’ emerging as a resource for going-on with organisational learning as deuterio-learning, with and for practical, everyday events, situations and environments. It is a figure with a capacity to mark features of the learning process going-on that are often discounted, unclear, overwhelming or ‘undiscussable’. It is a way of generating a ‘phenomenology of textualising processes’ as an embodiment of deuterio-learning with organising practice.

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<sup>2</sup> And many others that can be constructed

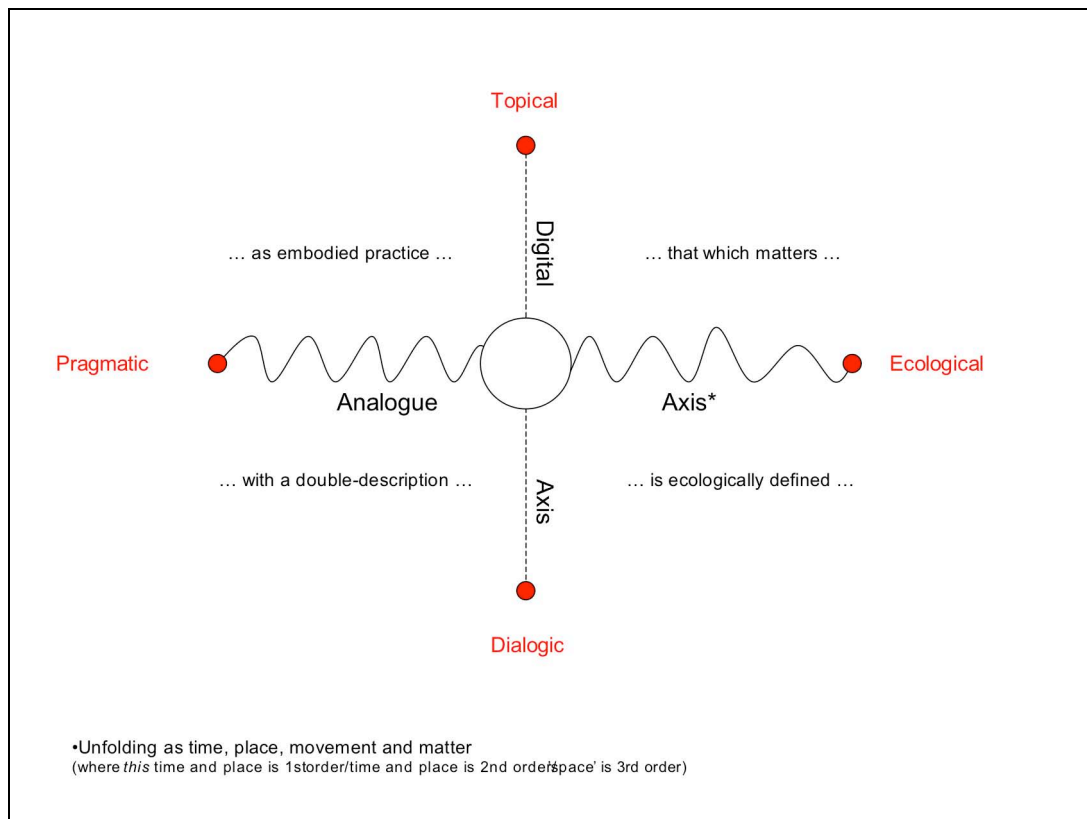


Figure 0-1 – The Figure of Practical Learning

It is on these particular terms, this construction of learning/organising-practice as a generative approach to organisational learning that this Thesis is premised. The terming began with three loosely bounded 'texts'. The text of 'researcher' with a lightly worked 'sketch' of this learning-frame emerging from a variety of previous development and organisational experiences. The text of the 'data-field' with a Government Organisation, a Division of a Department of Foreign Affairs that manages an Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget, an organising practice called 'Irish Aid', and finally the primary method or discipline that constitutes the protocols and processes embodying the particular production of a PhD, as the final text. Figure 2 presents a general view of these dynamics. From these distinctive texts the contextualisation of this descriptive formulation of learning/organising-practice emerges as reflexive enquiry with the processes/patterns of deuterio-learning. It does so in such a way as to generate its own practical resources for going-on with, attempting to *show* in as much as the text *tells*. 'Learning context' becomes a complex, although practical matter of learning<sup>3</sup> some terms for going-on with – by which those terms are always appearing as possibilities that can *become* differently *as* and *for* generative change.

<sup>3</sup> 'Learning' thus becomes a name for making, doing, acting ...

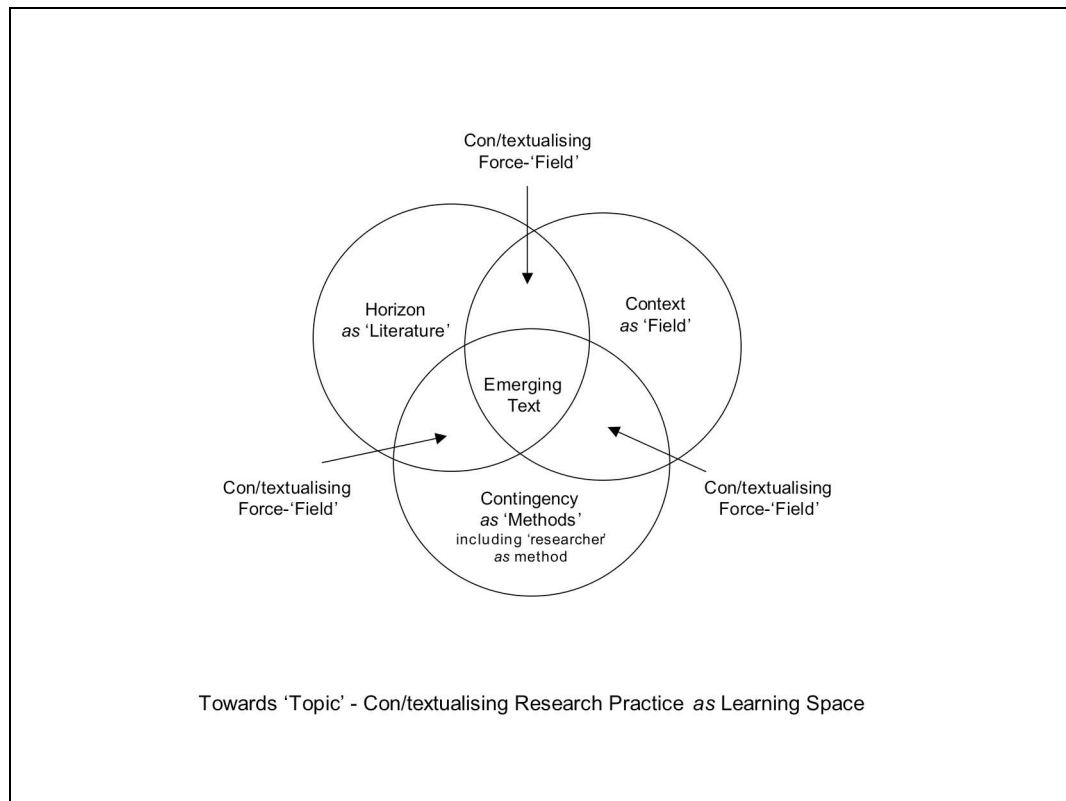


Figure 0-2 – Figuring the Research Process as Contextualising Learning Space

This Chapter is organised as five parts. This first is a general introduction to the thesis as a whole, its vision of learning and a consideration of what the text to hand *is* as contextualising practical learning. The second is a brief introduction to the research topic, which leads to the third part, a description of International Development-aid as a new ‘architecture’ or ecology for practice, and Irish Aid as a player for that field. The fourth part is a review of the literature with two stages, first a consideration of the concept of ‘organisational learning’ in general; and secondly, a review of the concept as understood for development-aid organising practice. The last part of the Chapter is a short orientation towards Chapter Two and the thesis as a whole.

### *Marking the Text*

This text is a piece of knitting or weaving cut from its making. The making has a history and an imagined horizon of future actions, facts that *tend* from<sup>4</sup> the text giving it substance – holding it ‘up-to’ and ‘for’ the weaving. The text, standing as a piece of woven-cloth, is a remnant that when taken up functions in many ways. It tells a story of a research process, while also telling another story of a particular time of organising practices described as *Irish Aid*. It is the site or situating of a number of new positions and possibilities generated with the praxis of its textualisation, its *production*. It is the *mark*, the *grammè* and the *grapheme* of and for a research or

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<sup>4</sup> Also ‘for’ and ‘with’ the text.

*learning* practice – a syntax of perspective, concern, method and medium; all the matters that come to hand with a relating process that generates its own process. The text goes on in a myriad of directions and dimensionalities, from whence it became. As a woven-cloth ‘cut out’ from the weaving, the text is a fragment with loose threads, recurring patterns, slipped stitches, and knots where broken threads are tied together. The text *itself* shows as telling with different voices, logics, marks and interpretations in the service of a reflexive attending that seeks to make somehow new common ways of organising and learning practice, as learning/organising-practice.

Standing *as* and *for* reflexive enquiry the text shows *force* unfolding, never with all its complexity, but remaining open to *this* and *that* and *what-* or *however* might ‘get appeared’ with the weaving. The ‘inflexive’ construction of the term marking the ‘strange’ relating process that makes what-or however comes next an unknown we make with our knowing. We are considering the basic conundrum, whether for learning or organising, whereby our situation continually becomes *as* we imagine, while always being *other* to what we can imagine. As we imagine we *use* many textualisations and boundaries-made for this and that emerging and unfolding purpose. We use the world as we find it, its materiality, spatiality and the cadence of night following day. We use the voice, the hand, the face – and from these relating patterns we create and use the language we make. Our slippery language as *used* twists and turns in disconcerting ways for our logical, linear, categorising *thinking* patterns so that often for *text* we ‘stand back’ from such confusion and *formalise* our uses according to our thinking for order, clarity, control and communication. We try to leave our labyrinthianism aside.

The power or force of this strategy is that a text communicates message, makes its mark matter. But the other ‘logic’, the *dialogic* (of) moving *through* the text often gets lost or forgotten with our objectifying formulations and formalisations. The great resource of our practical expertise often remains latent for the complex predicaments that we commonly organise to face. These ‘resources’ and ‘predicaments’, the ways we connect and disconnect such experiences and practices, the ways we evoke and imagine and decide *about* them – and how we do this *together*, participating as we do with common threads – all of this continually becomes the con/text, the *being-with* aswell as the *being-there* that generates the practices we take up as ordering our experience, our task and the world we dwell.

The text works towards ways of marking, counting – or accounting for – the complexities that feature our learning and organising practices but tend to ‘get disappeared’<sup>5</sup>, to invert the earlier term. Organising complexity is not easy, whether understood as organising-function or the

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<sup>5</sup> A useful term taken up from Fletcher and used throughout the thesis (1998)

situation of address, the challenges to face and respond-to require reflection, deep insight, commitment and considerable ability. Many of the methods, instruments and tools that are imagined and drawn up, that guide coordinated actions, that create the immediacy of situation and view, are drawn from and for our most ready and oftentimes seemingly effective tools (which they are up to a point) – our histories of authority, rule and management; our cultures of what’s good and strong and bright and what’s not; our experiences with the power and rigor of our scientific method, in short our *controlling*, *fixing* and *rational* achievements. Such is the con/text of matter that marks the hegemony of much organising practice.

The text seeks to mark the complexity of con/text, the *relating* of our process, the *texting* of our texts (and this text), the *phenomena of contextualising* going-on – all the time, everywhere; all about. Not only to mark, but with the marking to learn by paying attention to itself, its unfolding process, in ways that generate new resources for going-on with learning. Resources such as changing metaphors for learning and organising, explorations with how we syntax and generate meaning, categories of language-use that generate position and *disposition*, formal figures to pre-figure new practical explorations for organising learning with communities of practitioners; interpretations of the learning process as organising practice that can open up reflexive spaces.

The reflexivity of sustained ‘opening’ is the condition or environment that can enable a ‘double’ or ‘deutero’ learning-ecology to continually become. Like the processing of ‘being/knowing’ such an ‘aorist-ecology’ generates itself<sup>6</sup>, thereby keeping the possibility of learning open, as a loosely-bounded space to explore each time as new. This possibility for learning is imagined as a practical function, a common feature, a practice integrated as organising practice. There are always times and places to ‘come apart’, to have a ‘down day’, to *reflect*; but it seems only if *reflexive* attending becomes continually common and a feature of the knitting that is everyday practice can the functions of deutero-learning or ‘learning to learn’ become accessible as another way to go-on. The text therefore tends towards an inclusive and sustainable epistemology, an epistemology-of-participation, for the practical learning that can enable free and creative ‘response’ to an increasingly complex and highly staked organising life.

You are invited as *reader* to ‘another first time’ of living enquiry with this text to hand as a ‘*this*’ (or a ‘*that*’) come to you. Entered upon as ‘learning process’ the contextualising of the read is liberated with this *projecting* view to what and however may arise. Science or Positivism and the

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Aorist’ is the name for a mode of Ancient Greek language-use that enables a possible future action to be ‘telescoped’ to an undefined future (Zerwick and Grosvenor, 1996). It is rooted from ἄ-ὁδός (a-hodos) meaning, ‘without boundary’ when ὁδός is the item for ‘way, path, road’ and ‘way, means, manner of doing things’ (Liddell and Scott, 1891).

methods for knowing that cohere with its rationale are for knowing *what-is* – they thus generate tautological cycle for going-on with. They are thrown towards confusion when confronted with necessary articulations of *what-is-not* (a contradiction) (Heidegger, 1949b). As the paradigm for much ‘best’ organising practice, and the root of iteration for a development-aid management by and for ‘results’, scientific method as relating process has difficulty with, no terms for the phronetic, the phatic, the political; the poeitic and sophic, the praxial nature of learning/organising-practice. Along with knowing how to projectively make-count, and give-account, with complex goals such as ‘poverty reduction’, surely it is incumbent on development-aid organisations to also know how to contemplate ‘what might be’ by learning to consider *what is not becoming* with the practices going-on.

### *Chapter Coordinates*

A word of explanation is required about the text overall in order to aid the reader and in the process seek some forgiveness in advance. The beginning of each chapter of the thesis is made with contextualising introductions as ‘communications about the communication to follow’. Some of them are long. As a starting point this is risky since *purpose* appears slowly. It marks the learning predicament whereby to learn one needs-context, but in order to gain-context one must learn by doing. The Sixteenth Century mystic John of the Cross described the phenomenon as ‘going by night’. Just as censured ‘communication about communication’ generates double-binds, so also *too much* contextualising means missing the message. The difficulty is substantive since in order to learn how to ‘learn context’ (deutero-learning) it is necessary to reflexively describe the learning process with a double-description (as Irish Aid, as *this* research practice). This is the phenomenological method for understanding the complexity appearing. As a *practical learning exercise* I believe the insights gained will enable clearer ‘communications about the communication to follow’ as empowering for other learning contexts.

John of the Cross also realised that ‘thirst lights our way’. Therefore, to encourage the reader on this path a set of ‘coordinates’ open each chapter to situate it by con/textualising the ‘mapping’ going-on. The first coordinate briefly describes what the chapter is about. The second is an enigmatic question (for the thirst) relating to the whole topic of deutero-learning as practical practice. The first set of coordinates are presented now having already ‘begun’ – they set the ‘beginning’.

### Coordinates – Chapter One

- This chapter begins the description of Irish Aid and the thesis as ‘textualising practice’ by presenting the topic, the context of international development-aid practice and the

literature of organisational learning. ‘Contingency/Complexity’ is noted as a core predicament; as a pressing relating process figuring for practical learning.

- How can ‘another’ way of mapping not become the ‘map’?

## **Part I: An Emerging and Textualising Research Enquiry *as* Topic**

The topic defined for this research project is articulated as:

Organisational Learning on ‘Another Map’  
Phenomenological Explorations with Ecological Epistemology  
*as* Practical Learning for Development-aid Organising

Each of these terms emerges from the research process as unfolding. The first two chapters of the thesis seek to show why and how they were formulated as they are. This is accomplished by means of initial descriptions of the research organisation and its context of practice, a literature review and a detailed description of key features of the research methodology chosen, along with initial steps taken as research practice. It is also important to show why this topic is relevant and how the work has addressed the situations described and offers some new resources for learning with them.

As an important first marker, the term ‘another map’ is taken from Dian Marie Hosking’s description of critical relational constructionism (2007). She explains how relational constructionism is ‘critical’ in the sense that it is an approach premised on another set of coordinates to the prevalent realist/relativist (ontology), subjective/objective (epistemology) binaries that orientate many knowledge-making processes. Relational constructionism is on ‘another map’. It recognises the form of knowing often called ‘science’, as an ‘episteme’<sup>7</sup>, based on fairly firm differentiating patterns that fix dualisms as binary relations (such as either/or), but as *one* among many ways of knowing. In this way relational constructionism can be considered a metapractice for exploring many different knowing processes recognising the validity and usefulness of each, including ‘science’. Relational constructionism offers a way to explore deuterio-learning with formal organising and learning practices often premised on the

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<sup>7</sup>ἐπιστήμη – 1. Knowledge, understanding, skill, experience, wisdom. 2. Scientific knowledge, *science* (Liddell and Scott, 1891)



coordinates of scientific method. This is how the situation of development-aid organising practice and its discourse for organisational learning is considered for this research project.

### *Initial Contextualisation of the PhD Research Project*

This research project is formalised in part by the 'LEARN Project' set up at the *Centre for Global Health* at *Trinity College Dublin* in order to develop research, understanding, and a context for new skills of organisational learning in and for Irish aid-organisations. It is an exploration of practices of organisational learning as *Irish Aid*, the Division of the Irish Government Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) that manages Irish Official Development Assistance (ODA). From the beginning the focus was on the social processes of learning (rather than knowledge/information management) thus generating a context for exploring the interactive and complex nature of learning as a function of generative development-aid organising practice. A social constructionist approach (Gergen and Gergen, 2003, Holstein and Gubrium, 2008) offered a general framework with which qualitative methods of data generation were chosen. From within this frame relational constructionism (Dachler and Hosking, 1995) was taken up as a relational approach to learning and organising practice. Data generation methods included exploratory and unstructured interviews with over seventy-five Irish Aid members, periods of participant observation or research-practice both in Dublin and overseas; and the close tracking and description over two years of a core organisational learning process with Country Strategy Papers (CSPs) (Irish Aid, 2008a).

### *Orienting Figures with the Research Organisation – Irish Aid*

After establishing access to the research organisation<sup>8</sup> and beginning data generation with a one-month exploratory phase at Irish Aid Head Office in Dublin, initial topics or *figures* in relation to learning were identified/described. These figures were collectively termed as interpretations of *Organisational Fragmentation*. A series of 'lacks' were described by organisational members when talking about their work, their experiences as 'Irish Aid' and their understandings of 'Organisational Learning' as a term of reference. Repeated descriptions of 'lacks' and 'gaps', whether of communication, coherence or learning, became apparent as fixing/stabilising constructions, or meaningful 'texts'. As interpreted some causes for the descriptions of fragmentation and incoherence were suggested, the different career-streams (technical, diplomatic and civil service) that make-up Irish Aid; the technical and power-related difficulties with knowledge sharing, distribution and management; and particular concerns relating to the

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<sup>8</sup> Through a series of formal meetings with senior managers from Irish Aid, two researchers from the LEARN Project and the Principal Investigator

imminent decentralisation of Irish Aid Head Office to a regional city as part of a Government policy to decentralise sections of the Civil Service from Dublin. This situation was interpreted as a threat to organisational learning and efficiency.

A notion of organisational learning was perceived as something alien to Irish Aid, something that this research project would ‘do for’ the Organisation. Although a *Knowledge Management Working Group* had been set up during the previous year, members interviewed did not talk about their organisation as a ‘learning organisation’, in fact they generally characterised it as the opposite, an ‘un-learning organisation’,

*I just don't think we are good at feeding learning into planning [the organisation] has no insulation; the heat gets out. Lots of interesting things happening, but the heat is getting out all the time ... Activities are the easiest thing, but where are they going?*

*[It's a] dysfunctional government organisation, we all know that! You knew that before you started!*

*All the time we are working with two organisations ... there can be resentment of specialists coming in and telling people what to do, we try to find a way of managing differences, set up structures that facilitate cross sectional dialogue.*

A factor of perceived incoherence seems to be a view of knowledge as both a possession and a key to power:

*Some people are tight with knowledge*

*There is an old organisational tradition, many management people don't even use a pc, there is an absence of a learning culture, keeping information to yourself is important, it's a competitive environment, for diplomats its about advancement*

*The official stance is, we can't have specialists here, that's the way the Civil Service works, you need to be a "Jack of all trades" willing to take on anything ... the organisation cannot survive like that.*

With such figures of fragmentation and apparent incoherence presenting an approach was sought that would address those processes and interactions *problematised* by Irish Aid organisational members themselves on their own terms. At heart these phenomena were

understood in the first instance as communication processes, while as second-order abstractions they were interpreted as relating processes, thus broadening the epistemological-frame from phenomena *in* context to the epistemological context itself as the focus of research enquiry. Relational constructionism starts enquiry with communication processes theorising them as relational processes (Hosking, 2000a). Such processes are understood as ‘language based interactions’ (Hosking, 2006) embodied interpersonally, but as essentially epistemological formulations for making meaning, sense and knowledge, as acting or embodying for going-on with discursive and material processing.

As documentation referred to by members during interviews was reviewed, their concerns with fragmentation, communication and learning began to take shape within the context of an development-aid environment that is increasingly oriented towards a ‘Coherence’ of development co-operation and development-aid delivery with a relatively new aid architecture that includes a variety of mechanisms such as the modality of General Budget Support (GBS), the rationalisation of Sector Wide Approaches (SWAs) and the production of Joint Assistance Strategies (JAS) between Multilateral Organisations, Donor Groups (DGs), donor and recipient governments. The general context of these new mechanisms for the disbursement and management of ODA embody a clear political agenda for such constructs as ‘harmonisation and alignment’, ‘aid effectiveness’ and ‘management by results’, as articulated with a series of protocols that frame the Millennium Goals Development Process.

## **Part II: The Research Context**

### *International Aid for the 21st Century – a challenge for learning?*

International aid delivery is a ‘business’ changing in response to a variety of factors including globalisation, demands for greater participation of development-aid recipients and a critical reflection on the failures of almost 60 years of the ‘Age of Development’. The beginning of this ‘age’ can be linked to the United States presidential inauguration speech of Harry S. Truman on the 20th January 1949 (Sachs, 1992) as symbolic of development thinking in the aftermath of the Second World War and The Marshall Plan of 1947 (Robb, 2004). Without exploring here Truman’s aims for identifying specifically, in the Southern hemisphere, ‘under-developed areas’ or the impacts of that view over the decades, we can assert that the landscape of the present development-aid environment is the result of, and a reaction to, much of the foundational thinking and action of that time. Steps such as the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals by 189 countries in September 2000, the emergence of new focus areas such as good governance and the capacity building of civil society and public service, and a greater awareness

of the need for institutional and organisational reform and effectiveness all indicate, in different ways, a general drive to re-orientate, and in some cases reconceive the rationale and operation of development-aid delivery and the idea of 'development-aid' itself.

The role of learning comes into this macro context as a response to a multitude of challenges. It is necessary for *learning* that there is acknowledgement of what is unknown or indeed, awareness *that* unknowns exist and are a continual element of the realities in which we live and work. As will be described below in greater detail, many researchers and development-aid organisations have acknowledged the complexity of development-aid, technical, social, political etc. Seeking new resources to learn about and design fresh project approaches, as well as organisational change, aid practitioners began to take up the ideas of organisational learning and systems-thinking developed in the business and corporate sector especially during the 1980's. Nonetheless, there is acknowledgement that the development sector is different in substantial ways to business in its goals, structures and accountabilities. Some consider that this necessitates a particular approach and style for development-aid organisational learning. In many ways, the learning project for development-aid organisations is only beginning despite the fact that learning and education have long been strong components of aid. It is now clear that the 'developers' have much to learn; about development, about the contexts in which they often work, but maybe most significantly, about themselves and how they are making sense for development-aid.

### *The New Architecture of Development-Aid*

The United Nations stipulated that countries should aim to dedicate 0.7% of gross national income to developing countries by 2012. Resultant increases to aid budgets had at least two important consequences. First, the urgency for accountability increased in line with aid flows. Accordingly, aid organisations sought to attain greater coherence, accountability and focussed on results and evidence-based management (Picciotto, 2002, OECD and Worldbank, 2005) to serve these ends. Second, as they entered partnerships at increasingly higher levels of policy dialogue, organisations required greater clarity of goals, and efficient means for their execution. Policy changes for present development-aid delivery have entailed a shift away from project-based aid toward more programmatic and integrated engagements between donor and recipient governments and international organisations.

Frontline development-aid delivery is increasingly entrusted to recipient governments with new modalities such as Direct and General Budget Support<sup>9</sup>. Attention paid to the nature of recipient/donor relationships is growing (eg. Hinton and Groves, 2004, Eyben, 2006b). The relationships between recipient governments and bilateral development-aid organisations such as Irish Aid are important as greater levels of ODA are directly managed by recipient governments through modalities such as GBS (Irish Aid, 2005a), a concept that can generate difficulties for ODA organisations<sup>10</sup>. Development-aid relationships inherently embody imbalances of power. The conditionalities of donors may be at odds, or disable the possibilities for recipient government's ownership of a programme. These imbalances influence all talk of partnership and have implications for sustainable development-aid delivery for many contexts.

Donor to donor relationships feature little, this includes the patterns of relating across sections or different geographic locations of large organisations. As collaborating groups such as the Nordic+<sup>11</sup> continue to share practices; or the homogenising effects of the DAC Peer Review<sup>12</sup> increasingly require of development-aid organisations precise *articulation* of their positions, it is possible that these relationships, *as* and *with* their relating patterns, will become more complex to negotiate. Equally relevant is the harmonising and aligning environment (Sector Wide Approaches, Joint Assistance Strategies, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers) which as time goes on will require of organisations sophisticated understandings of such abstractions as 'organisational identity' far beyond the mainly technical appraisal of positions enacted at present under the label of 'comparative advantage'.

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<sup>9</sup> General Budget Support is an aid modality that involves the direct transfer of funds into the treasury of a recipient government from a donor government. This modality is usually accompanied by policy dialogue mechanisms such as Joint Assistance Strategies (JAS).

<sup>10</sup> In Ireland, there has been conflict within the development-aid community over the modality of GBS. Newspaper and radio debates took place between prominent NGO actors and a former Junior Minister for Overseas Aid, Connor Lenihan. *Irish Aid* was accused of giving large amounts of Irish tax-payers money to corrupt governments in Africa, see: "Letters to the Editor", *Irish Independent*, 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 2006; *Irish Aid Newsletter*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2006, [www.irishaid.gov.ie/latest\\_news.asp?article=715](http://www.irishaid.gov.ie/latest_news.asp?article=715)

<sup>11</sup> The Nordic+ are a group of 'like-minded donors' who work together in many fora with common policies and approaches etc. The countries thus aligned are Norway, Sweden, Finland, UK, Ireland, the Netherlands and Denmark. Germany and Canada are linked to this group on the issue of Procurement and Joint Finance (Canada only). DFID is the Department for International Development of the British Government.

<sup>12</sup> The DAC Peer Review Process is a quality assurance mechanism of the OECD. The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) reviews ODA Programme performance periodically. Irish Aid was reviewed in 2003 and again in 2009 by the DAC.

Since this research began a world-wide recession has hit ODA budgets from 2008 onwards. Irish ODA was cut by €115 million in the period from July 2008 to February 2009<sup>13</sup>, with further cuts to the budget at the end of 2009. As ODA budgets both climb and fall, the importance of relationships between donor and recipient governments continues to be of critical importance as a broad context. Given that the focus of ODA is increasingly on policy dialogue and coordination, the terming/practicing of those partnership processes is crucial. If organisational learning is to be more than a technical approach to organisational or management efficiency, learning *with* and *as* partnerships will be increasingly important.

### *The Research Organisation – Learning as ‘Irish Aid’*

The particular context for this research is an organisation called *Irish Aid*. The organisation is a division of the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Ireland. In 2007 the Irish ODA Budget was 0.54% of GNP, totalling €869 million (Irish Aid, 2008c). This was a five-fold increase in ODA in a period of ten years. A commitment was made by the then Taoiseach at the UN General Assembly in 2005 that Ireland would meet the official UN ODA target of 0.7% of GNP by 2012. The organisation was therefore in a phase of managing a growing aid budget with considerable annual increments during the period of data generation; the scale-up from 2006 to 2007 was 6.7%.

The Organisation is structured with different ‘Sections’. During the period of data generation there were nine sections, each one taking responsibility for functions in relation to the overall ODA programme. The Programme includes bilateral aid to eight ‘Programme’ or ‘Partner Countries’ (Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Timor Leste and Vietnam), various project based programmes elsewhere (Balkans, South Africa, Eastern Europe etc.), Multilateral aid (EU, UN) and considerable funding to Civil Society including Multi Annual Programmes (MAPS) to five Irish NGOs, now in their second cycle. A significant Emergency and Recovery Budget is also managed. At the time of data generation two sections had support functions rather than administrative in relation to the Programme; the Technical/Specialist and Evaluation and Audit Sections. There was also a section dedicated to human resources and management functions called ‘Support Services’ and a section dealing with Development Education and Communications with the Irish Public. The Organisation remains dispersed geographically with its Head Office in Limerick, a satellite of the same in Dublin, and regional management routed through development teams working at the Embassies of Ireland in the various Partner and Programme Countries.

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<sup>13</sup> Press Release, Dóchas – The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Organisations, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2009

Irish ODA started in 1974, its initiation corresponding with the emergence in the State of a modern industrial economy with changes in external trade policy during the 1960s. Nonetheless, ODA in Ireland is founded on a long tradition of development-aid, especially to Africa through the work of Irish missionaries in the sectors of health and education among others. The involvement of Irish people in Africa from the 1960s onwards also included UN Peacekeeping Missions (the Irish Army's first tour was to the Congo in 1960), and as development aid workers from a variety of NGOs and an Irish Government initiative of technical assistance. Engagements were often with agricultural and livelihood security projects. The importance of this legacy to a small ODA contributor such as Ireland is often described as the quality of relationships built up over time 'on the ground', the practical tradition associated with Irish aid interventions, and a perceived identity of Ireland as a generally benign and neutral ally, not least symbolised by Ireland's status in the developing world as a 'post-colonised country'. In more recent times the economic success of Ireland attracted interest from developing countries seeking to learn from the experience of rapid growth and development.

In recent years the landscape or 'architecture' of development-aid has changed. Irish Aid has responded to these changes by developing policy, entering into new partnerships, and designing more strategic ways of delivering aid. There has been a shift away from the Area Based Programmes of the 1980s and 1990s which were technical-support based interventions, towards more 'upstream' partnerships with other donors and recipient governments. Development-aid delivery has become less a skill of practical action as one of aid management, dialogue and partnership negotiation. This contextual change is important for this research project for which the challenges of learning are increasingly understood as 'social' rather than technical.

The drive to make Irish Aid more of a 'learning organisation' has a variety of routes. The Irish Civil Service in general has been working towards knowledge management and better coordination and communication across different divisions and departments of Government (O' Riordan, 2005). Irish Aid set-up a *Knowledge Management Working Group* (KMWG) in 2004, although getting the knowledge management agenda on the table of senior management was judged to have been difficult (*member interview, 2005*). The KMWG did not meet over a two year period since its initial work of producing a short orientation document (Irish Aid, 2006a), although it is currently operational and primarily concerned with ICT development and training initiatives. Although organisational members are aware of the need for learning, they are also conscious of the barriers and constraints that seem to de-prioritize learning work in their daily organisational life. The focus often tends to be on seeking a *system* to manage knowledge, including creating accessible databases and developing protocols for communication by email etc. Though most members, in some form, know the concept of organisational learning, it tends

to remain remote and ill defined in any practical way. There is a sense that learning seems important notionally but is a concept with little context for the Organisation.

### *Relevance of the Topic for the Present Context*

There is little difference between learning matters figuring as Irish Aid to those identified for other governmental aid organisations in Europe (Arora-Jonsson and Cornwall, 2006, Eyben, 2006a, Ballantyne et al., 2000). The response of the development-aid community has been to look to the concepts of organisational learning and knowledge management among other strategies in a bid to improve organising practices. Nonetheless, many of the different actors seem to be uneasy bedfellows. (A source of the lacks and gaps described by Irish Aid members?) Despite the recognition that *participation* for development-aid ‘has come to stay’ (McCarthy, 2004, Hinton and Groves, 2004), the bureaucratic and ideological worldviews held by many practitioners, and the outworkings that they contextualise as embodied systems and organising patterns for development-aid, seem to be entering unknown territory. A landscape where new development-aid contextualisations for ‘effective’ or ‘inclusive’ development-aid requires, not only new learning for changed modes, patterns and mechanisms, but also learning how to re-create such patterns on an on-going basis for a participating world. Exploring such complexities is inevitably a complex task. The primary relevance and contribution of this research work is its serious consideration of the dynamics of such abstractions as ‘deutero-learning’ and its attempts to generate some practical resources for beginning to learn as *organising practice* with such second-order challenges as those presenting. Taking the long term view this is a time of exploration with no certainties as to how some of the new approaches and partnerships for alignment and harmonisation are going to work out (De Renzio, 2006). Equally, this research work stands as a beginning, an unfinished text, and an exploration with a full sense of the word.

## **Part III: Towards the Topic: A Review of the Literature**

### *Introduction*

This review is concerned with finding paths towards an ecological epistemology that can underpin forms of organisational learning as ‘living inquiry’ (Shotter, 2008); a living enquiry going-on continually with common practices *as* development-aid organising. The term ‘relational processes’ (Hosking, 2007), re-termed ‘relating processes’ (in order to further mark ‘their’ unfinished, contingent and dynamic patterning) is taken up from a strand of the social constructionist literature (Holstein and Gubrium, 2008) as a marker for the contextualising nature and ‘surface’ of knowing and learning.



The discovery of a literature that is ‘critical’ in a very particular sense, locating itself on ‘another map’ to the realist-relativist (as an ontological position) and objective-subjective (as an epistemological position) coordination of discourse and knowing processes (Dachler and Hosking, 1995, Hosking, 2007), offers a way to go-on for organising practice that is inclusive of methods such as evidence-based management, but also offers another context from which to construct other methods as legitimately going-on and ‘delivering’ the development-aid project. Broadening the scope of development-aid methodological practice is important if the situation is to change whereby, ‘[w]hat development agencies say, the language they use and the policies they propose are still out of alignment with what they do’ (Pasteur and Scott Villiers, 2004: 182). Central to the argument developing here is the belief that constructions such as this one can become different when the knowledge-making ‘coordinates’ in use find another contextualising pattern or way of mapping themselves.

In contrast to many ‘knowledge management’ approaches that construct knowledge as a personal acquisition of the individual, thereby treating *it* primarily as *content*, the focus here is on *processes of knowing* in the belief that such processes offer untapped potential for organisational learning (Hosking and Morley, 1991, Hosking and Bouwen, 2000). This reading of the organisational learning literature highlights the relational nature of learning and seeks to define its terms. The intention is to contribute towards understanding the complexity of learning for development-aid organisations as they make, develop and coordinate practices and policies for the management of development-aid. This emphasis is timely given the increasing focus on policy dialogue and the participation of aid recipients in managing and controlling the development process (Pasteur and Scott Villiers, 2004, OECD, 2005, De Renzio, 2006).

With this review links are made between a general body of organisational learning literature generated from for-profit organising contexts, and the uptake of that literature with and for the context of development-aid. Although the development-aid ‘Project’ has a particular history of learning it seems that on-going constructions of organisational learning frames and practices are unquestionably absorbed from the business context. That this context is different in significant ways is relevant; but it is also germane that for relational constructionism generative knowledge is contextual and therefore a matter of *making* that must be taken up with and for each context – organisational members are inherently responsible for the learning going-on.

### Development of a Concept

Reviewers of the field tend to cite the birth of the concept with either, Cangelosi and Dill's work that seeks a synthesis view of learning in a small team (1965) or Cyert and March's research on learning within the 'firm' from a behavioural perspective. For them 'organisational learning' is based on the adaptation of goals and routine (1963). Much of the work of developing a comprehensive view of the concept took place during the 1980's. Fiol and Lyles' define organisational learning as 'the process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding' (1985: 803) with the intention of clarifying terms such as 'change', 'learning' and 'adaptation' for which different applications were causing confusion. Levitt and March gather together a descriptive range of ways by which organisations learn (1988) while Crossan, Lane and White define organisational learning as complex, dynamic processes of intuiting, interpreting, integrating, institutionalising (1999). The overall aim was to 'clarify these issues of definition so that a better theory can be built' (Fiol and Lyles, 1985: 803). A full issue of *Organization Science* focussed on the topic in 1991 with the aim of developing better theories of learning in organisations (Cohen and Sproull, 1991). The review-of-the-field paper included identifies the key constructs and processes associated with organisational learning as knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation and organisational memory; also as a framework for on-going research (Huber, 1991). With these overarching approaches the concept of organisational learning systems came to the fore (Shrivastava, 1983, Bontis et al., 2002).

As both 'organisational learning' and the construct of the 'learning organisation' the quantity of literature around the topic grew dramatically during the 1990's with the greatest focus on application-type literature, including forms of prescriptive and practice-oriented writing (Crossan and Guatto, 1996). The field seemed to divide between normative, prescriptive type literature on the one hand and more descriptive or academically focussed literature on the other (Tsang, 1997), the division is noted by reviewers (Easterby-Smith et al., 1999, Romme and Dillen, 1997). Although the swing to practice and 'application' tended to have a different drive and focus to the academic literature, points of intersection have been identified; the conceptions of what makes organisational learning desirable or productive, views on the nature of threats to productive organisational learning, and attitudes towards whether such threats can be overcome are held in common (C. Argyris, 2005).

Nonetheless, the division of the field as an *issue* is considered overcome with growing awareness of the roles of different 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Brown and Duguid,

1991, 2001) and their particular languages and practices (Easterby-Smith et al., 2000) as well as greater acceptance of the multidisciplinary nature of the field (Easterby-Smith, 1997). What is interesting about this debate is an underlying desire that theories of organisational learning would be practical and useful for 'learning organisations', and a growing critique as to whether indeed they were. These different ways of doing organisational learning can be considered two distinct modes. As the volume of case study and applied explorations of organisational learning approaches grew, questions concerning the viability in practice of some of the ideas also multiplied (Garvin, 1993, O' Keeffe and Harington, 2001). 'The notion of an 'ideal type' (Shrivastava, 1983, Örténblad, 2001) was linked to the 'learning organisation', meaning an organisation able to maximise its capacity through learning. Senge's definition captures the tone well, 'an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future' (1990: 14).

The question of how research and practice relate remains important. For a construct such as organisational learning, what might be termed the 'so what?' question is always a concern. Organisational learning as research or practice needs to be mutually pertinent. How these often distinctive practicing communities are and might be 'mutually pertinent' remains a challenge, and organisational learning seems a still useful domain for further exploration of this practical matter.

To summarise, from the cognitive/behaviourist view of organisational learning comes a range of key issues that pervade most of the literature of this and earlier periods; the relationship between the organisation and its environment, the spanning of boundaries, the role of managers and leaders with a strategic learning function, the precise nature of insight-generating processes and the ways in which such insights can be communicated, integrated or applied in different settings, teams or organisations, and the nature of the connections between learning and action. In a 'looking back, looking forward' type article, Easterby-Smith, Crossan and Nicolini identify the key issues of the initial periods of organisational learning research as debates about; levels of learning, whether learning necessarily implies cognitive or behavioural change, the respective values of single and double-loop learning, the relationship between learning and unlearning and the distinction between organisational learning and the learning organisation (2000). Although viewing these issues as generally dormant at present (using a volcano metaphor) they do suggest that as they represent the basis upon which organisational learning research stands they could 'flare up' at any time; they are the issues by which one 'plug[s] into' organisational learning (2000: 785). In a succinct fashion Miner and Mezias summarise these themes in the three questions, 'Who or what is doing the learning?' 'What are the key learning processes?' and, 'When is learning valuable?' (1996: 91)

As noted, the growing disillusionment about the promise of organisational learning as a useful construct for desired change, strategic or otherwise, on the basis that considerations were overly technical in their consideration of the ‘challenge’, ‘opportunity’ or ‘problem’ of learning in organisation, or solely focussed on individual behaviour within dynamic interpersonal group relations, gives way to a literature that takes questions of power, politics and trust into account. Coupled with these shifts, the view of the organisation as an interpretive system (Daft and Weick, 1984) marked a key moment in the development of organisational learning theory and research (Crossan and Guatto, 1996). This shift in perspective served as an important theoretical resource for moving towards language-based approaches. Initial work in this vein began to explore the collective nature of learning and conceptualised the group as the primary unit of analysis for investigating learning processes (Fiol, 1994, Dixon, 1999). Along with Daft and Weick’s interpretive view, the publication in paperback of Berger and Luckman’s, ‘The Social Construction of Reality’ (1967) also marked an important step in the shift towards interpretive approaches to organisational learning and practice.

### Knowledge Management

During the 1990s a literature concerned with knowledge creation and management developed. The establishment of the connection between the literatures of organisational learning and knowledge creation is generally attributed to Nonaka (1994, Nonaka et al., 1996, Nonaka et al., 2003) who set out a theory of the firm anchored not on an evolutionary nor resource basis but on the dynamic capacity to create knowledge (Spender and Grant, 1996). The questions of knowledge creation, transfer, share and management route another path towards a growing awareness of the importance of epistemological assumptions in conceptualising learning processes in organisation. The notion there is a form of tacit knowledge that we can know but not express (Polanyi, 1967) underlies Nonaka’s approach.

The term ‘knowledge management’ itself generally refers to systems of information technology, remote communication systems and procedures and processes for accessing, coding, integrating, remembering and using information and knowledge. From this entitative view (Hosking and Morley, 1991) knowledge becomes a ‘resource’. It is ‘seen as either a codified object independent of (inter)subjective realities or as generated by an autonomous subject’ for ‘inter-subjective interpretation into an independent objective reality’ (Küpers and Jäger, 2005: 3). To manage knowledge in this sense is to reify it as an objective *thing* – to make, to have, to hold, to use. Linked with this construction is a notion of knowledge as somehow *within* an individual’s head, conceived as the ‘content+structure of the individual’s cognitive system’ (Propp in Yih-Tong Sun and Scott, 2005: 75). This ‘content’ becomes knowledge by way of the structuring provided with the beliefs, attitudes, values, opinions, presumptions and memories that make up

the ‘cognitive system’. Therefore knowledge originates principally with the individual according to the Cartesian articulation of ‘thinking’ as the first principle of ‘being’ – *cogito ergo sum*. The implication of this construction is to disconnect the knower from the ‘givenness’ of any situation in a very fundamental way. Knowing-with any *otherness* – person, feature, form, energy – as relating process, becomes inaccessible as a way to go-on, isolates the subject and leaves only strategies for reaching across definitive rifts.

Thus, as we have already noted, the challenge becomes one of transferring and distributing knowledge across boundaries between units – whether teams, sections, groups, organisations or towards environments. The question of knowledge creation also becomes a site for marking boundaries as certain individuals or groups are valued and prioritised as the knowledge-makers. Thus as an organisational learning issue knowledge creation and management is constructed as a problem of knowledge distribution that must be continually overcome.

Some see the role of knowledge management as a distraction to organisational learning issues, in that it is primarily technical, driven by advances in Information Technology and a powerful strategy of consultant firms to align knowledge management systems with competitive advantage (Easterby-Smith et al., 2000). Nonetheless, it is also a factor that technology, especially the possibilities that ICTs offer in terms of communication and collaboration, are now part of the learning landscape generating new ways of knowing and making knowledge need to be taken into account (Ebrahimpur and Jacob, 2001)

### Organisational Learning is Political

Easterby-Smith notes a shift from an ‘epistemology of possession’ to one of ‘practice’ (Easterby-Smith et al., 2000). Learning processes are considered (Nicolini and Mezner, 1995, Nicolini et al., 2003, Nyhan et al., 2004) leading to an understanding that learning in and for organisation is essentially a question of power (Hosking, 1995, Mc Kinlay and Starkey, 1998, Fournier and Grey, 2000, Grey and Garsten, 2001). Learning is no-longer understood as purely technical capacity, nor as psychosocial dynamics tied into cultural systems, nor as processes for accessing tacit or implicit knowledge, but as power-full interaction for which questions such as, ‘Who wants to learn, what, when and why?’ become important. Assumptions that learning is an always-beneficent activity are set aside (Contu et al., 2003) since practice is understood as a social process of meaning construction, and is always an articulation, or contextualisation of some particular social grouping, gathering or collective concern. Such meaning making is generally normative, captured in discourse and cultural ways of being that privilege the intentions, plans or worldviews of certain sectors within society – at any level of society. Even though, in earlier considerations the concept of unlearning set patterns of action or routine

(Hedberg, 1981) was present, the qualitative nature of what is at stake is different. Rather than unlearning a pattern of behaviour, the challenge now becomes one of taking a critical view of the notion of learning itself, in this sense the step of the linguistic or discursive-turn is figured and the task of empirically researching this 'practice of knowledge' in action – that is, the social processes of knowing and learning becomes central.

### Working with Gaps

The concept of organisational learning was highly popularised for the corporate world in the 1990s with influential books such as *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation* by Senge (1990) and *Organizational Learning II – Theory, Method, and Practice* by Argyris and Schön (1996). Both texts cohere in rationale with a slightly earlier literature exploring individual behaviour for the organisational setting of the 'Firm' and management challenges (Cyert and March, 1963, Cangelosi and Dill, 1965, March and Olsen, 1975). Senge's use of the metaphor, 'mental models', and Argyris and Schön's foregrounding of individual behaviour that is marked by defensive routines show how they understand learning as located primarily with individual actions.

From this perspective the 'gap' is constructed when individual actions are found wanting in relation to the organisational whole or indeed imagined ideal action. Working with the 'gap' phenomenon theorists recognise that learning in organisation is not straightforward (eg. Cangelosi and Dill, 1965). Organisational dynamics seem influenced by much interaction that remains tacit, unnoticed and assumed. Argyris and Schön (1996) manage this complexity by distinguishing between different levels of learning somewhat based on Bateson's distinction of proto and deutero-learning stages (Bateson, 1972). The first is *single-loop learning* whereby an organisation reviews action and makes changes according to 'lessons learnt'. As *double-loop learning* an organisation learns to explore underlying assumptions guiding people's actions, and publicly test behavioural hypotheses with techniques such as the learning history (eg. Roth and Kleiner, 1995). The purpose is to make discussable uncritical assumptions held by individuals that become institutionalised with organisational processes, creating 'pattern A' interpersonal relationships, in which 'a tendency toward minimal expression of feelings, minimal openness to feelings, and minimal risk-taking with ideas or feelings' is possible (Chris Argyris, 2005: 382). Such a pattern suggests 'relatively ineffective interpersonal relationships and ineffective problem solving of task issues that were important and loaded with feelings' (2005: 382) as a barrier to organisational learning and effectiveness.

Even though Argyris examines 'interpersonal relationships' that are 'loaded with feelings' and their effects on task issues, and seeks to move from defensive reactions to open shared reasoning, he 'does not seem to believe that individuals, as such, are constituted through

processes of social interaction’ (Holmberg, 2000: 182). When the question is asked; ‘What is an organisation that it might learn?’ (Argyris and Schön, 1996), the interest in human interaction remains rooted in the idea that mental models are essentially individual constructs. The cognitive approaches of Argyris and Schön; Schein, who defines and explores three management cultures (1997); and Senge, whose systems approach to complexity sets teamwork as the key ‘fifth discipline’ (1990) all situate organisational effectiveness with the success of coordinated individual actions (Edmondson, 1996).

### Is Organisation Distributed Knowledge and Power?

Along with the research for learning about organisational learning, theories of what an organisation *is* undergo changes during the period and contributing to an increasing focus on the question of power. Several ordering principles for organisation can be presented. These are organising principles of bureaucratic control (mostly through large governmental institutions), of scientific management, of the market; principles of natural self-organising systems, and of political social forces driven by access to key resources (Clegg, 2006a). This is a sociological view from which many varieties of economic, management and political models of organisation flow, and according to these basic principles of ‘order’, organisational designs and practices are developed. Weber’s seminal analysis of bureaucratic logic for organisation (1978) pre-figured the development with forms of scientific management including ‘Taylorism’ and ‘Fordism’ of efficient organisation. This impacted on general theories for society as organisation such as the structural-functionalism of Talcott Parsons, which in turn impacted on a resurgence of Weberian ideas in the 1980s with the emergence of institutional theory, rationalisation and population ecology (Turner, 2006). Understanding organisation according to the logic of bureaucratic ordering – as a means of generating control and efficiency – is important because of its paradigmatic influence on common assumptions about what an organisation is. Furthermore, this bureaucratic model has been the core rationale for the design and development of governmental organisation processes (Clegg, 2006b).

Theories of organisation are not only important for organisational design but also term the frameworks for organisational research and practice. A major shift in the ways in which organisation has been viewed as a phenomenon occurred with the emergence of General Systems Theory (GST) in the 1950s (Bertalanffy, 1950, Boulding, 1956). This move towards a ‘science of sciences’ or general theory is closely linked to the field of cybernetics and the notion of complexity in systems (Midgley, 2003). Here we see the emergence of a different understanding of order which displaces the latent patriarchy of scientific management with its emphasis on control. A system is understood to be ‘a unity made up of *organized* elements’

(Midgley, 2003: xxii) with the pattern or relation of organisation being crucial to the nature of the system. The ordering principle is the system as itself which decentres the role of any 'master', whether builder, designer, manager or owner.

Cybernetics is the study of communication and control for which the idea of 'feedback' is central. 'Feedback' is the flow of information within a system generating adjustment, and difference as new context (Bateson, 1972, 2002). With a cybernetic or systems approach the role of the manager becomes one of flexible attentiveness and response, leadership changes (Wheatley, 1992). Key to the systems view is the notion of 'complexity'. According to the organised nature of complex systems, organisations can be understood as living, changing and dynamic phenomena that embody patterns of order that are beyond the view or control of any 'central' perspective or will (Marshall and Zohar, 1997). In the 1990s the complex view of organisations attracted much interest and an applied form of systems thinking was understood as a way of managing the complexity of organisations (eg. Mohrman and Cummings, 1989, Flood and Carson, 1993). This approach has been critiqued as an attempt to relocate control with management, a phenomenon also linked to the growth of management and business schools from the 1980s onwards, whose uncritiqued, value-laden curricula were for a time hegemonic (Grey, 2004).

A hegemony of a particular management style that values efficiency and effectiveness constitutes a certain 'managerialism' (Enteman, 1993) that plays a part in the generation of a critical view. From this view organisations are by nature situations or collectives that are always generating unintended consequences, where human beings have *some* level of agency and are in fact 'unknowable' by virtue of their nature. This means that organisations will always be sites for constructing informal forms of action and practice that are ultimately uncontrollable (Grey, 2005). The critical perspective on organisation takes the political or democratic approach to ordering organisational life. Questions asked from this perspective focus on power relations as key forces for organisation and management (Starkey, 1996, Mc Kinlay and Starkey, 1998). From this perspective it is always incumbent when dealing with or designing for such abstractions as 'efficiency' to inquire of the action, 'efficient for whom?' (Checkland, 1991, Contu et al., 2003).

The critique of power as an organisational question has gained increasing importance on the basis of philosophical movements such as existentialism, post-structuralism and phenomenology; Foucault's genealogical work and a growth in postmodern expressions of the disciplines of sociology, social psychology, psychoanalysis, linguistics and literary criticism, to name a few. Not only is organisation understood as complex system or interpretive space (Daft



and Weick, 1984, Weick, 2001, Weick and Sutcliffe, 2006) but the diverse and multivocal nature of how such spaces are made comes into view (eg. Hosking et al., 1995). Central to these shifts is the emergence of language as a generator of meaning and knowledge, the 'linguistic turn' foregrounds a new 'site' or 'location' of organising 'space'.

As ways of looking at organisation, classifications of organisations according to theories of bureaucratisation and complexity (Dunbar and Starbuck, 2006) and different forms of critical theory are merely typological frames for managing what is an expansive and complex field. Organisational forms have been classified with historical boundaries reflecting different types over time (Clegg, 2006a), according to 'functional' frames such as the 'structural', 'human resource', 'political' and 'symbolic' views (Bolman and Peel, 2008), or according to figures such as the 'linear', 'circular' or 'boundaryless' organisation. Silverman organises his view with the frames of systems, structural-functionalism, organisational psychology, technology, action and action-analysis, attachments and strategies and patterns of interaction. He notes that such classifications present a simplified and homogenising view (1970). Exemplary modelling is also limited as a way of imagining organisation<sup>14</sup>. Just as with the typology the particular contexts and processes of learning are sufficiently objectified as to generate what Hosking has called hard subject/object or self/other (S/O) differentiations (Hosking, 2004, 2007). The entifying tendency is reinforced with constructions of organisational change management that imagine transitions from static to 'unfrozen' to new static states (Hosking and Bass, 2001).

As organisation is imagined with the postmodern turn according to political or symbolic perspectives, there is a shift from the relative 'stability' of bureaucracy towards the complex and chaotic (Cooper and Burrell, 1988); organisations have thus been described as 'puzzled' (Baumard, 1999) as dynamic according to turbulent processes (Polley, 1997), sites of distributed rather than centralising knowledge and power (Chia, 1996, 1998, Clegg, 2002, Tsoukas, 1996, 2003, Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). Emergent here is attention to the knowledge-making power of processes of interpretation, framing or classification, symbolic interaction, language-use and discourse that constructs ontological abstractions. In such a reflexively complex environment the micro-practices of members, as everyday contingencies marked and made with others, become the focus for theorising/practicing as 'organisation' for which the 'processual becoming of things is given a primary role in the explanatory schema' (Chia, 1996: 31). Organisational space is open for representation, negotiation, reinterpretation, participation and the like. The organisation becomes therefore a space for social construction work. The contingency that generates complexity is also the complexity that generates contingency for going-on with. Exploration of the contingent 'becoming of things' is the route taken for this

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<sup>14</sup> The prescriptive literature of the learning organisation is a good example of this strategy.

research project as a frame for complexity. The relating processes of complexity/contingency may generate ‘othernesses’ of further abstracting orders. For these we do not need a map, but a mode of always mapping as ‘another’ what we seem to become as making.

### Towards ‘Another’ for Mapping

To reorientate towards the general topic of this thesis, questions of power are important for relational constructionism. Marxist and Foucauldian conflict-based critique imply that power is always *contested*. Much of our experience as society and organisation would reaffirm this formulation. This may be more to do with how we imagine those relating processes than any *de-facto* situation. Relational constructionism deals with the question of power according to a different rationale. Exploration is based on another set of principles to those that constitute knowledge and power on objectifying, entifying and generally individualist terms (Dachler and Hosking, 1995). The question is how power relations and relating can become a matter of responsive and evocative ‘power to’ or ‘power with’ relating processes, rather than the more common ‘power over’ forms of domination and control (Freire, 1970, Gergen, 1995, Hosking, 1995, 2007) that seem to order much organisational life and practice.

One of the central tenets of this approach is that power is *related* – embodied or contextualised – according to an ontology of ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being’ (Hosking, 2007). The import or shift with this construction is that whatever becomes ‘critical’ is becoming so on ‘another map’ than that of S/O dualism or conflict. In a sense there is no ‘other map’, only another ‘*other map*’ for each time that can become stabilised or fixed, as contingency for some group or organisation. Relational constructionism therefore approaches phenomena of power-making, organising practice and sense-making from a position of the possibility of mapping afresh each time. The ‘otherness’ that matters for a relational, social and practical world becoming is the ‘anotherness’ of such phenomenological unfolding.

The movement is towards a dialectic reading of learning and organising practices as complex, powerful and practical dynamics that are ethically charged. While taking up these labels for going-on from the literature, the insights of the earlier more ‘technical’ period of organisational learning development still have much to offer as no doubt a large part of organising work will continue to revolve about such pragmatic matters as management, routine, procedure, knowledge-sharing and skill transfer. The work of this thesis is an exploration of how some of the particularly prevalent current terms-of-relating for knowledge, power and organisation might become differently and thus take their place among others (whether under-distributed as formal organising practices, or as yet unimagined). This seems an especially critical new context for creation with development-aid organisations. Organisational learning (in this case) becomes the

possibility of learning with living practice in myriad practical ways. As a rationale for development-aid organising practice and its out-workings with and for culturally rich and diverse communities who are often struggling with complex inequalities, the ‘ontology of becoming’ is remarkably apt and practical as a frame for going-on with a development that might be a difference for difference.

### *Organisational Learning with the Complexity of Development-Aid*

#### Why Organisational Learning for Development-aid?

Since the World Bank made the decision to become a ‘global knowledge bank’ in 1996 (Wolfensohn, 1996, World Bank, 1998) and the European goals of ‘lifelong learning’ and the creation of a ‘knowledge-based society’ have been linked to the learning organisation (Nyhan et al., 2004), awareness of the need for organisational learning and knowledge management for development-aid has grown. This approach is now recognised as useful for the particular constraints, challenges and contexts of the development-aid project and particularly linked to the question of effective aid as the new agenda driving much of the design and practices of current aid architecture (Edwards, 1997, Davies, 1998, Mosse et al., 1998, Eade, 2003, Carlsson and Wohlgemuth, 2000, Pasteur and Scott Villiers, 2004, Britton, 2005, Eyben, 2006b). The need to address questions of power in relation to learning for development-aid organisations has also been foregrounded (Robb, 2004, Krohwinkel-Karlsson, 2007).

As participants with the general move towards constructions of the ‘knowledge society’ (Drucker, 1968, Bell, 1973, Toffler, 1990) development-aid organisations can be classified under various formal and interpretive categories. Formally, they may be understood as public organisations – governmental and non-governmental. Many of them enjoy charitable status, while others such as Irish Aid are vehicles for the disbursement and management of public money. Development-aid organisations (certainly those of significant size) are transnational; they work in a number of different countries with a large range of partners and communities; governmental and multilateral institutions. They can be highly complex ‘systems’ or ‘organisms’ where people of many different nationalities, backgrounds, career paths and motivations work together.

Their goals also bring an expansion of complexity that is challenging and different in character to the for-profit organisations that have mainly been the focus for organisational learning research. These goals are not only relative and contestable, i.e., ‘poverty reduction’, their enactment is value-laden in ways that are often left un-talked, while the processes taken up to

move towards them go-on. As they often work with public or donated money, issues of efficiency and accountability are paramount. This situation generates a series of questions about ownership, identity and public commitment. They are ambiguously constructed with the public eye. Are they 'good'? Are they 'bad'? Do they make a difference or not? Should they all 'go home'?

Taking into account this labyrinth of complexity, both formal and abstract, it is surprising how little organisational research attention has been paid to learning as development-aid organising practice, a point noted by Carlsson and Wohlgemuth, 'learning in development co-operation is more or less virgin territory for organisation research. Although there is a significant body of research on organisational learning in general, there are few studies that focus on learning in development co-operation' (2000: 7). Approaches taken are generally of a technical style in that they are primarily concerned with the application of organisational learning frames and practices as already articulated in the general literature (eg. Pasteur and Scott Villiers, 2004). Generally it is 'development-aid people' rather than organisational researchers who write on the topic.

Davies' PhD thesis on organisational learning with non-governmental organisation (1998) shows this orientation well with an action research type study. Nonetheless, he takes an evolutionary view on learning for the challenge of diversity, which is unusual for the field. Generally, writing about organisational learning for development-aid organising practice may be placed with the prescriptive body of the general literature on the learning organisation in the sense that although research is carried out it seems always premised on the assumption that there is a problem to be solved, and this on the basis of many forms of fragmentation. This technical appraisal is captured well with the questions repeatedly put to me during the data generation period with Irish Aid; 'What will it look like, how will this be useful?' While these are essential and continually relevant questions, finding adequate responses is not a straightforward movement. I suggest this is one of the difficulties with organisational learning for development-aid organising practice that this research work not only brings to the fore, but seeks to develop understanding of the ontological and epistemological frames that orientate and feature how organising and learning practices are embodied. An overly technical reading of the learning question makes second-level or deuterio-learning difficult because this type of learning is a question of context that requires an embodied-abstraction from immediate or pressing task.

In other words, deuterio-learning (which organisational learning theorists consider key) requires 'stepping back' from proto-typical or technical-type questions. As long as the desire to know how to do anything is so pressing and paramount (and it is), that the desire for knowing how that *know-how* was and is constructed remains latent or displaced, then development-aid

organisations particularly (because of their roots in the sectors of infrastructure building, water and sanitation, medicine, technology development etc.) have a deep challenge. I have purposely listed those sectors of development-aid practice that are generally the domain of ‘engineers’ for two reasons.

Firstly, I believe that much of the styling of development-aid organising and learning practice is gendered. The markers of legitimacy, success, results, ‘best practice’ etc., are set on the whole by senior managers who are men; many of whom started their development careers working as technical assistants in the field, and at a certain period in the development-aid story of the last forty years. Secondly, I believe that the sectors of education, community participation and health promotion among others, offer another tradition, indigenous of development-aid practice, that is under-valued as a source of insight and practical learning for the development-aid organisations themselves (King, 2000); as one Irish Aid practitioner said to me, ‘The way we work internally is not interactive nor participative, facilitators do that for us’<sup>15</sup>.

But moreso, beyond participative conversations as learning, the critical contexts are the situations, events, instruments and processes that fashion so many experiences of learning, organising, development and aid – for recipients and organisational practitioners alike. This focus on the practices or practical learning of development-aid organising practice is taken up for this work as a way of beginning the exploration of how ontological/epistemological assumptions might be deconstructed with description of practical events and actions. This proposal is pre-figured here as research practice, therefore remote – but the intention all through is to work towards the establishment of a changed context of organisational learning for development-aid organising practice by offering both an appropriate relational approach for the challenge of changing aid relationships, and to some extent presenting initial resources for new learning agendas.

As King has questioned about the construction of knowledge-based aid, is it a new way of working or simply a new North-South divide? (2000) This question is asked on the basis of his research that suggests the new forms of learning and knowledge management being developed are primarily oriented to the needs of the development-aid organisations, neglecting the knowledge-making methods of the South. King believes that development-aid organisations undervalue their own learning traditions and relations with Southern partners, taking their leads from large Northern firms along with their corporate identity, and not recognising their particular orientation towards the development of others. With a sophisticated nuance he suggests that, ‘a continuation along the present trajectory will probably be counter-productive, it

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<sup>15</sup> Participant research-practice notes, Field-Visit PC-A

will make agencies more certain of what they themselves have learnt<sup>16</sup>, and more enthusiastic that others should share these insights, once they have been systematized' (King, 2000: 37). The implication is that as organisational learning and knowledge management are energised from the North they might become yet another form of extrinsic 'know how' to be transferred to the developing world (in the same tradition going on since the 1960s) and thus continue to generate objectifying relations. He concludes, 'an alternative approach is still eminently possible ... but it really consists of turning the present approach on its head.' (King, 2000: 37)

### The Learning Challenges of Development-Aid Organisations

Carlsson and Wohlgemuth, with a book bringing together views on organisational learning from development-aid practitioners and analysts, identify five key areas or topical-nodes for learning as development co-operation. These are, political constraints, the unequal nature of the aid relationship, problems internal to the organisation of the aid agency, the organisations and capabilities on the recipient side, and finally the sources of knowledge and the quality of information available (2000). Not only do these categories show how the generation of a discourse of gaps is prevalent when thinking about learning for development-aid goes on, but also the language used reinforces the construction as 'problem'.

As suggested by King's analysis, the issue of relationships is central to the whole question.

*The unequal nature of the aid relationship is an issue which runs through most of the studies presented ... [it] emerges as one of the major constraints for learning in development co-operation. What will be required is a major re-thinking of the current mode of operation of aid, a process which needs to incorporate partners in developing countries much more than has been the case up to now, i.e. a quest for real partnership relationships. (2000: 18)*

Nonetheless, considerations of the situation are generally constructed with what has been identified as an entifying and objectifying worldview (Hosking and Morley, 1991, Hosking and Bouwen, 2000). This makes the topics of learning, knowledge sharing, evaluation and relationship building all problematic on the basis of gaps to be bridged. The following long quote demonstrates this view very well:

*Organizations do not learn, individuals do. A learning organization absorbs and adapts new knowledge or insights that are present in individual heads, and changes its behaviour accordingly. New knowledge is generated within the organization as its staff and management draws lessons*

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<sup>16</sup> This is a good expression of the tautological circuit explored in subsequent Chapters of the thesis.

*from their activities. It is also generated outside, by practitioners in other organizations and by analysts, academic and other. Organizational learning is concerned with whether and how the new knowledge is translated into operational reality. Despite its ambiguities, it is convenient to use the term “organizational learning” as shorthand for the process by which organizations obtain and use knowledge to adapt old policies, programs and strategies, or to innovate more broadly. (Berg, 2000: 25)*

On every key dimension – levels of organisation, the status of ‘knowledge’ as ‘object’, the identified sites of knowledge generation, and the link between knowledge and action – this construction reinforces interpretations of clear units and boundaries to be crossed as the critical learning and knowledge situation. This means that not only are ‘relationships’ key, but also the epistemological, ordering or relating processes that characterise them.

Practitioners at the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex University (IDS) have explored ways in which the practice of participation and reflective practice can be incorporated into development organisation as a path towards transforming aid relationships (Pasteur and Scott-Villiers, 2004, Eyben, 2004b, Groves and Hinton, 2004, Eyben, 2006a). This step originated with a programme of collaborations that resulted from a workshop in May 2001 when learning was highlighted as a way of achieving consistency between personal behaviour, institutional norms and the new development agenda (Chambers et al., 2001). The issue of power was recognised by practitioners as central to relationships, and finding ways to address this feature of organising practice was considered essential (Groves and Hinton, 2004). A short report from a meeting in 2004 convoked by Eyben and Cornwall to look at the ethical and methodological issues of researching international aid organisations summarises the ‘key themes’ as, ‘the challenge of knowing’, ‘positionality and relationships’, ‘power and learning’, and evocatively poses the question, ‘Whose text?’ (Eyben, 2004a). Despite the fact that power-relations presents as a theme in the literature, the constant reinforcing of gap-making that the analyses present, seems to make the possibility of a ‘major re-thinking of the current mode of operation of aid’ (Carlsson and Wohlgemuth, 2000: 18) continually remote.

Practical challenges identified are rarely irrelevant for these complex epistemological and relational dynamics. They include the drive to make efficient use of limited resources and integrate the efforts of people with distinctive backgrounds and expertise; the complexity of the organisational mandate; the need to respond to and be accountable to numerous types of stakeholders; and having limited access to private sector regulatory mechanisms. Partnerships are insecure and vulnerable to changing factors (political, financial, climatic, global) and

stakeholders are diffuse and ultimately very susceptible to the political context. Employees are often in liminal roles; they are meant to act both as *specialists* and as *generalists*, and these dual roles may give rise to confusion. Further, the need to ensure the inclusion of the less powerful is a complex and important one. For development-aid organisations, learning is for *social change* as well as organisational effectiveness and is therefore value-driven in accordance with a particular vision of society.

Different to the 'triple bottom line' (client, worker, shareholder) position of corporate for-profit organisations, development-aid organisations operate in a climate where multiple stakeholders approach the task from many different perspectives and with a great variety of goals and ways of working as significant factors that must be taken into account. This situation has led to the use of the complexity metaphor as a useful frame for the development process (Eyben, 2006a). Difficulties with aid relationships due to imbalances of power between donors and the recipients influence all talk of 'partnership' and have implications for sustainable aid delivery at macro (e.g., policy) and micro (e.g., project monitoring and evaluation) levels (Krohinkel-Karlsson, 2007). Writing of the complexity of public sector management for development health policy, Robinson comments that, 'what is commonly missing is an appreciation and analysis of *interdependence*. These relationships are complex, political, and often fragile. They require management, and of the kind which goes beyond target setting and quantifiable outputs' (1999: 163).

Britton (2005) identifies the particular reasons for development-aid organisations' interest with organisational learning as the increasing complexity of the aid environment, where there is a move away from cause-effect models of change in human systems; the requirement for improved organisational effectiveness (and learning as the activity that will deliver this); and increasing aid budgets. Also relevant is the desire to make the best use of limited resources (not necessarily monetary) as 'careful stewards' who work efficiently as well as effectively. Strengthening partnerships for a context where building trust becomes increasingly important and where the skills of reflection are seen as a means of building those relationships. Britton also identifies the need for closing the gap between monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and planning, 'what this gap represents is often the absence of mechanisms for learning in the design of M&E systems' (2005: 11).

Eade (Roper et al., 2003) identifies the reasons for development agencies' interest in organisational learning as principally offering a means towards better use of resources and a possibility for making conscious change. The development-aid organisation needs to strike a balance, in a climate of constant change, between being open and willing to learn while at the



same time being sure of its values and principal goals. Eade picks up on the notion of 'intersections' as important between the 'different layers or sets of actors right across the development spectrum' affirming that organisational learning is about 'developing hybrid forms of knowledge and communication' (Roper et al., 2003: 2). Roper and Pettit (2003) argue that much of the development tradition has been built on a belief in the 'transformative power of learning', especially in contexts of non-formal education where 'critical awareness and consciousness' can lead to individual and social change (2003: 6). Paulo Friere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) represents this tradition, showing how *critical analysis* is at the heart of learning for empowerment. This tradition has also often been about generating knowledge for action and attempting to change internal organisational structures that block or inhibit learning:

Development management is, then, concerned not with exercising control or counting beans, but with seeking to act on an understanding of how change processes intersect with power, and of how best to shape these processes in favour of those who are excluded from resources and decision making. (Eade et al., 1999: 16)

Nonetheless, it is also recognised that this tradition is generally not learned from as a way of doing organisational learning with development-aid (Box, 2000). A particular challenge in the context of development management is that by their nature, government development organisations are normative in their orientation to governmental ends (La Palombara, 2003).

Factors in the broader context of development-aid organising practice can also constrain learning. Rapid changes, emergency, work overload, lack of resources, especially time all feature. The 'fire-brigade syndrome' is well known, often the biggest difficulty is having the energy and time to become aware of what is being learnt as everyday experience with organising practices. People are always learning (Nelson and Winter, 1982, Zollo and Winter, 2002), but it seems they also experience 'gaps' between their stated intentions and practices (Pasteur and Scott Villiers, 2004). To act coherently, an organisation must talk coherently, and talking and acting must be reflective of each other, 'coherence in social action requires a shared understanding that is facilitated by and generated in an ongoing discursive practice as well as in a common experience of collective action' (Jacobs and Cochlan, 2005: 117). Often though, it seems there is little time for talking and reflecting in ways that move beyond immediate concerns.

To summarise it is noted that development-aid organisations face challenges of developing organisational learning practices and knowledge management systems that are attuned to their particular task and context (Robinson, 1999, Eade et al., 1999, Britton, 2005, Pasteur, 2006). Many of the changes with international development architecture and policy in the last decade

introduce a need to move beyond technical expertise towards relational intelligence in practice (Küpers, 2005b); organising and learning practice based upon dialogue and coordination. Trust and communication are key for these new forms of organising practice (Ballantyne et al., 2000). But rather than focussing on the relationships themselves, as some authors do (Eyben, 2004b, 2006a), the assumptions that seem to orientate the *practicing* of those relationships as important features of the contexts that embody them need to become relevant and apparent. Despite the fact that the difference is recognised between the original *business* organisational learning contexts and the contexts of development-aid organising practice (King, 2000, Krohwinkel-Karlsson, 2007), the literature does not seem to address the epistemological frames of reference that contextualise what is generally a *technically* interpreted field. It seems therefore not to take the deuterio-learning step of becoming reflexively attentive to its own premises. How the research of organisational learning for development-aid is imagined and framed is continually a relating process with how practical actions are taken for learning as development-aid organisations.

### A Last Word on the ‘Problem’ of Learning - Minding the Gap<sup>17</sup>

A learning organisation seeks to continually adapt by creating the conditions that reveal the ways in which learning is blocked or enabled in its systems, structures and relationships, and it seems that this view is precisely a key difficulty. By always constructing the gap, the gap becomes real. This knowledge embodies the design and management of change initiatives – whether framed as organising or learning practices and programmes. Attention to the topics that are generated about learning, of *what* is learned *along with* these learning topics is relevant. Building on the observation that what is learned may not always help to further the stated mission and goals of an organisation (Fiol and Lyles, 1985), the learning of context or deuterio-learning going-on with common practices, discursive and figurative, is latently framing and thus embodying particular learning practices. Deuterio-learning becomes but is often *un-worked*, or under-contextualised as a legitimate and critical field, domain or site of learning work. While the deuterio-learning frame must remain to some extent always remote (its embodiment is our condition, and therefore that containment we *cannot overview*) it is important to develop a critical attitude with and in practice so that reflexive knowing becomes an organisational ability. Reflexive knowing or enquiry is essential for generative learning and practice.

The response of development-aid organisations, including Irish Aid, to the complexity and experienced chaos of their context is to seek to create ‘coherence’, coherence with practice, and coherence with policy. This topic is taken up in detail with Chapter Four as an Irish Aid organisational story. Coherence is imagined as an ideal state, but is generally unexplored. The

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<sup>17</sup> The term is taken from Pasteur and Scott-Villiers (2004)

contention is that unreflexive forms of construction and relating processes continually generate the gap experiences that the literature reports as thwarting development-aid organisations. This 'gap' construction of the learning context is common to the literature of organisational learning and organisational learning for development-aid (Argyris and Schön, 1996, Pasteur and Scott Villiers, 2004). In order to discover 'another' approach, on 'another map' for 'coherence' (possibly reconstructed with relational language), one that practically recognises how 'it is in the flow of relations between people that organisations hold their greatest asset – their knowledge and capacity to change' (Pasteur and Scott-Villiers, 2004: 4) it seems a more expansive notion of ontology/epistemology to that prevailing at present is required.

## Conclusions - 'Learning to Learn' Context

The research context is complex; the research topic is complex in tandem. By 'complex', I mean that the situating, eventing, practicing and abstracting discourses of learning *getting made* – as development-aid organising practice, as research – are non-linear, often not very rational (using a formal/common sense of the word) and require an approach that can address the multidimensional, strangely patterned and often unclear dynamics of such learning processes.

Ways forward with this task are chosen according to the rationale of relational constructionism, an approach to understanding *relating processes* as a sort of 'surface'. A fundamental con/text or contextualising dynamism that is how we know, learn and practice. Thus we continually embody and go-on with our tasks as 'world becoming'. Both the general literature of organisational learning and the particular iterations of this approach for development-aid organising practice recognise the challenges of learning according to a discourse of gaps and barriers. This discourse seems premised with an ontological understanding that entifies, objectifies and continually generates hard subject/object, self/other (S/O) differentiations as a core operating assumption – normally from a technical approach to change and development.

Acknowledging how the literature constructs the problem of learning, a deutero-learning step is taken for the research practice by seeking to move beyond the terms of the particularly prescriptive, technical or applied formulations of learning that are prevalent for the development-aid domain. This intention, present from the beginning of the project has found new articulation through the research process in ways that were not possible at the beginning. Relational constructionism offers a way to go-on that can create contexts where the challenges of unequal relationships might be addressed. Inequalities or unequal relationships are a predicament for all organising practices and contexts, and are not solely generated between aid

donors and recipients. The relating processes of development-aid organisers themselves are critically relevant to how the processes between donors and recipients can become.

Generating a topic of organisational learning with Irish Aid inevitably deconstructs for enquiry the question of relationships across organisation. But it goes beyond these terms, constructing the conundrums of communication and fragmentation, the gap or silo mentalities talked about by organisational members, as ontological/epistemological topics. Relational constructionism makes this step possible by situating its scope of enquiry on 'another map'. As relationships for organising and learning are imagined and constructed as fragmenting, disempowering and isolating, the position is taken that relationships for aid are 'problematic' because interpreting frames construct them in this way. The ontological/epistemological assumptions that orientate and embody the ordinary practices of development aid are the practical 'places' where development-aid relationships can change. It is affirmed that while the objectifying, scientific (to use a label) approach to learning is useful and appropriate for many enquiries and practical challenges, it is one method among many for knowing.

On this premise, the shift is made to deconstruct common learning practices in order to differentiate their terms and generate 'another context of learning practice'<sup>18</sup> where topics such as relationships for development-aid, or indeed questions of organisational coherence, can be discoursed and explored in ways that seem difficult to generate currently. The fact is that in order to address such practical, pragmatic or phronetic (Clegg, 2002) matters as relationships, learning, coherence or situation, and the notion of 'development' itself, an appropriate context is required. A 'context' understood as con/text, a relating weave that is much more than rational or linear logic. Although development-aid practitioners know this, getting 'there' for learning seems almost impossible when 'there' is probably the available-unknown; a residual trace with all the gap talk, but generally unrecognised.

This thesis is explored and developed over the continuing six chapters. Chapter Two describes the methods taken up for going-on with the research project. Chapter Three details how the 'gap talk' figured from Irish Aid with exploratory participant research-practice phases. New resources for constructing another view of learning are then sought with the literature of adult learning. This literature coheres in many respects with the participatory stream of learning for development-aid practice. Chapter Four explores the topics of coherence building and strategic planning as systematic organisational responses to complexity and 'gaps' with learning and organising practice as Irish Aid, while Chapter Five describes an instance of practical learning as

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<sup>18</sup> That can always become yet 'another' on its own terms of making.

language-used from a Pragmatics approach. Chapters Six and Seven draw the thesis to a close by exploring practical learning as both dialectics and reflexive enquiry.



## Chapter Two: Methods for An Exploratory Enquiry

‘The sequence of questions is itself a mode of thinking which,  
instead of supplying concepts merely,  
feels and tests itself as a new mode of relationship to being’

‘No one methodology is superior to another’

*Martin Heidegger*

(1949a)

### Coordinates – Chapter Two

- This chapter describes the research methods used and generated during the research process as contingencies for practical deuterio-learning *about* and *with* organising practice.
- How can contingency become resilient as research and organising practice?

### Introduction – Paths for Exploratory, Emergent and On-going Enquiry

#### *A Relational Methodology as Research Practice*

The methodological context is as integral to the topic of ‘Organisational Learning on ‘Another Map’ as are the other contextualising factors of the project; the research organisation in its milieu, and the literature reviewed as research horizon. This Chapter describes the terms and first steps of the research practice as an unfolding, continuing relating process of many dimensions. It is not the presentation of a pre-figured ‘research design’ since the challenge has been to discover how to progress the research project according to a *relationally coherent* practice as *itself*. The central conundrum or drama-described is the movement towards textualisation (as the customary method of marking research-insight and making that knowledge accessible for on-going practice) while *acknowledging* and being *true* to a relational approach that foregrounds the living, chaotic,

confusing, often disorienting and complex nature of the learning-process-with-exigency and matters-to-hand, termed here as ‘practical learning’.

The solution presented with this Chapter is simply to acknowledge *that* it is the case, and to show how to *go-on somehow* by becoming attentive to the processing of the process with its distinctive voices, moments, predicaments and tentative solutions found. By reflecting on that process *reflexively*, attempting to see *its-self* <sup>1</sup> insofar as this might be possible or has been learnt to date, and generally by taking-up a strategy of *showing* and *telling*.<sup>2</sup> The narrative structuring of the text frames the nature of *telling*, its coherence and progression, while the methodological or ‘second’ story is told and presented in as honest a fashion as possible in order to *show* the learning process. *Showing* stands as practical learning for practical learning, as research and organising practice. Appended texts are attached in order to enhance this *showing* of the research process as unfolding and changing, indeed as the stages have appeared *with* and *as* various different text-types.

The challenge of research-learning with and for a process that remains unknown until complete – or drawn to *a* completion – shares common features with the learning tasks, practices and conditions of organisational practitioners; working as Irish Aid or beyond. Thus the Chapter sets out the terms of an exploration, made with contextualising steps, recursive in nature, for a deutero and reflexive practice that continues throughout the thesis. The aims are to explore practical learning as much as *experienced* as looked-upon, described or explained. To establish a rationale for this progression as learning that is attuned and integral on its own terms, while also being grounded in the research community. Finally, to explore and establish some methodological terms upon which practical learning processes (whether contextualised as ‘research’ or ‘organising’ practice) can go-on in some new ways by generating fresh metaphors, figures, syntax, spaces; in short some resources for knowing once again as generative ways for practical living worlds.

### *Generating Organisational Learning on ‘Another Map’*

Current constructions of ‘organisational learning’ with/for the domain or environment of development-aid organising practice are predominantly generated according to the rationale of the original communities and concerns that formulated those constructions. Whether considered

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<sup>1</sup> A problematic term, centring as it does the individual, but interesting as terming id-entity – what is required is a new term for the reflexive awareness of process-by-process where we ‘individuals’ participate *with, as, in, for* ...

<sup>2</sup> Mimesis and Diegesis – true mimesis is impossible, therefore the different strategies of description used here, graphic and textual range as ‘different degrees and kinds of telling’ (Rimmon-Kenan, 2001: 108).



as the literature of ‘organisational learning’, or the ‘learning organisation’ – the formulation generally taken up for the context of development-aid architecture is framed with an essentially *scientific* epistemology that carries along positivist and entifying assumptions, biases, methods and expressions. I have explored the notion that this particular formulation and practice with learning phenomena and tasks is in some ways missing important *marks*, and generating contexts where organisational practitioners talk of experiences of lacks and gaps as defining their organising practice.

In order to explore the dynamic modes of such experiences of ‘gaps’ and ‘lacks’ practical methods are required that can critique, and enable the on-going critique, of current constructions, rationalised with *scientific* formulations or otherwise. This is the task of practitioners as ‘members’ of their own contexts of concern and practice, but as a sort of pre-figuring exercise this project intends to ‘take-on’ (with a rich sense of the term) the construction of learning practice, and by default the organising practice that embodies this. The tension is towards a formulation of practical learning which accounts for many more features of the learning process than it seems are currently imagined.

The reasons why this re-formulation of terms on ‘another map’ (Hosking, 2007) is important, or can make a contribution, is in the first instance, because perennial difficulties and organising predicaments with communication, coordination, direction and management disable or disconnect organisations from views of their environments of concern and their own functionality or common practices. It seems also the case that such styles have relevant effects on the abilities of people working within organisations to participate and flourish. In the second instance (which is not to be in ‘second-place’) this situation matters since the stated goals of development-aid organisations are variations along the theme of ‘development’. However defined or contested ‘development’ is assumed for the betterment of people’s conditions and qualities of life. Development is always a political, or to use another language emerging from this work, a ‘positional’ dynamic.

Increasingly, with many current organising practices people’s voices, concerns and ways of making sense of their worlds seem to become excluded from the processes by which those ends are defined, instrumentalised, appraised and evaluated. This repeating situation is not forced by edict or intention, but according to the practical and everyday processing of those ends that embody often unexamined rationales. Nor is it a matter of ‘sitting back’ and examining such ‘rationales’ since the making of sense, especially practical-sense is an embodied and material process that continues to go-on and is conditioned by its dynamic modality. No one group or person has full view or control of ‘what’ is *going-on*, even with themselves. We are participants in

our process and must therefore always learn again. We do so with those matters and media that are to hand. The *immediacy* of our situatedness requires a learning practice that is continual, practical, open, reflexive and ultimately ethical with regard to the public task of the common good as well as personal fulfillment.

### *A Question of Organisational Ethics?*

There is an ethical matter that development-aid organisations must address. In some senses it may be argued that many of the efforts for greater controls, transparency and accountability currently being practiced are indeed expressions of ethical concerns for ‘right’ practice. This may be a simplistic reading which a relational and constructionist exploration can nuance somewhat. Before that, the basic position being argued is that development-aid organisations can best take-up their ethical commitments and concerns for excellence by learning to learn with and about the myriad practices that they construct and use to organise their common tasks. For attentive critique to become increasingly possible a view is required that *relates* or *moves differently* in some fashion from the objectifying, entifying and generally positivist paradigm that fashions so much current learning and organising practice as development-aid.

The very critical factor for this imagined movement of difference is that its processing must continually become reflexive if the practice is to be continually fresh and generative. We are talking about a ‘method for learning methods’<sup>3</sup> or a *practice* with very particular features. Features that may seem unusual and strange to many common ways of thinking and doing about organisation as they are formally imagined and prescribed. The method to explore such a perspective and to generate some paths for its continuance thus requires an ontological and epistemological ground and weave different to the subject/object base-duality that orders so much learning and organising practice, particularly for those organisations seeking to contribute to the development of people and communities for whom poverty, hunger, ill-health, conflict and many uncreated opportunities mark their lives.

### *Methods for a Relational Research Practice*

What is imagined and sought is a research practice that generates formulations, processes, engagements and tools that enable emergent, recursive, responsive and reflexive organisational learning to take place. Talked either as research practice or as organising practice, the orientation is towards a different frame for going-on with the challenges of organising a social, moral and pragmatic world. A frame or imagination that can include and enhance the expectations,

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<sup>3</sup> And a ‘method for learning-methods’

experiences and living enquiries of diverse communities. Communities and groups with shifting distributions of knowledge, membership, power and location. Communities that must live and organise together. For this task we need methods that can offer ways forwards while simultaneously maintaining flexibility and openness, they must be pragmatic, ie. *practiced* to become *practicable*. For this new attention to practical learning is required as a way of contextualising the 'space', for participative practical enquiry as shared resource. This is an important task for organisational learning, but particularly for development-aid organisers whose field of relevance is at the heart of the pressing global predicaments for which we need to learn new ways of organising.

The description that follows is therefore of three inter-relating approaches worked or knit together for this exploratory research project. Relational constructionism offers the ontological/epistemological frame or boundary that formalises the 'worldview' taken up; Phenomenology generates a path of exploration and way to go-on with the research process; and Pragmatics is the method of primary address for a cluster of 'core' data generated. Each of these sets of principles and practices are thickened at times with contributing disciplines that further enhance the connections and dynamics that they envisage and describe. Ethnomethodology stands with a relational constructionism approach to foreground the expert, contingent and productive ways in which organisational members create and contain their interactions. Such 'ethnomethods' as ordinary language-users create, employ and no doubt enjoy, are equally attuned to the focus of Pragmatics for the possibilities inherent with 'language-use' as 'language-choice'.

In a similar vein a broad range of literatures is drawn on throughout for the research journey. As relational constructionism attends to epistemological processes, recognising the validity of any local or situated knowledge-making, nor prioritising one formulating process over another, different literatures can legitimately offer resources. Insights from organisational psychology to critical theory to literary criticism and beyond can mark the search for 'relational' resources to contribute to the on-going emergence of a relational perspective and practice (Hosking, 2006). Partly due to my own background with philosophy and theology (making some of these literatures accessible to a degree) but also because the enquiry requires a broad sweep beyond the scoping of much of the organisational learning literature itself for reasons already stated; texts of a philosophical, critical, psychoanalytical and literary criticism nature are drawn on. Choices may at times be somewhat eclectic, partly due to the nature of research practice that has sought to follow the 'logic' of relating processes as they took place, thus making opportune, although at times surprising or unexplainable connections. The reading pattern emerging is also partly due to the expanse of the horizon from which connections can be made in this regard. For these and

other reasons the method seeks to ‘point towards’, and in some fashion to show a way to go-on with relationally oriented learning, rather than cover the ground of all the possible paths followed and explored.

The final section of this Chapter will outline the flow of each chapter one to another. Broadly corresponding to the ways in which the research process itself unfolded in ‘real-time’, rendering insights and skills for going-on-with *when* each step was taken, this presentation is made with an understanding of the layered, complex and iterative nature of its own methodology. Knowledge is a matter of feedback generating deeper and wider contextualising possibilities. Earlier iterations are woven through the finished polish, bringing thinking old and new as threads that weave the learning. Taking up the metaphor of the ‘French Polish’, a method that brings out the quality of the wood by means of a layering process, this recursive nature of the project is counted, and presented.

It is a re-presentation of the research ‘journey’ characterised by often intuitive decisions, which when followed generate practice. The representation with this text thus renders a view of the complex teleological phenomenon whereby early intuitions become *marked* when more precise and thus more accessible articulation is found. It is also therefore a practical expression of the learning paradox described as the situation for which a truly new competence can only be learned by doing that which the learner does not know how to do (Schön, 1987). In this way, the conundrum of learning with an unknown ‘method for learning methods’ mirrors the exigency and concern of organising practitioners, especially those working with development-aid for whom the moral and political stakes are high.

Having the practical ability to recognise and consider the methodological unknowns that feature our contexts of learning and organising practice generates the beginnings of a path to changed or ‘deutero’ learning. As a metaperspective on this exploratory research, a concern emerging as this project has drawn towards conclusion is the relating process going-on with the construction of research/practice. Often imagined with hierarchical relating pattern (whichever the ‘top’ depending on situation and perspective) and commonly constructing ‘research’ as the discipline bringing knowledge that is *then applied to* practice, the tendency here towards ‘relationally-responsive’ dialectic practices and the generation of methods that enable them is reflexively explored throughout. By attending to *this* research practice towards formal textualisation – always with organising practice in view – some insight with and for these intuitive, iterative, imaginative, formal, relating processes that make sense and knowledge of our situation, where the primary context is that very *situatedness*, are generated.

## Part I: Relational Constructionism – ‘Becoming’ as the General Context of Learning/Organising

### *An ‘Ontology of Becoming’*

This research project follows a particular social constructionist orientation called **relational constructionism** for which the ontological view is that *being* is *being-in-relation* which epistemologically means that *knowing* is the ability to coordinate or reference ‘text’ as generating ‘con/text’. A ‘text’ is understood here as any embodying imagined/material frame constructed or coming into being through the social process of knowing (Hosking, 2004). That ‘text’ has *being* only insofar as it is ‘contextualised’, coordinated or supplemented by context. This dynamic process of *knowing* and *being* is always on-going and open to change. Change comes from within since it is only when a ‘text’ is referenced or coordinated by context that it becomes meaningful. This dynamic is called an ‘ontology of becoming’ (Hosking, 2006). The approach is constructionist and not *constructivist* in that the process of interacting and making meaning is understood as ‘coordinating acts’ rather than interactions *between* bounded entities, persons or organisations thus generating with a broadly entitative view (Hosking, 2000a). These ‘coordinating acts’ are constructed as ‘relating processes’ and as the ‘surface’ of attention. Throughout the research process ‘they’ are described with a series of emerging metaphors to mark the ‘woven’ or ‘almost symmetrical’ patterning that *becomes* ‘them’.

Relational constructionism theorises the processes of construction rather than the products, understanding these as historical, social co-ordinations. This theoretical position is on ‘another map’. It differentiates the approach from cognitivist constructions that recognise the ‘internal’ world of individuals as distinct from ‘external’ social influences, ‘all social realities – all knowledges of self and other people and things – are viewed as interdependent or co-dependent constructions existing and known only in relation’ (Hosking and Bouwen, 2000: 129). Key for this research practice with ‘organisational learning’ as its topic is the fact that for relational constructionism knowledge is not ‘a separately existing thing or product that can be learned, traded, transferred and stored’ (Hosking and Bouwen, 2000: 129) in a way that learners and what exists to be learned somehow exist as separate, bounded entities. This insight is pivotal for generating a practical learning focus for development-aid organising practices. As a clarification, two ways of typing the key term ‘context’ are used throughout the thesis. Normally ‘context’ is used when foregrounding a particular setting, material or abstract. ‘Con/text’ is used when it is important to mark the functionality of relating processes going-on. This difference is to lighten the text somewhat while recognising that all ‘contexts’ are ‘con/texts’.

### *An Epistemology for Practical Learning*

Hosking, setting out the principles of a critical relational constructionism defines ‘relational processes’ as ‘processes that (re)construct self-other realities as local ontologies or ‘forms of life’ (person-world making); and (re)construct mind – metaphorised for example – as an imaginal space in which self-other relations are discoursed’ (2006: 272). Although a slight re-terming has been made here by talking of ‘*relating* processes’, in simple form we can say that they are ‘language based interactions’ that are ‘multiple, simultaneous ... local, social-historical constructions of relational realities’ (2006: 272). Relating processes are pluri and multivocal co-ordinations of meaning, a series of local, historical ‘useful fictions’ (Hosking and Bass, 2002: 12) constructed with assumptions about the ‘self’ as separate to the ‘other’, and change as a process of linear logic and progression. A relational view understands change to come from within a given context, to be generated from shifts with the co-ordination of language, sound, position or shape and perspective giving rise to the notion of a *relational practice* (Hosking and Bass, 2001).

Exploring with relating processes requires leaving aside binary constructions of self//other, right//wrong, superior//subordinate, subject//object<sup>4</sup> as fixed relating patterns and exploring new co-ordinations or processes of making meaning that are co-constructed through co-equal, inclusive, multilogal ‘power to’ relations different to the ‘power over’ dynamics that often characterise relating processes fixed with ‘either//or’ patterns (Gergen, 1995: 39, cf. Freire, 1970: 126 ff.). This includes the epistemological assumptions of ‘received science’ and forms of ‘possessive individualism’ that underpin much management and organisational change literature (Hosking, 2007). This ‘softening’ has been understood as a move from hard S/O ‘either//or’ differentiations towards ‘and/and’ differentiation patterns (Hosking, 2006, 2007). The ways or methods through which such shifts become possible or available have been explored to some extent but are still co-ordinated as ‘unimagined’ due to the fixedness of some of the dominant co-ordinations mentioned above (Hosking and Bass, 2002).

Thus the role of language is important as discursive practice that constitutes the ‘forms of life’ (Wittgenstein, 1953) we live. Language-use offers us a ‘discourse that centres language-based relational processes’ for which ‘language and ‘real’ reality may be discoursed as inseparable by seeing ‘textuality’ as a defining characteristic of all phenomena and not just of written and spoken ‘texts’” (Hosking, 2006: 271). It is because of this viewing of ‘textuality’ as a ‘defining characteristic of all phenomena’ that the word play of text-context, or ‘text-con-text’ (Gergen,

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<sup>4</sup> A double-backslash is used here to mark the ‘binary’ nature of the relating processes going-on that *closes units off from each other* in a sense. This is to distinguish from the single-backslash marker used for dialectic relating processes as relations that *become* as living ‘self/other’ for example.

1995) becomes so central. Language is centred as a primary medium of relating processes. It is understood as performative rather than representational. This means that language is *used* as social, relational joint actions whose co-ordination construct social reality (Berger and Luckman, 1967). Any act, to exist as a social reality must be co-ordinated with, or supplemented by communication process (Gergen, 2003). Therefore relations are between *acts* and not persons *per se*. Communication processes ‘go-on’ according to the ways a given act is supplemented or co-ordinated with. A greeting such as ‘How are you?’ can commonly evoke a supplement such as, ‘Fine, Thanks’ or maybe less common such as, ‘Bloody awful’. Whatever the response-made a journey of meaning-making is set in motion as an on-going co-ordination of language-acts that construct the processing of social reality.

Considering such processes as *social* means also considering them as *empowering*. The relations between acts constitute relational processes that privilege certain acts and leave others unsupplemented or uncoordinated; these acts are therefore not ‘real’ in any meaningful way (Hosking and Bass, 2002, Gergen, 1995, 2003). The co-ordination of meaning is a powerful social process in which certain co-ordinations or relating processes can become dominant, for example a gender specific division of labour for which men tend to be managers and women operatives. With this relating pattern the practices of men are co-ordinated with an implicit narrative about men as active, decisive, and strong. A social narrative which relates with a construction of women as passive, obedient and functional. Some co-ordinations of meaning are so pervasive and established that loosening their fixed grasp may seem unimaginable. Possible co-ordinations may ‘get disappeared’ with other dominant versions of social reality (Fletcher, 1998).

Knowledge or meaning is therefore constructed with relational, social processes as a way of ‘going-on’ (Hosking, 2007) as contingency strategies for each context, encounter, set of relations, predicament or organisational form. ‘It’ is not entified as a ‘thing’ to be stored, accessed, transferred or shared. The relational constructionism epistemological stance focusses on the processes by which we ask particular questions and not others, the processes by which we come to know (what is knowing), and the processes by which we justify claims to reality (Dachler and Hosking, 1995).

For research practice, and at variance with the scientific worldview that prioritises a positivist theory, relational constructionism offers the possibility of a different theory of theory (Cooperrider et al., 1995, Gergen, 1995, Hosking and Bouwen, 2000) for which theory is an experience of knowing and coordinating meaning. In this sense relational constructionism offers a generative approach to theory (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2003) as something we *use* for on-going processes. This frames the research process with a research orientation that is inductive

and emerging. Meanings are made with ‘multiloging’ as the sharing of many voices, words, texts and acts. Meaning cannot be definitively fixed to one source or one end as it is always in the process of being re-narrated and constructed. This makes learning common, going-on always and potentially empowering-possibility for change for real groups of people and organisations. Learning or making meaning is only limited by the local, socio-cultural contexts where it is related, although these processes are complex and dialectic, constructing over place and time in ways that can fix and oppress as well as generate and enhance. These phenomena of meaning as *made* are explored throughout the thesis.

In summary, for a relational constructionist approach the following key assumptions are made: the claim *to know* is a claim to be able to construct the meanings of a running text in which making meaning is a process of narrating and a reflection of the oppositional unity of text and context. Such texts and contexts cannot be separated, they entail each other and derive meaning from opposition or difference. Meaning is produced through multiloging which is an actively creative process of creating (common) understandings on the basis of language. It can never be finalised, nor has it any ultimate origin; it is always in the process of making. The only limitations upon meaning making are the socio-cultural contexts in which it is made since these are the reference points to which people coordinate (Dachler and Hosking, 1995: 10).

### *Shifting Orientation – from ‘Unit of Analysis’ to Exploring Con/text as Relating Processes*

For this methodological rationale the customary early definition of a ‘unit of analysis’ as a way to go-on with research practice becomes problematic. The definition of a ‘unit’ carries along other features of construction that are unhelpful at an early stage of research practice. The hard or fixed differentiation required for definition of a ‘unit of analysis’ isolates subject from object in such a way as to reduce the horizontal-view of relating processes generating knowledge for the ‘field’, as well as knowledge of the knowing or learning process itself. This difficulty also means that access to the functional learning process that renders awareness and insight about/with the framing and driving assumptions of the research practice itself becomes inhibited. With an early-defined construction the researcher remains cast as ‘overviewer’ who manages and controls the process. By standing ‘apart’ or ‘over’ the living modality *featuring* (or what I have come to call the ‘pushing back’ of the data-in-process) with experiences of unmanageability, exigency and confusion among others, are lost as authentic features of the research and practical learning process. It seems that a significant element of the potential-power of the ‘relationally responsive’ feature of the ‘living inquiry’ (Shotter, 2008) is disempowered.

In order to re-orientate with the practice or processual-turn (Nicolini et al., 2003) for organisational learning, Elkjaer takes the route of broadening the scope beyond ‘individuals’ or



‘organisations’ and holds onto *living-quality* by defining ‘situations and events’ as the ‘unit of analysis’ (2004). Easterby-Smith et al. (2000) have noted that with the turn to an epistemology-of-practice the ‘unit’ has been reformulated as ‘communities of practice’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991), ‘activity systems’ (Engestrom and Middleton, 1996) and ‘ecologies of knowledge’ (Star, 1995). These solutions for the ‘unit difficulty’ construct on a sliding-scale from aggregated-wholes to ‘systematic and dialectical units of analysis’ (Star, 1995: 2). Relational constructionism does not approach subject/object differentiations on binary terms (Hosking, 2007). Relations constructed with hard binary process are considered overly reductive, generating tautological processes that become ‘incomplete’ by means of firmly-fixing fragmenting differentiations and relating patterns. Common concerns with bridging individual, group or organisational levels become less relevant (Hosking and Bouwen, 2000). On ‘another map’ research practice needs to become contingent by ‘another’ learning process. A construction of ‘unit’ for *operationalisation* closes-off attention and faculties for noticing and taking account of matters that ‘do not follow’. For a relational approach to research practice, open attentiveness to the process *itself* is central to the learning task. Thus it becomes difficult to define and construct the ‘unit’ as an accomplishment *before* the projected or imagined process (Küpers and Jäger, 2005) takes embodied place.

The contingent way forwards for this situation is textualising ‘contingent processes’ figuring. Asking why or how are the matters that seem to matter, for people, for organisations, for communities or for the environment, ‘appearing’ and recognising that such matters are best explored by/with those for whom they matter, on *their terms* insofar as they can be expressed or described. This is a way to go-on with emerging coherence, *somehow* received. ‘Relating processes’ act as proxies *standing-for* ‘unit of analysis’ as methodological frame and step. Working with ‘relating processes’ as ‘proxy-units’ (*as* they are contextualising phenomena figuring from field) shifts classic metaphors for describing methodological perspectives such as ‘lens’ or ‘view’ to more complex and expansive imagining devices such as ‘landscape’, ‘topography’ and ‘surface’. This shift renders ‘relating processes’ as a ‘vehicle’ for travelling (with/in) than something to *look at*. By *travelling with* a landscape the textualising, processual, living pattern of knowing is marked as ‘field’ *and* ‘research practice’ – for which a scientific rationale is but one strand.

The ‘unit’ emerges ‘of late’ with a relationally ordered enquiry. It becomes a clarity *received* when the landscape is travelled and the exploration comprehensive by means of double-description or deuterio-learning. For this project the ‘unit’ emerges as a *particular name* or label, contextually described as ‘relating processes’ (as a proxy) for going-on with the research practice. This label is topicalised as ‘interpretations used’ (as complex ways) for organising – when ‘organising’ is adaptable, negotiable, variable – rarely ‘coherent’ as commonly imagined, always ‘difference’. ‘Interpretations used’ as Irish Aid organising practice have been explored in various ways for this

project. As language-used (with pragmatics), as second-order determinations (*about* Irish Aid by organisational members and by me as ‘researcher’). The determinations become ‘positions’ constructed with research practice with the purpose of generating new contextualising practices. In this way ‘relating processes’ as ‘things’ to describe, but more importantly as ‘modes’ to take-up are critical, multiple focal processes for real change and transformation. Whatever name or label relating processes can be given as context, they matter ultimately as the ‘survival units’ (Bateson, 1972: 468) that order our imagining/deciding about and with the world and how we become with it.

### *The Reflexive View*

Reflexive attending is critical to the integrity of this research practice. Continuous deutero-reflection for learning *about* and *with* learning/organising practice is generated as ‘another’ body of data for reflexive enquiry. This means that data-generated from the field of ‘Irish Aid’ is *worked* with describing process. As *worked* the process of engaging with data-generated is data-generating its own process (and textualisation) of research practice that must be attended to for learning with ‘validity’ and ‘reliability’ as praxial or ‘so what’ questions. From a relational and practical point of view *quality* criteria are required for judgement rather than an objective ‘Truth’. Küpers and Jäger take up the perspectives of ‘self reflectivity and transparency’ (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000), ‘trustworthiness’ (Marshall and Rossman, 1995), and ‘coherence’ (Van Maanen, 1988) for such a qualitative and processual approach to research practice. They construct a reflexivity of attending to the ‘vividness, accuracy, richness and elegance’ (Küpers and Jäger, 2005) of conclusions reached. Asking how the emerging determinations ‘fit’ with and for the context from which they emerge as ‘Irish Aid’ matters for the *forcing* and *resilience* of the enquiry. It is also a way of presenting conclusions as effectively and coherently as possible. These validity markers for a phenomenological approach to research stand as criteria that centre concern for going-on (better) with learning practice so that there is rigor *on practical terms* to the research practice.

Assuming that forms of heuristic intuition or ‘recognition’ and intending (or rhetoric) generate with the practice certain teleological *force* for the process of emerging frames<sup>5</sup>, a general criteria of ‘trustworthiness’ (Küpers and Jäger, 2005) strikes as a ‘measure’ for the *usefulness* of any learning/organising practice whether classed as ‘research’ or ‘organisation’, or ‘practice’. Judging

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<sup>5</sup> A wonderful scene from Nick Park’s Wallace and Gromit tale, *The Wrong Trousers* features a train-chase whereby Gromit runs out of track – the solution becomes the speedy placing of tracks in front of the carriage as it advances (from a spare box found on the way), generating a frantic and hilarious chase forwards. While the metaphor doesn’t do all the work we would wish, the figure of throwing down the next track while moving is evocative of the sort of ‘attending’ discussed at this point.

trustworthiness is a practical task that requires practical learning grounded in the complex ways we know – moment by moment, event by event, task by task. Constructing a framework for a ‘pheno-practice’ from advanced phenomenology and process philosophy, Küpers and Jäger point out that, ‘[p]heno-practically it can be assumed that researcher’s criteria for their research practices are largely embodied and implicit knowledge and knowing and not rational logic’ (Küpers and Jäger, 2005: 31). Reflexive attending to the embodied, implicit and contingent nature of the research practice is important for ‘trustworthiness’ and on-going learning according to a rationale that holds the end, purpose or goal of *praxis* as more *praxis* (Groome, 1980a). Küpers and Jäger seem to have an ‘interpersonal view’ for the ‘pheno-practice’ they are developing as a phenomenology for organisation, ‘the research process itself can be interpreted as an *inter-relational* process of knowing’ (Küpers and Jäger, 2005: 1 emphasis added) which distinguishes their construction from the phenomenology of contextualisation imagined here.

As practical learning and reflexive enquiry the research process *itself* is ready-data for interpretation integral to the overall enquiry or exploration as organisational learning for development-aid organising practice, especially when framed as ‘practical learning’. As an experience of trito-learning insights are received with reflexive practices that show how that very practice or enquiry is complex, framed by time, place, method, media, syntax, figurative and random occurrence among many other particular and patterning features. The possibility of reflexive practice becomes social and powerful as feedback that in-forms the process going-on and is therefore a mode of living enquiry. Attending to the data generation and interpretation process by describing the ‘describing going-on’ as reflexive enquiry, is understood here as double-describing for deutero-learning. That is learning to learn with the topic or, practically speaking, the ‘matter to hand’.

## Part II: Phenomenology for *Going-On* with Research Practice

### *Initial Phenomenological Orientations*

The term ‘phenomenology’ is rooted with the Greek verb φαίνω (phainoo) which is ‘to bring light, make to appear, to show’ (Liddell and Scott, 1891). This is a construction which figures the projective/receptive nature of phenomenological process. Phenomenology is method that seeks to accomplish as much with its *process* as it can tell with its *words* – to *show* as well as *tell* – making reflexivity a necessity. The aim is not ‘logical demonstration but understanding (*Verstehen*)’ (which for Heidegger means *understanding*) ‘the primary mode of being of man in which all knowing and thinking is rooted.’ (Mehta, 1971: 50) The method of *Verstehen* is a new departure or movement in philosophy that constructs itself on changed ontological/epistemological terms by seeking to describe its own process of objectivisation without presuppositions. Important steps of

phenomenological development are marked by shifts in understanding as to the proper 'ground' of that process. Some of those key principles are used here to frame the ways in which the project is generated. For Edmund Husserl the 'ground' to *make appear* was necessary truth or pure consciousness. He sought to define pure essences by way of describing-practices that 'bracket out' everything that is non-essential to the phenomenon studied. As transcendental phenomenology the describing process arrives at a distinction between pure consciousness (noesis) as directed towards objects-known (noema) by means of intentionality (1969).

Whilst there is no sense of 'pure consciousness' taken up for this project for which all knowledge is immanent, or 'knowledge-made', the notion of the bracket or boundary is useful to show how such boundary-making is that which essentialises the topics, texts or figures that come to be known (Dalal, 1998); and as various discursive-*fixes* are always a deferral or difference from other possible relations-to-make (Derrida, 1976). Phenomenological describing brings-out or 'abducts' to greater degrees the *detailing* of the knowing process thus rendering glimpses of the 'thing' or process *itself*. Martin Heidegger generates an ontological phenomenology that grounds all knowing on the condition of *Dasein* – the 'being-there' from which *givenness* all describing of the world becomes (1973). There is no search for 'consciousness'; idealism is rejected as generating dualistic-thinking and displacing the situation of *Dasein* as the primary possibility of all phenomenological process in which knowers participate. Therefore all describing practices must take account of the immanence that constitutes them – for Heidegger the ultimate horizon of Being, or *Dasein* is time (the 'there' that matters most). A horizon that marks all research or learning processes as practices that 'go-on' (Wittgenstein, 1953).

Finally, Merleau-Ponty establishes the phenomenology of perception as the embodied or backgrounding condition of all knowing processes (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). With a chiasmic<sup>6</sup> orientation to the 'landscape' to which phenomenal objects belong, consciousness is cast as neither purely logical nor sensual. With the relating processes of [perception/objects of perception] going-on *as* every time, every space *meaning* is generated. It is the distinction of the figured-object from a spatial and temporally relating horizon by means of the embodied perspective of the perceiver<sup>7</sup> that enables consciousness to function as a projecting or spontaneous action. This spontaneous or 'appearing' feature of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology,

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<sup>6</sup> The 'chiasmic' figure is grounded in the Greek letter chi, the grammé of which, Χ, shows the basic structure. It is taken up by Merleau-Ponty and Gregory Bateson (1972) to note how perception is *already embodied*, before any formal thought, as light passes through the retina and is mirrored in chiasmic pattern from the back of the eye, thus generating vision. This chiasmic structure is also taken up by John Shotter (2008).

<sup>7</sup> A dynamic, moving, locating and space-filling experience ...

the chiasmic and inter-relating process of knowing, or consciousness (attention/judgement) frames the condition of ‘knowing-within’ by which all describing-processes are generated and generate according to a relating dynamic, desire or intentionality.<sup>8</sup> This *force* of intention is nuanced for this project as a teleological-textuality of organising practice that *becomes* without the full attention, awareness or control of any one group or organisational member.

These three orientations, the bracketing or abductive feature of phenomenological practice that differs and defers; the ‘being-there’ of *Dasein*, as existence always manifesting itself and thus generating the ‘becoming’ nature of all relating processes; and the interrelating always going-on (spontaneously) as embodied, embodying and spatialising knowing processes; all generate a processual rationale for going-on with research practice according to a relational coherence. As a living example of these terms Gregory Bateson’s text, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972) marks a journey over many years with different describing-disciplines towards an ordered formulation of what he called a ‘Necessary Unity’ between ‘Mind and Nature’ (2002). The immanent, knowledge-as-made condition or ground<sup>9</sup> of all learning/organising practice is the core-feature or δύνᾱμις (dunamis as power, dynamic, energy, ability) that gives this project figuration (principle, shape, direction, progression, end).

### *The Beginnings of Description - Encountering the Field, Generating Topical and Practical Focus*

#### Encountering the Field – Responses with Confusion

My initial experiences of Irish Aid as a field of enquiry were intense due to the fact that there was much to learn – about the organisation and its work, about the research process itself, and about the theoretical ground I was moving from, *worked* and *un-worked*<sup>10</sup>. I found myself in a process of coming to know people from Irish Aid and myself as ‘researcher’ within this new context. The experience was quite overwhelming as a flood of ‘data’ enveloped me in such a way as to make the processes of ‘seeing’, ‘touching’, ‘hearing’ ‘smelling’ ‘tasting’; all ‘sensing’ and ‘connecting’ quite challenging. The following quote from my research journal (12/11/2006) paints the picture while also showing how the disorientation of field-initially-encountered can become a relating process itself:

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<sup>8</sup> Rather than ‘intention’, the preference here is for δύνᾱμις (dunamis) for its traces of ‘movement’, ‘power’ and ‘ability’

<sup>9</sup> Heidegger uses the term, ἀρχή (archê) for ‘ground’ (Mehta, 1971) – which Liddell and Scott define as ‘a beginning, first cause, origin’ (1891)

<sup>10</sup> A distinct vocabulary to ‘explicit’ and ‘implicit’

‘Today I continue to be aware of my fragmentation, I am like a butterfly resting momentarily on all the flowers that come before my eyes, I have browsed four books already this morning as I wander about the empty house ... the discipline and traction of a consolidated forward move eludes me’.

Nonetheless, initial orienting-frames were clear. This was a qualitative enquiry to explore organisational learning as a social phenomenon. Method was central as I was more interested in *how* than *what*-type questions. While not highly defined the enquiry was heuristically-driven by clear attention to the relational nature of organisational life and a desire to discover how this domain might be explored. This was based on an intuitive awareness that the ‘relational field’, as how sense is pragmatically made, is at the heart of what matters most for current predicaments with organisation. It was equally clear that in order to explore the relational life<sup>11</sup> of organisation access to ‘live’ organisational process would be necessary. This is a complex challenge since ‘life’ is by nature intangible due to its immediate presence. We *are* our organisational life – so discursively *sensing* that life is always secondary process, must always take us ‘out of ourselves’ by some fashion. The moment was equally complex since I did not have clarity of expression on the matter at the time, nor was the intention easily intelligible to Irish Aid practitioners. They are accustomed to consultancy-modes of research practice for which the focus is generally technical and therefore unquestioning of first principles. Following on from this situation a final orientation came with the practical question, continually put to me in the context, as to how what I was doing as a researcher was going to be useful and ‘applicable’ for Irish Aid. This *exigency* felt like a foil but brought a critical, difficult and pragmatic or *praxial* edge to the data generation phase and beyond.

The process of topic-definition moves in dialectic relation to the process of access. The task is ‘multilogal’, meaning that there is interplay of several practices in order to go-on while keeping open and responsive. These are practices of reflection on starting positions and coming to know where knowledge is moving from; making space for openness to multiple logics or different ways of making sense; living with ‘not knowing’ as a path towards transformation; staying in touch with the ‘here and now’, and continually reflecting on the frames and questions that are generating knowledge and power in the local context (Hosking, 2002). Taking these practices into account for the learning and research practice means that the overall experience of generating data becomes one of broad scoping and ‘hoovering’<sup>12</sup> while all the while becoming critical and attentive to how that is getting done. Despite preparation for the field by way of initial reading

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<sup>11</sup> The distinction between ‘interpersonal’ relationality and ‘relating processes’ as a frame of epistemological/discursive action was at the time still unclear to me.

<sup>12</sup> A colloquial term constructed from the popular make of vacuum cleaner, Hoover.

and preparatory meetings with some Irish Aid personnel, the field ‘talks-back’ in jumbled and fragmentary ways that can disorientate. Although this is the richness of a qualitative, participatory, exploratory and emergent approach, some methods for learning are required.

I managed my confusion by generating reflexive description. I kept an unstructured research journal and made copious ‘field’ notes<sup>13</sup>. I worked towards an ‘integration paper’ that reflected back to me my latent-theory as lived and explored in earlier study and work experiences<sup>14</sup>. By working with a heuristic rationale I generated initial frames. From the heuristic point of view the research process is understood as a deep enquiry with experiential knowing for which the researcher’s reflexive view is a valid source of data with regard to the phenomenon being explored (Moustakas, 1990). It is also one’s particular existential lens or position operating at the edges of explicit awareness or knowledge. Coordinating this *curiosity* with the exigencies of the research context or field becomes the work of gaining useful access in tandem with defining a relevant topic. A pragmatic focus meant that questions of practical relevance pressed and shaped the topic, and the ways in which it could be explored. The ever-present frame of ‘organisational learning’ generated the challenge of ‘organising learning’<sup>15</sup> attuned to the pressing, complex and exigent terms of a real-life development-aid organisation, Irish Aid.

Along with heuristic-attending, the practice of participant research-practice is viewed as a method of understanding from within the research context. From a relational constructionism perspective the possibility of making meaning exists only if an emerging text can be coordinated with the context of matter (Hosking and Bass, 2001). This makes some form of participation or coordination with the context essential for any possibility of shared meaning. One needs to be engaged, relating-with and learning the local ‘languages’ if one is to have access to the processes of meaning-making getting made. Interpretations of the role of a participant observer cross a wide spectrum, but the practice can be simply-framed as a ‘specific form of field research in which the researcher participates as an actor in the events under study’ (Rubin and Babbie, 2001: 390). *That* participation must also be attended to. A reflexive hermeneutic is required by which means the process of interpretation going-on also becomes a focus of enquiry. As primary and secondary orders of abstraction (participation-with-the-field and attention to that learning

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<sup>13</sup> Useful for later review and reflection but primarily undertaken for the process-itself of *describing*, it is learning or research practice *in the moment* that can keep the attending and judging functions open and in touch with the landscape or horizon ... while generating attention to the intentional or framing process *itself* going-on ...

<sup>14</sup> See Appendix C

<sup>15</sup> Another term for the research practice itself

process) the participant research-practice work was understood as participant-practice for going-on and is therefore termed here as participant research-practice.

As participant research-practice I spent four distinct periods of time *in-situ* with Irish Aid, three periods at Head Office and one at a 'field' embassy overseas. In the case of Head Office these periods (over two years) were interspersed with on-going attendance at specific meetings. During these periods unstructured and opportune interviewing, documentary collection and review, and reflexive journalling enabled an exploratory approach to go-on. Each of these methods are ways of generating descriptive accounts of the field, rich in detail although chaotic as they initially impress upon one's perception in fragmentary fashion. An anxiety towards making sense is generated.

A gestaltian perspective (Harris, 1989) offers insight as to how fragments or 'particulars' are generated with 'wholes'. Phenomena *present* or *appear* to our perception and are apprehended through a shifting perception of 'figure' and 'ground', words which resonate with Merleau-Ponty's description of embodied knowing process (1962). We make sense by 'seeing' with a patterning of the whole, by attending to the 'dynamic relationship which cements everything together' (Barber, 2006: 72) in order to proceed. This ability to *figure* and *ground* not only helps us manage the confusion of the field but also gives us a sense of *frame* as *focus*. The language used here for that *frame* is 'relating processes' – the focus of enquiry through which the looking, describing and learning came to take place. Gestalt theory also offers some useful resources for initial interpretation of the 'whole of field' experience of a qualitative exploratory approach. One can notice to what degree phenomena *figure*, or alternately begin to fade or constitute *background*; the degree to which phenomena are self-contained or merge as their differentiation and confluence are explored; the degree to which phenomena show resilience to merging and can reconstitute or reconfigure themselves; and finally, the interrelationship of different layers and levels of experience can be noted by using the concept of a 'laminated field' (Barber, 2006). The initial descriptions by organisational members about their jobs, learning in their organisation and the difficulties they faced, along with my reflexive describing-work were understood as generating indicative interpretations as data. As the process of data generation goes-on the broad horizon or landscape reconfigures repeatedly, as lamination, as polishing<sup>16</sup>. No doubt the figures that come to count become apparent along with pragmatic opportunity – which focusses the question of *access* in tandem with the question of *topic*.

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<sup>16</sup> A formulation of 'bracketing' using the 'French Polishing' metaphor – for which the 'quality' or a certain 'essence' (as/for *this* relating process) is brought-out – 'made to appear'.



### Access and Topic as Ways to Go-on

The practical challenges shaping these initial experiences were the negotiation of access and the definition of topic. The process or *journey* of access, to use a helpful metaphor, extended over a period of two years, moved through phases of contracting trust<sup>17</sup>, establishing inter-personal connection and familiarity, learning the languages of Irish and International ODA; and finally, while getting to know the ways of Irish Aid practice, coming to an interpretation of topic according to the predicaments that organisational members foregrounded or figured the most. By approaching the enquiry in exploratory fashion, following intuitive leads, attending meetings and listening, taking notes, asking questions afterwards, all the while wondering how learning was imagined, understood and enacted with and for this context, I was slowly sharpening my focus around that which was repeatedly talked as the learning ‘problem’ – it seemed that ‘communication’ is key.

In order to proceed towards greater detail with ‘communication’ it was necessary to connect with a particular organisational process. Learning was linked to communication and described by organisational members as lacking for the context of their work. Fragmenting-interpretations were functioning with communication lacks, gaps and barriers getting-made. A more expansive description<sup>18</sup> would have to be generated from the practical, everyday contexts of organising practice.

After several months of attending *Programme Coherence Meetings*<sup>19</sup> I responded to a particular initiative reported there about ‘Mid-Term Reviews’ of Country Strategy Papers (CSPs) by presenting a short paper to the person responsible for that process. The paper explored possible connections between mid-term reviews and organisational learning. The action instigated an invitation to participate in a general Review Process of Programme Country Strategy Papers (CSPs). CSPs are core instruments of Irish Aid practice, their production of considerable operational significance, they involve most organisational roles and their processing incorporates the participation of people working in the Field, at Head Office, Partners, Recipients, Government and other organisational actors.

The planned Review would generate new ‘Guidelines’ to inform on-going practice and was part of a more expansive organisational process of institutional development going-on. A review-event was envisaged as the centre-piece of the work when practitioners from all Programme

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<sup>17</sup> Formalised with a ‘Memorandum of Understanding’

<sup>18</sup> Towards more expansive describing practices *as* and *for* organisational learning that can go-on ... as a practical research outcome/new resource

<sup>19</sup> See Chapter Four

Countries were to gather with a significant delegation from Head Office in one of the programme countries in Africa. This event was called the CSP Review Workshop and became the focal point for core-data generation. A 'preparation week' was planned at Head Office when people from every section of the organisation were consulted, and included input from the embassy teams about the world. The opportunity to generate data from a living organisational process was excellent.

In tandem with the invitation to participate with the CSP Review Process links were made with the Head of Development and one development specialist in a programme country.<sup>20</sup> Communication was established with the help of a specialist from Head Office and continued by email. Initial exchanges, including a telephone conference call, were consolidated with opportune meetings during the following months as the key people visited Head Office. The focus of engagement was organisational learning at the Field Office since the Embassy Team had explicitly included this topic in their CSP. Commitment to a field-trip was accomplished through a terms of reference document and conversations held with the development specialist responsible during the CSP Review Workshop. All along there was concern from Head Office that the research work would broaden its focus to the Field. The field trip and the data generated from it are presented with Chapter Four according to a knowledge-audit frame (Ramalingam, 2006). It was chosen to offer categories for action that correspond to the field-context. This opportunity was key to understanding many of the issues arising with the CSP Review Process itself. It was possible after an intensive participant-practice at an Irish Aid Embassy to locate general CSP issues as 'field-predicaments' as well as concerns from a Head Office perspective. This data cluster greatly thickened and nuanced the perspective of the CSP Process *as* reviewed for the Organisation as a whole.

### Interpreting the Field – A Hermeneutic of Exploration and Emergence

The interpreting process is *working-with* and *responding* to data-generated from participation. It renders new relations-made as frames for moving forwards with the disjointed fragments of experience, observation (as described) and reflexive attending to the knowledges from which movement is going-on. Centring the social coordination and production of knowledge with the frame of relating processes means that rather than seeking to *uncover* 'internal' interpretations implicitly made by organisational members the textualising-practice *as textualised* becomes the focus.

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<sup>20</sup> Named PC-A for this project.

Thus the first hermeneutical-orientation is reading social processes as *textual*. The frame of relating processes centres communication and language-based interactions as constructing the social fabric or ‘text’ (Hosking, 2000a, 2006). *Language-used* is practically ‘capturable’ and can stand (with all the caveats as to its ‘already dead’ nature) as a social-textualising practice available for further exploration and description.<sup>21</sup> Of course the social interaction or production of meaning is much more than a game of syntactical language in the formal sense – discursive practice is multimodal and multidimensional – but language as *used* was recordable given the resources available and the access granted, and therefore became the way of going-on with more expansive describing process. Thus, even beyond the pragmatics of access, the interpreting process is also marked with a *pragmatic* or embodied-possible and *do-able* orientation.

By participating with the local language games (Wittgenstein, 1953) and thereby bringing another text towards the mix, a new possibility of interpretation or hermeneutic-process is generated. Hermeneutics do not centre ‘the experienced intention of the actor’ – whether researcher or organisational member, but instead take ‘action as an access through which to interpret the larger social context of meaning in which it is embedded’ (Aanstoos, 1987: 15). With the orienting frame of relating processes and the participation of the research action I found myself ‘more interested in the social than the individual meanings of actions’ (Tesch, 1990: 37). In other words the enquiry was clearly focussing *how-type* questions as a way to explore actions going-on. These *actions* as contextualising practices – framed up as ‘learning’ or ‘organising’ – are the particular discursive practices or *talked-texts* that feature how and what becomes ‘Irish Aid’. The research practice thus enters the weaving of local interpretation while bringing other texts to bear. Attention to how-questions is inherently oriented towards *method for going-on with* and thus making the hermeneutic-orientation *deutero*, recursive or *reflexive* and requiring appropriate reflexive methods to generate a coherent practice.

This hermeneutic perspective also seeks to be *critical* in the sense that social processes, as *relational* are powerful, historic, situationally meaningful, local, and of real or practical consequence (Dachler and Hosking, 1995, Gergen, 1995, Hosking, 2007, Gubrium and Holstein, 2008). A critical hermeneutic offers several ways off attending to the text. Firstly, common relating processes can be deconstructed to some extent with practices of disturbance (Blanter and Anderson-Wallace, 2006a) that loosen the weave. By noticing practices as they repeat for example, that awareness can be rhetorically presented as a new consciousness. As a critical perspective attention can also be paid to the unusual or strange turns of talking practice. An ‘incoherence’ can be an indication of the need for greater attention to a process or functionality

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<sup>21</sup> It seems the only truly ‘living text’ for a ‘living enquiry’ is the one that matters *now* to those persons (or species) gathered about its mattering.

that is not at first evident from initial descriptions. When a non-linear complex view of organisation is adopted the social process does not present simple cause/effect connections (Senge, 1990).

When the exigency of task is paramount, the complexity of social process is often disregarded. Relating processes may then work for or against stated organisational tasks and goals as practitioners seek to generate the sites and opportunities to contextualise that which is undervalued or insufficiently prioritised with common contextualisation. The notion of organisational learning itself is generally interpreted for development-aid organising practice in positivistic and entifying terms as was set out with the literature review of Chapter One. The approach to learning with organisation taken here seeks to explore and offer some new paths that can be inclusive of the many hues of the practical learning process. Following on from this a critical hermeneutic offers the possibility of generating contexts where the political nature of discursive practices can be talked as intrinsic to what it is to know.

A critical processing of text also enables the researcher or ‘analyst’ who stands *as if* ‘above’ the textualising process to become rigorous and always suspicious of bias. Firstly as research practice, but later as figures for new learning patterns as organising practice emerge, assumptions functional to the interpreting process must be accounted for. Assumptions are unseen until they are seen! Therefore conscious and conscientious processes must be taken up to attend to their presencing.<sup>22</sup> This is done with a variety of methods including continuous reflexive review of the analysing or responding process; asking critical questions of one’s tentative ‘explanations’; placing determinations or conclusions as they emerge *back* towards the overall contextual picture using grand-frame questions such as, ‘Does this understanding make more sense of the experiences described by organisational members?’ or ‘What “more” does this conclusion tell us about the learning context as Irish Aid?’ Supervisory practice can also be used as a touchstone of one’s developing view. The general hermeneutic-orientation guiding these various critical attendings to contextualising practices is that a more expansive and inclusive rationale and process of knowing/learning is required, whether described as ‘praxis’, ‘practical learning’ or otherwise. Clegg has described this need succinctly when arguing for the importance of ‘distributed discourse’. He notes that what is needed is ‘a more discursive, phronetic model of science as wisdom rather than either episteme or techne’ (Clegg, 2002: 4).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Just as a good car-driver drives knowing that a blind-spot exists with the rear-view

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter Six for a graphic-exploration of Aristotle’s Categories of Knowledge as episteme, techne, poiesis, phronesis and sofia.

The hermeneutic of *exploratory, emergent* interpretive-framing is central to research practice that intends to progress as a deuterio-learning, and thus 'phronetic' mode. Repeated 'readings' of the context-presenting with the process of data-getting-organised-and-analysed, generates new texts as resources for *learning with*. Particularly so when the purpose of the research is for changing or indeed, 'better' method – understood as either research or organising practice. 'Better' method must be rooted in context and in some fashion become coherent according to the criteria of trustworthiness noted above. Organisational researchers seeking to practically coordinate their enquiries towards better method for organisational contexts, have posited a variety of coordinations such as communities of practice, shifting frames of focus, explorations with key metaphors such as leadership-following processes, or frequent meetings between researchers and practitioners (eg. Wenger, 2000, Cooperrider et al., 2000, Küpers, 2005a, 2008). All of these practices seek to loosen fixed and fixing positions or boundaries for new learning processes.

On these terms finding a coordination that could 'go-on' with Irish Aid as *living* research practice was difficult – with *access-negotiation* and at other moments of the research process. On many occasions it was clear that Irish Aid members sought recommendations and concrete results, straight answers to questions such as, 'What will it look like?' (an organisational learning system) and 'How will this be useful?' These are reasonable, relevant and important questions, but from the perspective of a deuterio-learning enquiry using a deuterio-learning practice, they have no immediate or 'straight' answer. At an early stage I imagined that some form of participatory shared enquiry would become the way forwards (Heron and Reason, 1997) or a form of action research (McTaggart, 1991, Cochlan and Brannick, 2005), but I quickly realised that it would be difficult to generate the required commitment to such learning processes within Irish Aid.

As 'researcher' I was part of a 'project' from Trinity College Dublin that had approached Irish Aid for access, therefore my position was peripheral. Early in the research process I 'internalised' or related-to the difficulty as a 'lack' or inability on my part. But then I wondered was my experience unique, or shared by others coming to Irish Aid as potential partners, or aid-recipients, they too would be in the position of seeking something from the organisation. As the topics of communication-lack and fragmentation continued to be talked by members during different times and in different organisational contexts I wondered did my experience in some way connect or repeat the pattern talked by organisational members themselves according to the logic of parallel process? (Frawley-O' Dea and Sarnat, 2001)

A parallel process is generated when, in dialectic fashion, that which is figuring from the field relates or connects-with the conundrum of the researcher. Was the experience of disconnection and communicational miss-fire that was figuring for me in some way indicative of the experience

being talked by organisational members as the enquiry progressed? In all of this I noted that the interpretive process is *reflexive*, *pragmatic* and *teleological*, that is, complex, praxial and embodying in ways that generate forces and materialities that no one person or group has full view or control of, often ‘throwing’ us towards fictions, useful or otherwise (Hosking and Bass, 2002) as working-interpretations that we go-on with. Finding paths towards generating practices that can explore and describe the processing of such fictions, or even formal imagining processes such as planning tools and instruments, has been a hermeneutic force (*dunamis*) throughout the research process.

With topical focus establishing itself, the initial deutero-frame of relating processes becoming clear, and interpreting schemas working-out as ways to go-on I turned to the challenges of an expansive description of data according to a particular analytic discipline. With a focus on languaged interactions (realised as ‘core’ data with the CSP Review Process, particularly the CSP Review Workshop as a sufficiently boundaried event of talked-text) a form of discourse analysis was decided upon that understood language on practical and contextualising terms, *Pragmatics* analysis centres language-use as language-choice.

### Data Capture and Management

A variety of techniques to capture data were used including note-taking, digital recording of interviews and meetings, photography<sup>24</sup>, collection of different document types (policy documents, work process/procedures guidelines/planning frameworks/email communications/meeting agendas and notes - i.e. short form minutes, press releases) and reflexive texts such as the research journal. In the case of the CSP Review Workshop and the Field-Visit to PC-A some specific texts were generated from organisational members as responses to exercises with the concept of organisational learning. Some additional forms of data were *produced* as texts that capture a communication process with the research context. They offer material for interpretation of common organisational ways of making-sense. Data in this category includes the various documents and notes relating to key strategic meetings between the researchers from the LEARN Project and contact personnel from Irish Aid.

All interviews and sessions of the CSP Review Workshop were recorded digitally and filed electronically on my research laptop, on secondary disks and a hard drive as backup. All paper documents were filed in boxes according to the particular dates during participant research-practice periods, when they were collected, alongside field-notes made at the time. For each participant research-practice period separate day-files were put together as a way of ordering and

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<sup>24</sup> At the CSP Review Workshop and on the Field-Visit to PC-A

re-accessing the materials using a system of coding that noted the file number where the document was stored, the date of its collection and the particular number it was assigned, e.g. [PO1-03/07/06-3]. These documents were also listed using Microsoft Excel at which time they were assigned a 'type of document' label and particular points of note were recorded. All reflexive journals and notebooks were filed in one box – amounting to a total of 23 A4 Notebooks and 8 Research Journals of various sizes. All other electronic data – emails, downloaded documents, PowerPoint presentations made and photographs taken (digitally) were filed on my research laptop, on secondary disks and hard drive, according to the categories of data clusters as 'Programme Coherence Meetings', 'Field-Visit PC-A' or 'CSP Review Workshop' etc.

### **Part III: Pragmatics – Language-Use as the Primary (Con)Textualising Surface Figured**

With this penultimate section of the chapter the goal, scope and methods of *Pragmatics*, as a way of describing language as *used* in particular contexts, are briefly set out. These introductory remarks lead towards an explanation as to why this form of discourse and textual analysis is useful for the phenomenological project in hand. Methods for the management and segmentation of core-data are also outlined. In the final section of the chapter the sort of 'results' that a pragmatics analysis in this context can render are reiterated and the research contribution outlined in broad terms.

#### *What are Pragmatics?*

In simple terms, 'pragmatics' are the actions we take and make, particularly the discursive actions, that constitute or make context and contextualising practices. When 'looked upon' or attended-to they become available as conditioning movements of our learning processes, 'they' are contextualising actions. With a reflexive move we can turn-about and attend to how we make meaning and knowledge *using* such pragmatic-actions, not as 'things' we pick-up like tools, but as expressions that make *how* and *who* we go-on *as* – always understood on interactive or textual terms. 'Who-ing', or *characterising* processes-in-use interact or weave *becoming* – the primary ground of all knowing, learning, meaning. Attending to such processes we take a deutero-learning move that makes the figure of our attention not a 'thing', nor a set of propositions but a frame for acting, a method or another order of abstraction. The formal articulation of 'Pragmatics' as 'language-use' and 'language-choice' understands language as a living and multivocal text. This is an approach to language that is rooted in the 'Ordinary Language Philosophers' who sought to explore how language is functional in customary, creative and essentially responsive ways.

Relating processes are thus termed as language-based interactions within the scope of 'Pragmatics'. Pragmatics has been defined as the study of 'meaning in use', 'meaning in context', 'meaning in interaction' (Thomas, 1995). The approach 'does not deal with language *as such* but with *language use* and the relationships between language form and language use' (Verschueren et al., 1995: 1) or to use a more socially oriented definition, 'pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society' (Mey, 2001: 6). Speakers and hearers in specific contexts generate meanings with available language registers (Halliday, 1978, Ferguson, 1985), activity types (Levinson, 1979), styles, genres and discourses (Fairclough, 2001). Language is *used* in dynamic and interactive ways and is therefore generative, social, intentional, open to manipulation, confusion and ambiguity. Whatever meanings are generating, they and their effects are always open to interpretation.

Pragmatics aims to analyse what speakers and hearers *do* with the language available to them (linguistically, socially, powerfully) and *how* they do so; what choices of interpretation they make, what are the inherent complexities of possible meaning that language interaction gives life to, how does language-use function through and generate such interactional phenomena as indirectness, inference, ambiguity and politeness for example. Pragmatics is the study of language use in context.

Language meaning may be distinguished into three types; abstract meaning (possible word meanings as defined in a dictionary), contextual meaning (meanings of a word in a particular instance) and meaning force (the sort of intentional meaning that a word or sentence may carry/imply) (Thomas, 1995). Pragmatics highlights the *force* and interacted meanings possible in context and therefore the term 'utterance' is used to designate those communicative actions that construct with sounds, words, sentences and sequences the meanings by which speakers and hearers do things together. When Pragmatics was first formulated as an 'ordinary language philosophy' in reaction to logical positivism, attention was paid to 'speech acts' (Austin, 1962) by which language-use was seen to perform certain actions. The notion of 'performatives' (ie. an utterance that does what it says, such as a proclamation, "I hereby pronounce you man and wife") was developed with distinctions of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts being made. In this breakdown of interacted meaning it is recognised that with language-use not only ideas are communicated but social changes are enacted. The locutionary act is the linguistic construction of the utterance – the actual words uttered; the illocutionary force is the communicative intention of the speaker behind her or his words; while the perlocutionary act is the effect of the utterance on the hearer, the interpretation made.



The tradition developed from focussing mainly on speaker actions towards the actions of interpretation on the part of the hearers. It is here where much of the role of ambiguity in language-use and interpretation is highlighted with the notion of implicature as developed by Grice (1975). When hearing an utterance a hearer interprets an implied meaning beyond the simple sense or reference meaning that may be possible. The fact that such forms of indirect communication seem to be generally successful is explained by the use of a *Cooperative Principle*, and its attendant maxims which function implicitly between language-users. The phenomena of 'maxim flouting' for example is explored as a strategy of complex communication. It is the step from hearing an utterance to its interpretation that is explored by seeking to identify the implicit communicative structures that are operational in interaction. Grice sought to explore this level of informal reasoning that seems to operate with everyday talk and through which implied meaning is generated.

A distinct, more rule-based approach to felicitous communication was developed by Searle (1969) who sought to formalize the contextual conditions under which an implied meaning, or implicature might be successful. This project is ultimately judged unweildly nonetheless (Thomas, 1995) as the complexity and multiple functionality of speech-acts/events renders nominalisation of those acts difficult. In other words the context of meaning is always fresh or particular in some sense and therefore the conditions of context, such as positionality are always changing. A principled or maxim-based approach developed in the sphere of interpersonal communication with attention paid to 'indirectness' (Dascal, 1983) and 'politeness' (Brown and Levinson, 1980, Leech, 1980).

In recent times attention has grown in the area of macropragmatic research that seeks to investigate the phenomena of intercultural and international communication and at levels of societal interaction beyond that of the face-to-face; bringing in the questions of discourse and ideology, societal debate and the like (Verschueren, 1999).

From a relational constructionism approach (Hosking et al., 1995) the use of the word 'meaning' in language use needs a cautionary note. It is a word that can easily be referenced to a cognitive and representational understanding of language, that is; meaning as a bounded notion or idea formed 'within an individual's head', as if something we do alone and also as having objective status. Here meaning is understood as an 'ontologised' phenomena; its making, a social or relational project that really has no beginning nor end. 'Meaning' is taken firmly into the realm of action, interactive relational action in fact in which meanings-made *do* things between people, between notions, between contexts. Once again it is important to note that interactive phenomena such as communicative intentions, messages, motivations, expectations and

assumptions are generated in a relational context so that even the use of an idea such as ‘intentionality’ must be analysed as an interactive phenomena.

Given this phenomenological sense of ‘meaning’, a useful definition of pragmatics is ‘Thomas’, ‘meaning in interaction’ which she describes as ‘the process of making meaning [as] a joint accomplishment between speaker and hearer’ (1995: 208). Thomas states clearly that ‘meaning is not something which is inherent in the words alone, nor is it produced by the speaker alone, nor by the hearer alone. Making meaning is a dynamic process, involving the negotiation of meaning between speaker and hearer, the context of utterance (physical, social, and linguistic) and the meaning potential of an utterance.’ (1995: 22). The objective/subjective notion of meaning is broken down here where the many variables of the construction process are recognised. This understanding of ‘joint accomplishment’ generates space for moving beyond the bounded limitations of hard subject/object relations (Hosking, 2007). Using this resource of a ‘joint accomplishment’, which resonates with an ethnomethodological approach (Garfinkel, 1967, Francis and Hester, 2004), pragmatics analysis seeks to articulate how such processes are accomplished; while always recognising that the endeavour is ‘a probabilistic rather than a precise science’ (Thomas, 1995: 208). The focus shifts from individual actions towards possible meanings in interaction generated by the dynamic communicative process going-on between speakers and hearers in contexts full of meaning potential as they use language together. This dynamic interaction is graphically presented with Figure 1.

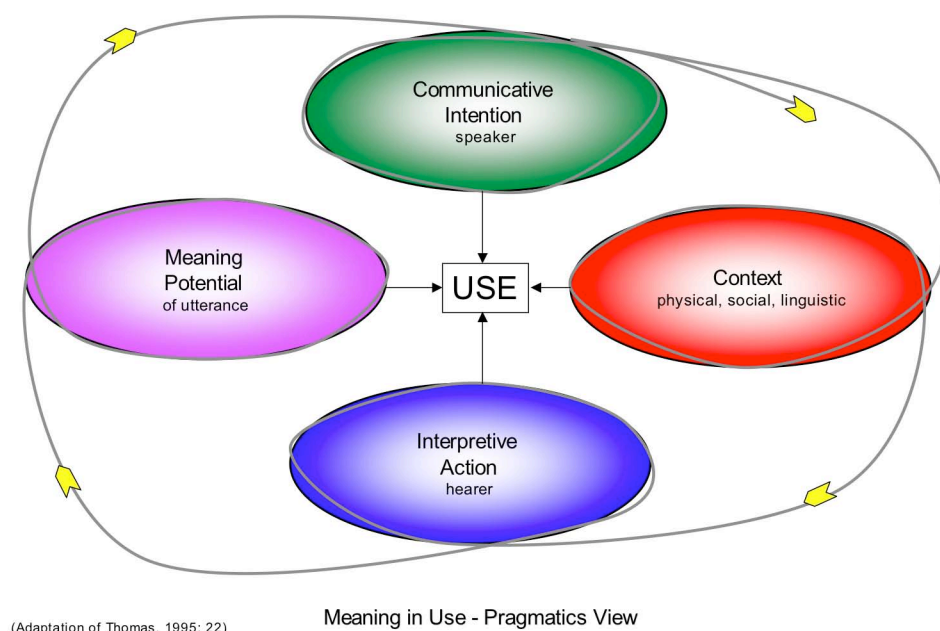


Figure 0-1: A graphic made of ‘Meaning in Interaction’ as described by Jenny Thomas (1995: 22)

### Pragmatics as Language-Use/Language-Choice

Verschueren establishes a general theory of language that underpins what is possible with talking (1999). This comprehensive treatment is extremely useful for this project as it offers a clear description of the dynamic character and functionality of language as *used*. As will become clear with Chapter Five Verschueren's schema offers a ready frame for understanding the connecting patterns that intertextualise particular language-choices as strategies, principles and infinite possibility for communities of language-users. His approach frames pragmatic actions as intrinsic to language processing under a rubric of relating processes with structure, context, dynamics and salience – a frame to be explored in greater detail.

It is important to note that Verschueren understands language as dynamic communication that functions according to three hierarchically ordered principles: *variability*, *negotiability* and *adaptability*. 'Variability' establishes norms as language-use for relating language-users (as nation, society, organisation, group, family or team) with a variable format or register, for example the format of language-use that we call, 'English'. The format is such that choices are possible within its range. 'Negotiability' enables utterances-*used* to be reinterpreted so that particular meanings (as made) are continually changing. Meanings are thus always open to renegotiation according to the shifting circumstances of use. Finally, 'adaptability' makes 'use' *as context* thoroughly alive and immediate since as *used* the form (i.e. the words uttered) can *receive* changed meaning. Language as *used* is always living, relating, responsive process for which the formats of normative-use are always changing by virtue of the fact that they are *used*. The social nature of language-use is foregrounded so that the 'receiving process' of meaning-making as dialectic shared-action becomes clear. Verschueren's articulation of a 'coherent theoretical framework' (1999: xi) of Pragmatics as dynamic relating processes and textualising actions goes a step beyond Thomas' perspective on 'meaning in interaction' in ways that became apparent as the detailed describing of Irish Aid talk went on. These moves will be explained with Chapter Five as the shift from 'Method One' to 'Method Two'.

Bringing further resources to the research practice, Ethnomethodology notes how people 'analyse social events in their course; they do so with methods' for which the task of Ethnomethodology is to 'identify, describe and analyse those methods' (Francis and Hester, 2004: 211). Attention is paid to the means by which practical actions are *produced* with language-used. As an interpretive stance attending to the processes of *production*, as well as framing them as *construction*, Ethnomethodology foregrounds the organising and cohesive character of social processes, often as embodied with talked-texts.

### Evidence for Pragmatics Analysis

Pragmatics analyses *how* meaning is made with the *use* or processing of language and doing so must inevitably make judgements as to *what* meanings are made. The probabilistic nature of the endeavour is recognised (Thomas, 1995) as the analyst generally has not participated in the generating context, but stands extrinsically in relation to utterances captured, normally as transcribed-text from recorded living interactions. What resources are available to warrant judgements made about what was ‘meant’ in any given context? The core criteria by which this warrant is upheld is that meaning is intrinsic to the text under analysis centring a concern with ‘what the **participants** understood to be going on’ (Thomas, 1995: 202) while also taking account for the functions of ambivalence in the communication-practice.

Thomas accepts that strategies of ‘appeal to the intuitions of the analyst or to retrospection on the part of participants in interaction’ are available; but judges that although these are not ‘counter-intuitive’, they are inevitably subjective (1995: 202). Thomas therefore counts evidence on the basis of textualised sources. There is the source of the text itself in which evidence of meaning resides in the language produced, in the use of such items as pronoun choice, choice of address forms and the use of indirectness. For those pragmatic processes for which no direct textual evidence is available (by their very pragmatic nature) Thomas suggests four additional sources: perlocutionary effect of an utterance on the hearer, explicit commentary by the speaker, explicit commentary by someone other than the speaker and subsequent discourse or co-text. (1995)

As the frame or surface of description for this project is defined as relating processes and therefore marks the deutero-functionality of contextualising practices, the question of ‘evidence’ does not feature strongly. This is because the enquiry is about and with modal-phenomena rather than propositional-designations, ie. *what* was meant with or for a context. Foregrounding the *how* features of relating practices (as practical learning) means that attention continually goes towards those *surfacing-actions* generating context and the principles that are conditional/conditioning, going-on/getting-made and intertextualising as patterns, customs, habits and the like.<sup>25</sup>

### *Practical Steps – Core-Data Segmentation and Processes of Segment Analysis/Description*

The CSP Review Workshop captured as digital data and transcribed into a series of talked-texts represents a core data cluster and constitutes a ‘holistic sequence’ (Mason, 2002: 167) of live

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<sup>25</sup> These dynamic processes are figured as practical learning according to an experiential, ecological learning cycle – Chapter Three. The shift from the ‘meaning in interaction’ approach to a functionality of language-use approach is described as a move from ‘Method 1’ to ‘Method 2’ – Chapter Five

organising process. This research enquiry can be characterised as a ‘mechanical’ intellectual puzzle in the sense of exploring *how* social process functions and the possible effects and opportunities generated from that process (Mason, 2002). As will be clear a ‘mechanical’ understanding of social process was useful only for a time, chosen initially because of its focus on how-type phenomena, but this language is unhelpful for the traces of other ontologies that it brings along and so was abandoned. Processes of social interaction are dynamic, contextual, historical, empowered, on-going, to be known by interpretive description as new texts coming from and going towards the generating context, valuable insofar as they resonate and can contribute to learning practice going-on (a *possible* text for co-ordination in an organisational context).

A distinction was made early on between what I interpreted as ‘public-talk’ as distinct from ‘presentational’ or ‘private’ talk. I defined public-talk as the talking going-on for all meetings, workshops, seminars etc. as the talk that formalised organisational processes and therefore as the ‘location’ of language-uses embodying the imagined ‘best practice’ for going-on with. Private talk is considered all talk that is informal in the sense of not being structured according to formal organising practice. Presentational talk is the talk of Irish Aid to the public at large, its self-presentation. I understood these forms of talk intertextualising all the time, weaving in and out of each other generating a complex con/textualisation of relating processes. Therefore, the categorical device was used simply to interpret a body of talk accessible as Programme Coherence Meetings and the CSP Review Workshop. The other forms of talk were amply considered with interviews, participant research-practice engagements and review of formal Irish Aid documents including press releases, TV programmes<sup>26</sup> and pieces in national newspapers.

As public-talk and the CSP Review Workshop the pragmatics description of particular segments requires a systematic procedure for the organisation, management and segmentation of the talked-text. Understanding the core data cluster as a holistic sequence offers possibilities for generating a variety of holistic sequences for description *as*

- Each session of the Workshop constitutes a ‘whole’ (17 sequences)
- Each day of the Workshop constitutes a ‘whole’ (3 sequences)
- The Workshop itself is an integral and core part of an overall organisational process review (Global sequence) as another ‘whole’
- Which can be described as context in relation to other organisational processes going-on

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<sup>26</sup> A series called, ‘Far Away Up Close’ that ran for two years during the period of the research.

From the perspective of holistic sequences of data, based on either temporal, propositional or operational boundaries, different types of sequencing can emerge. As a phenomenological approach to the data was taken a path for describing the complex weave of data generated began with standard exercises such as transcription, anonymisation and initial segmentation of sessions according to the propositional themes talked during that session. From this beginning, the complex process of interpretation began. Strategies for managing the process as it was going-on were designed, the core features of which are described below. Figure 1 shows a thematic overview of the CSP Review Workshop including some of additional information that helped me to generate some context for beginning the interpreting process in earnest.

Day 1 - Name/Describe	Day 2 - Describe/Issues	Day 3 - Issues/Action
<p>Session 1 - Evaluation of CSPs presentation/discussion (8.15-10.00 - 01:45:00)</p> <p>Session 2 - Strengths/Weaknesses of existing CSP (strategic planning) process group work/plenary (10.30-11.35 - 01:02:09)</p> <p>Session 3 - What Irish Aid is 'good at' cf. "comparative advantage" group work/plenary (11.40-12.30 - 00:53:07)</p> <p>Session 4 - What is Strategic Planning? presentation/discussion (14.07-16.10 - 02:02:55)</p> <p>Session 5 - Questions/Discussion of Presentations, 'Response' from 'VV', Review of day etc. facilitated discussion (16.40-17.40 - 01:03:20)</p>	<p>Session 1 - Graphic Presentation of CSP Process (with review of previous day) presentation/group work/plenary (8.35-10.20 - 01:40:46)</p> <p>Session 2 - Continued discussion of process (later stages) facilitated discussion (10.34-11.23 - 00:43:39)</p> <p>Session 3 - HR Issues presentations facilitated discussion (11.32-12.20 - 00:56:04)</p> <p>Session 4 - HRs/Team Work group work (recording on HRs) (12.30-13.10 - 00:41:36)</p> <p>Session 5 - Terminology presentation/discussion (14.10-14.57 - 00:53:13)</p> <p>Session 6 - Appraisal/Approval Systems presentation/group work/ facilitated discussion (15.01-16.15 - 01:07:41)</p> <p>Session 7 - Organisational learning interactive presentation/work sheet (16.20-16.43 - 00:23:47)</p>	<p>Session 1 - What are "Quality" CSPs? (with review of previous day) MfDRs/QA discussion/group work (8.35-10.25 - 01:47:00)</p> <p>Session 2 - MfDRs in Fragile States Presentation PC-H, RBM facilitated discussion (10.54-11.54 - 01:00:00)</p> <p>Session 3 - Country based work On RBM 1. group work (12.00-12.25 - 00:21:12) 2. Presentation 'WW' Chart (12.45-12.53 - 00:8:15)</p> <p>Session 4 - Development of the "comparative advantage" notion facilitated discussion with VIPs etc. (Presentation on EU Code) (14.25-15.24 - 00:25:41)</p> <p>Part II - Steps Forward - 5 Priorities group work/plenary (15.25-15.55 - 00:30:00)</p> <p>Part III - Review of Aims/Objectives Evaluation facilitated discussion/forms (15.55-16.06 - 00:10:00)</p>
Total: 05:01:31 (+01:45:00 unrecorded)	Total: 06:26:46	Total: 04:46:22

Figure 0-2 - Thematic Organisation of CSP Review Workshop

Several cycles of description were performed. The **'first cycle'** is understood to be the living encounter of the CSP Review Workshop, a moment passed and undescribed as 'itself'<sup>27</sup>. The **'second cycle'** is the existence of the data as recorded digital files, stored electronically and accessible for repeated listening. The **third cycle** then becomes the transcription of the recorded sessions of the Workshop. This cycle was understood as part of the process of global reading of the data (Wood and Kroger, 2000). Sessions amounted to eighteen hours of interactive talk of

<sup>27</sup> It is formally described for Irish Aid with two documents, the Workshop Report prepared by the facilitator, and the official CSP Guidelines published. This research practice is understood as a 'third life' for this data generated as talked-texts captured in various processes of iteration.

which over four hours of the talk were transcribed using standard orthography (O'Connell and Kowal, 1995). This was chosen since the level of analysis anticipated did not require annotation of extra paralinguistic phenomena or prosodic features. Some contextual factors relevant to describing the context such as laughing among the group were noted with italicised additional text.

The process of transcription itself is understood as more than a mechanical task. It is a first step of describing as a slower-than-real-time encounter with the data that takes one deeply into the worlds and ways of talking of these particular organisational members. As the process went on reflexive memo-making was linked to timed moments of a particular session so that the reflection process going on would be marked. The **fourth cycle** of turn-numbering and anonymisation was technical in nature and carried out simply using common features of word processing software. Anonymisation included the removal of all references to particular places and people. Participants at the workshop were each given a code (i.e. NN) for identification as *that* speaker through the describing process. Programme countries where Irish Aid works were given fixed codes to ensure consistency as PC-A, B, C etc.

As a **fifth cycle** an initial read of a session included a contextual description of the session and the identification of propositional themes linked to numbered turn-cycles. The boundary logic of segments was noted during the process. Links were also made to the core concerns featuring during the exploratory phases of data generation as difficulties with 'organisational communication and fragmentation' at this stage. Segment analysis or description began with a systematic progression through the session as a whole. The terming of these pieces of work as 'analysis' was chosen for this cycled interpreting process although they also stand as descriptions made. This way of proceeding became overly burdensome and choices were made for selecting some segments of talk for description over the four sessions explored in depth. These issues are discussed with the descriptions of 'method one' and 'method two' in Chapter Five, as are the processes of segment analysis as a **sixth cycle**, the longest in duration (of almost a year) with two intensive periods.

A **seventh cycle** meant re-reading all segment analyses in light of the theoretical work that was going on during this process. Reading and learning pragmatics from key texts was running in tandem with the task of doing the segment analyses. The frames of understanding I was developing, with the practice of describing the talked-texts, was continually cycling with my deepening appreciation of a pragmatics worldview, rationale and technology. From this learning process the frames for interpreting the data began to emerge. A key relating process that formalised my emerging understanding and framed how I could generate a structured description

of language-used was how dialectic/pragmatic processes generate each other. As a consequence the Fifth and Sixth chapters of the thesis stand as related-texts. They were written ‘together’ in the sense that their textualisation became as phases of focus ‘now with dialectics’/’now with pragmatics’. These stages, including on-going interpreting cycles are shown with Figure 3 below. As can be seen each segment analysis was given a code, CD[1/2/14-31]SA, signifying, ‘Core Data’, Day One, Session Two, Turn No.s 14-31, Segment Analysis’. As the work progressed segments were further categorised as M1, M2 or M3 as in, CD[1/2/67-68]SA/M1, signifying which of the three methods designed were used for the segment.

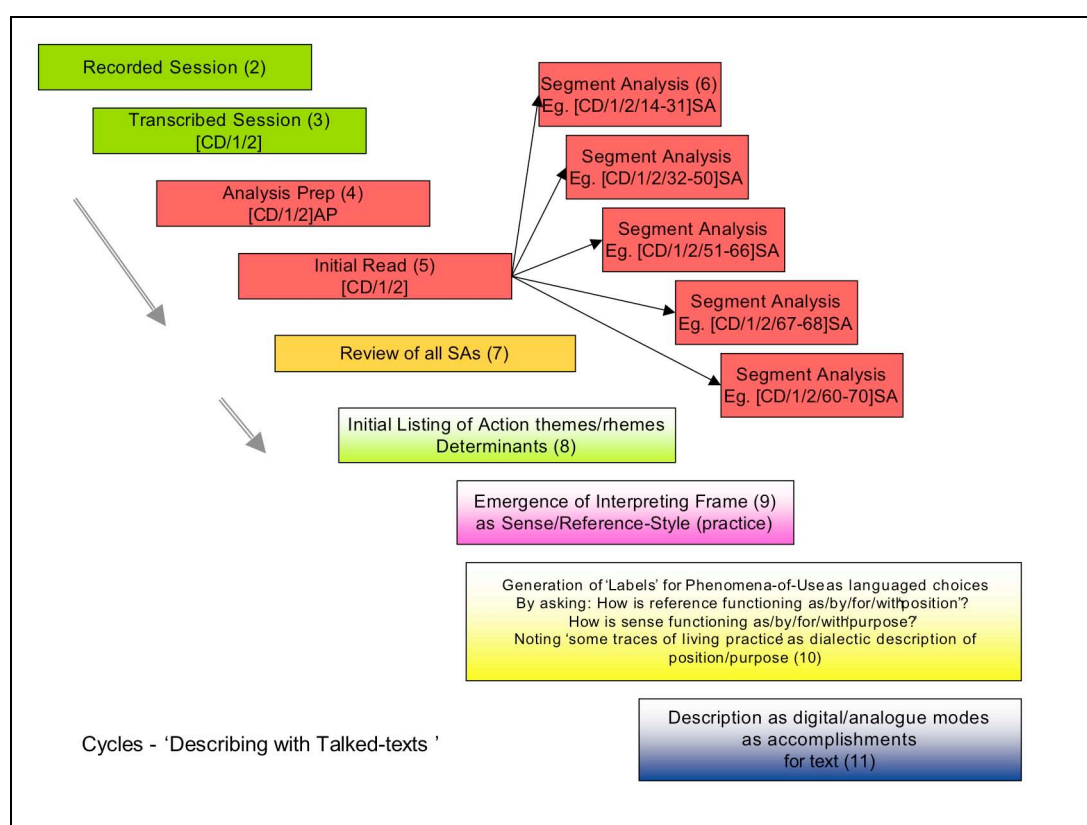


Figure 0-3 - Cycles of Describing with Talked-Texts

The **eighth cycle** was accomplished by listing together all the described ‘themes/rhemes’ and ‘teleological (in)determinants’ generated with segment analyses<sup>28</sup>. With these lists a variation on Austin’s question (1962), ‘How are things being done with words?’ was continually generating the functional understanding emerging. As the **ninth cycle**, ordering the performed actions decided upon or determined when describing segments of talk according to a functional sense/reference relating process for syntaxing language as *used*, a series of complex *uses* or *actions* were brought together. ‘Sense’ being the complex resource generating ‘purpose’, and ‘reference’ being the

<sup>28</sup> These labels for pragmatic actions are explained with Chapter Five.



complex resource generating 'position'. The relevance of 'position' and 'purpose' for making meaning and sense emerged from the work of segment analysis with pragmatics. Figure 4 below shows the graphic that was designed to proceed with this stage of description, with additional layering according to Verschueren's theory of language-use as adaptability, negotiability, variability (1999).

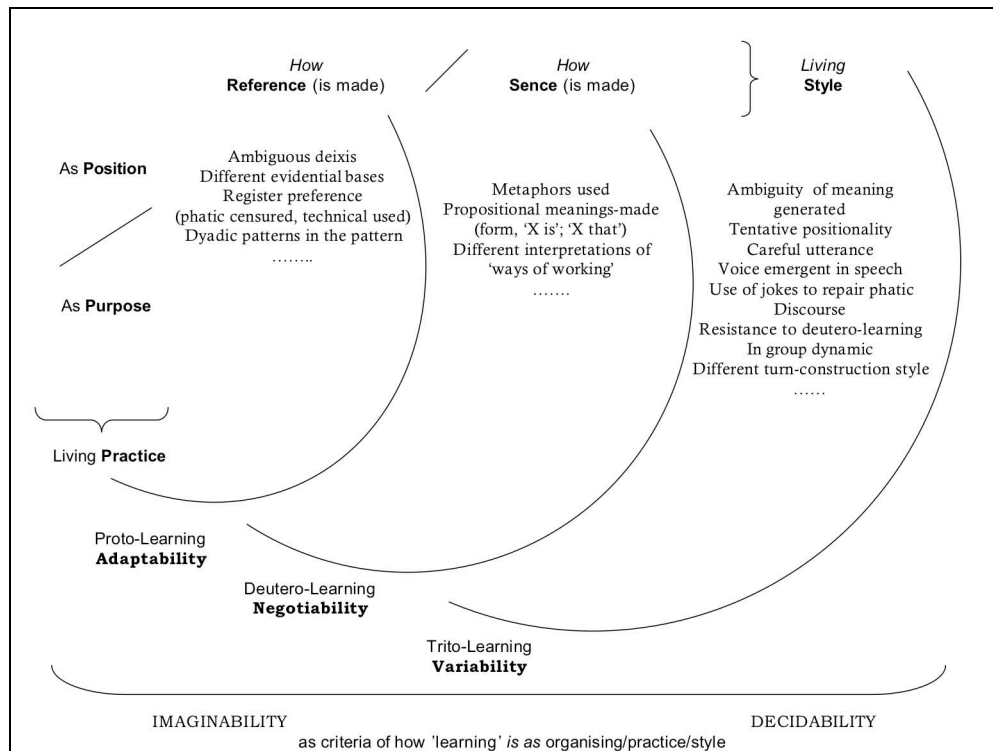


Figure 0-4 - Ordering Sense/Reference as Processes Used

The penultimate or **tenth cycle** emerged after initial drafts of Chapters Three and Four had been written for which a topographical metaphor for describing learning landscape had been 'found' and decided upon as a key metaphor to frame the descriptions of pragmatics for Chapter Five. The idea of 'topograph' was found rich for making sense of a myriad of complex and dis-ordered languaged practices or actions since a topography is a description of features or places of note that 'figure' on that landscape. This way of thinking about the material I was describing seemed attuned to the phenomenological logic unfolding with the research practice. Already writing the fifth chapter of the thesis the complex relating process of 'position/purpose-practice' found form through a series of graphic explorations, an example of which is shown with Figure 5 below.

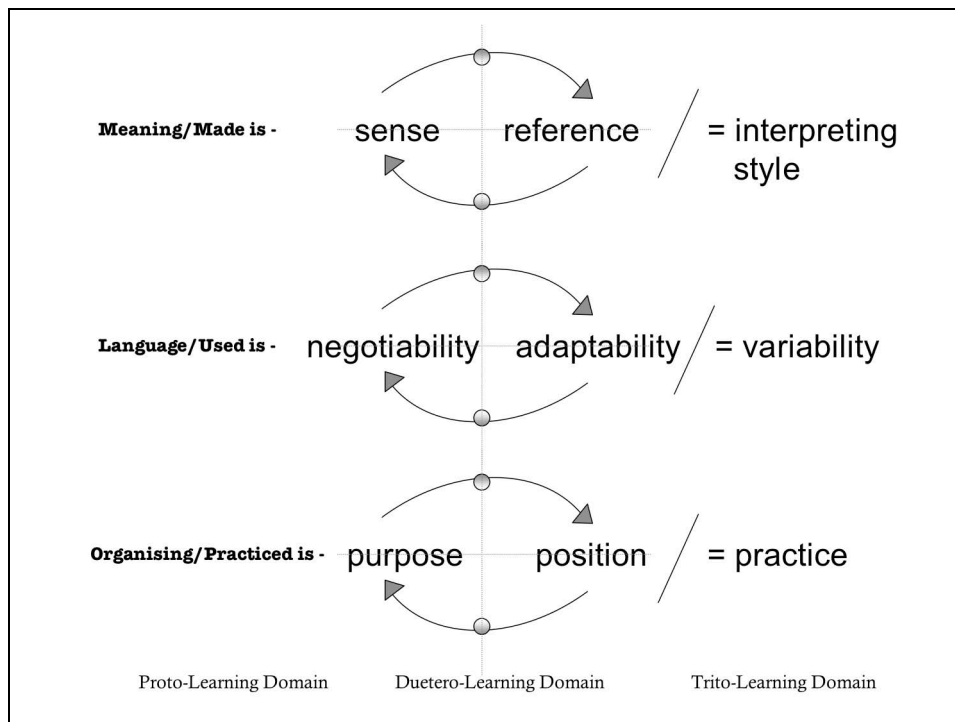


Figure 0-5 - Frames for Understanding Pragmatic Production

With the writing process of Chapter Five, itself a cycle of description (**eleventh**), the usefulness of the *Figure of Practical Learning* that had been framed with explorations of dialectics to understand organising practice (Chapter Six) was discovered for describing language-used as analogue/digital relating processes. The figure was used to understand how practice is thus generated. The describing process completed with an interpretation of Irish Aid *as* connecting pattern. This ‘determination’ was understood clearly as a ‘position taken’ and as ‘a resource for on-going practical learning’. Figures 6 and 7 below show how the generation of practice was framed (6) and how the *Figure of Practical Learning* was also designed to order the ‘story’ of Chapter Five.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> The story-boards used to describe and textualise Chapter Five are appended to the end of that Chapter.

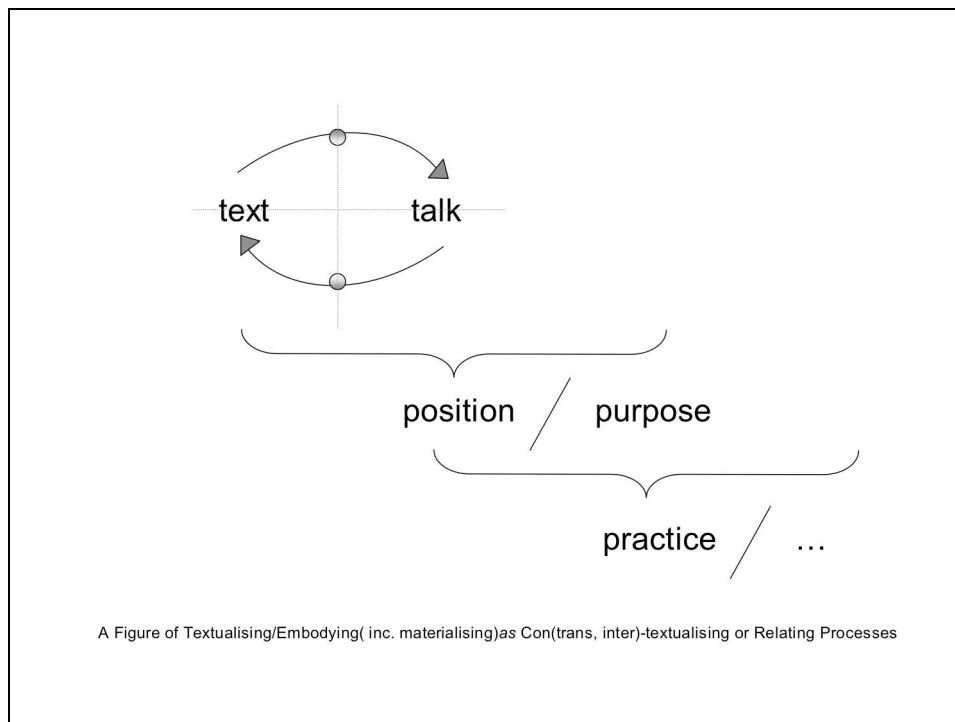


Figure 0-6 - Language-Used Generating Practice (towards patterning)

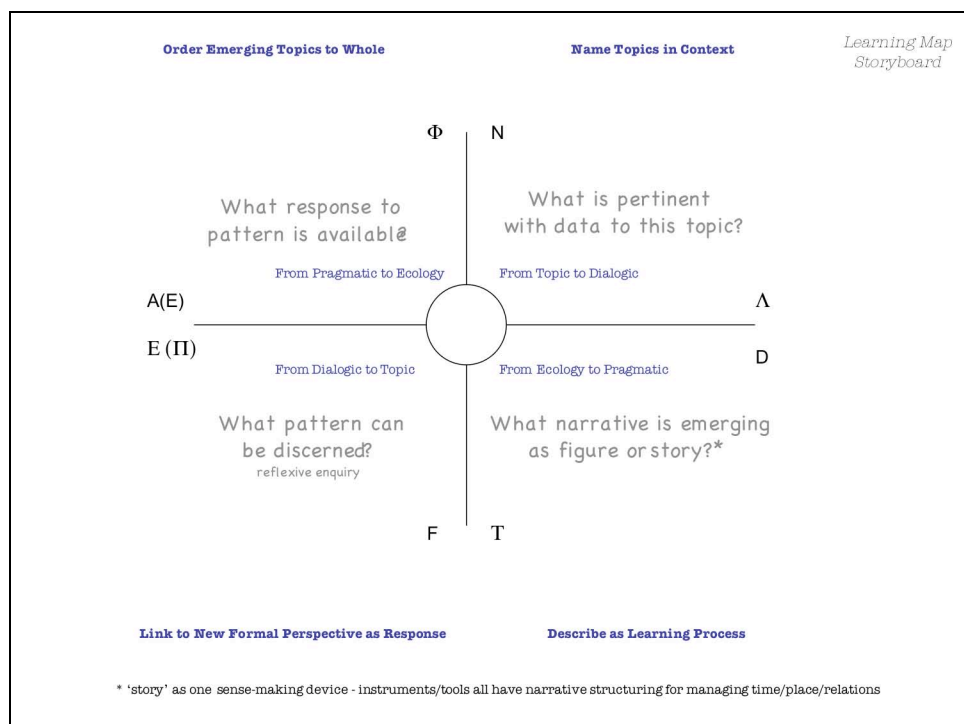


Figure 0-7 - A Practical Frame for Exploring/ Describing Complex Relating Processes

### *What Kind of 'Results' and How/Why They Might Matter?*

With all three key methodological markers taken-up to go-on with this research project the question of 'results' becomes a deuterio-mode 'answer'. Correspondent to locating the focal-point of the research with surfacing (textualising) phenomena rather than any 'unit', the type of results that can be generated are of a contextual nature. What can be reported are learnings *about* and *with* the phenomena of practical learning, generated as the description goes-on, as empirical-enquiry featuring, as a first order of abstraction, learning and organising practices *as* Irish Aid production (of interpretations/methods and formal texts); and at a second order of abstraction, learning and organising practices *as* this (PhD) textual production, or to widen the frame as a series of research (relating) practices. Therefore what can be rendered with the describing process of Pragmatics as carried out for this project are new markers or topics as focus-points to generate new relating processes of learning practice. The formal end or purpose of generative process is more process to go-on with as a valid 'result' or fruit of any learning process – organisational or otherwise. It is a perspective that is truly 'organisational' in the sense that 'deutero-learning', as marking processual-learning, regenerates organising practice on and with changing terms.

As contextual-feedback or learning, results may also expect to offer insightful interpretation of the Irish Aid phenomenon of members talking the learning and general organising-text or discourse over the period of data generation as a 'discourse of lack', uttered in various contexts, in a myriad of fashions, and with regularity as gaps of communication, coherence, learning, efficiency, evidence-based practice etc., and with a variety of fragmenting metaphors and representations – talking their organisation back to themselves as 'silos', 'sectors', 'sections', 'HQ', 'Field', 'diplomats', 'development specialists', 'general managers', 'desks' and the like. The pattern of marking for fragmentation and isolating practices was consistent throughout engagement with Irish Aid, even with the Field-Visit to PC-A where the Team was encountered at a time of significant cohesion and shared purpose.

Another set of formal or practical results are those new frames of reference generated with the phenomenological process of describing practice. Resources for new cycles of learning as organising (organisational) learning can be constructed from the dialectic interplay of a set of 'relational' principles and methods for organising and learning practice<sup>30</sup> with the empirical data generated, organised and described according to a particular (and different) rationale to that which normally interpretes or textualises it. These resources vary in type from new formulations

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<sup>30</sup> As distinct from many of the current principles that order Irish Aid and other public organising practices.

emerging from the describing process, such as presenting organisational learning as ‘practical learning’; new metaphors for describing organising life and practice for which features become as an ‘ecology of learning’ and can be related using topographical imagination; new figures or graphic-pictures that can dimensionalise the temporal, spatial, formal or relational movements of talking, knowing, learning practices.

As a general result, the *working-out* of principles and methods that cohere with a relational constructionism approach to learning and organising practice with or through the empirical experience of real-life contexts – the production of Irish Aid and the production of a research text/practice – renders a path with complexity that has resilient-force. This is because the ground-gained, including the new forms of language-use that have been constructed, emerges from learning process that attends to all the key movements of learning as envisaged from experiential and praxial perspectives (as key starting texts) and which in turn render a formulation of learning process for ‘organisation’ specifically. The development-aid environment (along with other organising contexts) has been framed as complex (Hinton and Groves, 2004, Britton, 2005, Eyben, 2006a). Learning with complexity and organising appropriate responses requires sophisticated practice. It means going-on, as Oliver terms it, ‘at the edge of chaos’ (2005: 121) and requires nuanced, flexible, trusting and sensitive ways. Such attitudes and environments as possible landscapes of learning are not easy to generate. They require *n*-dimensional relating processes and *spaces* – some features and movements of which I shall explore and describe as a generative thread for new explorations and iterations of development-aid organising practice as organisational learning.

#### **Part IV: General Research Contribution**

The research contribution is noted here and the topic is taken up again with the concluding chapter of the Thesis. On methodological terms some of the results noted above stand as a contribution to the relational constructionism literature on two counts, as a phenomenology of practical learning in the context of development-aid organising practice that explicitly goes-on by using the language and principles of a relational ontology/epistemology and bringing some new practical methods to bear, specifically the use of pragmatics-descriptions in order to mark and learn with a language-use/language-choice discipline. Without a background in either linguistic or syntactical analysis the treatment is inevitably tentative and a first-stepping, nonetheless I believe the Pragmatics perspective and project with language as *used*, especially as articulated by Verschueren (1995, 1999), has considerable potential for exploration of relating processes at any order of abstraction, or with any instance of organising practice since the functionality of

adaptive, negotiable and variable language-use (and extending towards ‘language’ used *with* surrounds, and *as* signals, signs, symbols or styles, genres, discourses) is a powerful frame for an empirical project, albeit as future-facing and practical. The describing of language *used* as language also *chosen* brings rich colour to the ethnomethodological perspective that resources the relational/social constructionism literatures. Foregrounding the productive, documentary and expert cohesive-moves that members of a situation make, the intertextual and dynamic view of Pragmatics brings a certain teleological energy or δύνάμις (dunamis) to bear on contextualising processes.

On ‘organisational learning’ terms (as a general category), although the need for empirical studies to follow-on from initial definitions and explorations of the concept has been largely met (Bapuji and Crossan, 2004), there is scope for studies that move beyond the largely business community that this literature originally emerged from and was advanced by. A phenomenologically guided research practice from a relational approach with an organisation such as Irish Aid that practices as development-aid organising practice and public organisation offers a context of different complexity to those normally marked. On the other hand, studies with organisational learning for development-aid organisations are largely prescriptive – explaining why development-aid organisations have taken-up the concept and some of its practices (eg. Pasteur, 2006), or are piecemeal, describing one-off experiments with different forms or models of learning (eg. Arora-Jonsson and Cornwall, 2006, Irvine et al., 2006). There is absence of a comprehensive treatment of the concept with an approach for the common organising practice of a development-aid organisation as a whole, and significantly of a detailed description of learning, knowledge or meaning-making practices of an organisation managing an ODA budget. Those experiments that are reported do not address in any functional or systematic fashion the paradigmatic or philosophical principles that order many of the common management and development-aid organising practices critiqued.

As a practical contribution, the figures, frames, language and metaphors emerging and explored throughout this work, in many instances designed as learning tools for the research practice itself, are offered as pre-figuring resources for practical learning with new organising groups, teams and communities. They constitute some beginning tools for an imagined phenomenology of contextualising practices as a frame to mark a changed approach to learning for development-aid organisations. Primarily those organisations that characterise highly bureaucratic, and therefore, fragmenting ways of managing order, direction, accomplishment, and accountability.

As a social contribution to the current development-aid context a view of organisational learning as concerned with the common good, embodying an epistemology-of-participation and taking

account of the impacts of results-based approaches to development-aid, has something important to say about how common and often unquestioned management, organising and learning practices generating the contexts, discourses and conditions that greatly influence the quality and opportunity of life for many people. A technical appraisal of learning practices is insufficient. There is an ethical question to be addressed which requires development-aid practitioners to take reflexive moves that are challenging and generate changes such as shifts with how power, knowledge and influence are related. This research work offers some relevant groundwork towards the kinds of new learning and organising practices that are morally called for.

## Conclusion

### *A Rationale for the Research Process and Text*

Taking into account the exploratory and therefore emergent nature of the research process as staged and unfolding, on methodological as well as topical terms, an approach to the *operationalisation* of the project (to use a term) is required that can enable the methodological sense to *unfold with practice* as much as the insights that could be generated with its enactment. The research practice is thus a ‘living sense’ (Shotter, 2001) that attends to itself at each twist and turn in order to learn *with* that practice, while learning *about* itself and the topics generated for attention (Shotter, 2008). In service of this approach to research practice this Chapter stands as an underlying rationale to the steps of the thesis and the text as a whole.

After the expositional and contextualising explorations with Chapters One and Two, a first practical step is taken towards a ‘destruction’<sup>31</sup> or deconstruction of the dominant discourse of ‘positivist organisational learning’ that shapes the metaphors and methods for development-aid organising. Chapter Three describes how Irish Aid members interpret their organising practices as ‘problems’ from a frame of learning as *praxis* and *dwelling* for an ecological understanding. Chapter Four introduces the idea of ‘topography’ as a ‘useful fiction’ (Hosking and Bass, 2002: 12) for describing learning landscapes and organising practices. From here a series of ‘organising stories’ are told from the perspectives of Irish Aid as ‘headquarters’ and ‘field’.

Chapter Five describes the pragmatics approach developed to work with core-data as language-used, interpretes those uses according to the frames for practice generated and decides upon a description of Irish Aid as connecting pattern. Chapter Six is a formal exploration of dialectics understood by using graphic representations that were made for the research practice. These

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<sup>31</sup> To use Heidegger’s term (1973)

graphs are understood as phenomenological tools generated during the research process in order to *figure-out* the relating of the figures or issues presenting through exploratory phases of participant research-practice.

Chapter Seven gathers the ideas of the thesis together with a frame of reflexive enquiry as the necessary completion of the learning-cycle. The point of reflexivity is creative, life-affirming practice. Generative organising practice requires that common-methods be continually attuned to the 'matters to hand' appearing – whether framed as topical, ecologic, dialogic or pragmatic movements. Methods enable but also intrinsically inhibit. Learning to stay attuned to the *complexity of becoming* is a double-task of attending to matter and method for practice as dialectic relating pattern for which the terming of 'reflexive enquiry' offers some literature and practical indication. A new construction of 'organising learning' is suggested for placing 'learning' as a constituent function of all organising practice. Although open to misinterpretation as 'a way of organising learning activities', the term marks the belief that all organising practice is learning practice. It is a searching term for a practice that seems necessary and topical if learning for development-aid is not to be solely imagined and formulated as 'results-driven'.

In this paper I have set out terms that can guide an exploratory, emergent research practice. I have presented those terms as integral to a researcher/practitioner approach for which an unfolding, phenomenological rationale realises the project and offers coherence to its phases. The research topic arises from a practical context with a inductive enquiry. The situation of the research organisation as interpreted by its members and the experiences of the researcher with research practice figure as opportune data and context for learning process. Focus on relating processes offers a route towards further understanding how organising practitioners make meaning, generate social practice and manage learning from/with and for governmental development-aid organisation. The 'surface' for description emerges with a general research orientation called relational constructionism which offers a useful framework from which to take a relational view of organisation. This 'relational view' is understood as pertinent, although not greatly referenced in the literature of organisational learning for development-aid. This research project aims to make a contribution towards a trend (as research/practice) towards greater understanding of the ways in which our relating processes shape the actions we take, the worlds we make.



## Chapter Three: Towards Another Ecology for Organisational Learning

‘To discover what is really simple and to act upon the discovery  
is an exceedingly difficult task’

*John Dewey*  
(1938: 30)

‘You cannot imagine the world as it *is*  
... the world partly becomes – comes to be – how it is imagined’

*Gregory Bateson*  
(2002: 193)

### Coordinates – Chapter Three

- This chapter describes how Irish Aid members generate ‘learning’ and ‘coherent’ organising practice as ‘problematic’. By describing ‘another’ ecological approach the position is taken that such interpreting practices disable critical flexing capacity for deuterio-learning.
- How do we learn anew with known ‘matters to hand’ parading as ‘problems’?

### Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to establish an ecological approach to organisational learning that takes into account the learning challenges figuring from the exploratory phases with Irish Aid and in the context of the literature reviewed with Chapter One. A view of learning or epistemological-practice is sought that can potentially respond to these challenges on the basis of ‘another’ rationale to that which seems prevalent with/for the interpretations presenting, i.e. a discourse of gaps, lacks and barriers to learning, communication, coherence or functional organising practice. What is sought is a rationale for the ‘learning of context’ (Bateson, 2002: 126). ‘Another’ that is

‘other’ not in the sense of ‘standing beside’ but rather as a different order of abstraction. This difference may be difficult to grasp but it might be described as the difference between knowing the letters of the alphabet and knowing how to relate and use them as composite<sup>1</sup> items for the practice of communication. Using them contextually is yet another ‘otherness’. It is important to note though that all these ‘types’ of knowing or ‘othernesses’ are intrinsic; functional ‘at once’, and none ‘better’ than the other – nor in fact practically distinguishable as/or/with situation or event.

The learning challenges described by Irish Aid members are understood as embodied practices and particular to situation in the phenomenological sense of actions socially constructed. They are described here as a research practice of ‘attend[ing] to the traditions, the communities, the situated practices of the participants at hand’ (Hosking and Mc Namee, 2006a: 30) While Chapter Five is a descriptive exploration of how these interpreting practices are partly made with language-used – positioning as they do certain ‘fixed texts’ of meaning and sense – the goal of this Chapter is to first contextualise those language-uses as they function as a repeating interpreting frame. From the perspective of this frame, organisational learning and the methods imagined to *do it* are constructed. In order to generate a relatively detailed description of this interpretive frame a contentual presentation of matters talked by Irish Aid members is made as a first step. This description is titled, ‘The Problem with Learning’ as this is a latent assumption functioning but commonly unacknowledged by members with their descriptions of the same. In other words, they talk about ‘problems’ without recognising *that* they are classifying their learning practices as ‘problematic’ – which would be a reflexive move.

A second step is taken towards an ‘ecology of learning’ with a brief consideration of some definitions of organisational learning from the literature that embody ontological assumptions that make them sensible. This is done by way of introduction to another set of frames on learning practice not normally referenced by the organisational learning literature directly, that of Adult Learning. From this ground, the third and final step of the Chapter is taken – a construction of an ‘Ecology of Learning’ rationale as the basis of ‘another map’ for organisational learning. A key metaphor taken-up from the Adult Learning literature is that of ‘learning as dwelling’ (Plumb, 2008)<sup>2</sup>. This metaphor makes a bridge towards ‘another map’ with which to learn about, with and for the epistemologies-in-use of any organising practice.

An ecological concept of ‘learning as dwelling’ can work as a key motif for changing, where helpful, organisational learning principles, models and practices oriented towards the style, tasks,

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<sup>1</sup> And no doubt as ‘complex’ items also.

<sup>2</sup> From Heidegger’s phenomenological perspective.

challenges and goals of government development-aid organising practice as it goes-on. This is particularly useful as such practices are shared among many partners in ever more collaborative and complex aid environments of numerous feed forward and feedback loops (Crossan et al., 1999). ‘Learning as dwelling’ suggests processes whereby learners ‘forever weave themselves into the fabric of their natural, social and cultural worlds’ (Plumb, 2008: 62) in discursive and material ways, and is an evocative metaphor giving form to the sort of ecological learning approach sought (Bateson, 1972, Hosking, 2000b). Given the complex nature of the development task and the merging landscape of development organisations in the new aid architecture, a weaving metaphor is particularly useful to describe a concrete role for critical reflexive awareness as organisational learning.

An ecological view of learning requires a dialectic relating of purpose (socially constructed) with ‘surface’<sup>3</sup>, a term used here to denote the factitious nature of the material, figured or imagined world, and understood as an environment of pragmatic experience and learning. The metaphor of ‘dwelling’ enables a re-ordering of the dominant relating-style embodied with such dualistic constructs as cause//effect, mind//nature, body//spirit, domination//submission, control//chaos. The paradigmatic construction going-on with these relations, often imagined as binary relations, is a distinctive and hard S/O (subject/object; self/other) differentiating pattern (Hosking, 2007). Despite recent shifts towards social constructionist approaches that ground organisational learning and research with practice and process-based ontologies (eg. Nicolini and Meznar, 1995) that are better equipped to address the complexity of organisational life, relational constructionism as a branch of that orientation, makes the distinction between ‘constructivist’ and ‘constructionist’ approaches in order to establish a way of discovering new forms of practice according to a changed or contextual rationale (Hosking, 2000a). It is a future-oriented methodology for learning, organising and research practice. By taking ‘relating processes’ as the ‘surface’ or primary context where meaning and life-worlds are made, practice is centred as the locus of learning. This establishes an ‘epistemology of practice’ (Easterby-Smith et al., 2000) on yet another ‘ground’ that seems particularly useful and powerful for the development-aid context. It also sets the pace for an epistemology-of-participation as a critical rationale for any truly developmental transformation<sup>4</sup>.

Having constructed an ‘Ecology of Learning’ rationale, Chapter Four explores two distinctive views of the formal organisational response made as Irish Aid to the situation of fragmentation and ‘incoherence’ that was talked continually over the data generation period. The construct of ‘Coherence’ is explored for how it embodies an organisational story for better learning and

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<sup>3</sup> As a pre-figuring of the dialectic of position/purpose-practice explored with Chapter Five

<sup>4</sup> If we can assume such qualitative change as the ultimate goal of the Development Project write large.

organising, and is sited initially as 'Headquarters' practice. A second description is generated – using an established frame of a 'knowledge audit' – this time of a Country Strategy Paper as lived for one programme country embassy team to be called here PC-A. Thus a view from the 'Field' is generated. With the very practical dimensionalities of time and place, these locations generate each other and the organising practice as relating processes in powerful ways. Both descriptions further contextualise the general exploration of the thesis towards some practical resources (from principle to method) for deuterio-learning as development-aid organising practice. These are explored as pragmatics (Chapter Five), dialectics (Chapter Six) and reflexive enquiry (Chapter Seven).

## **Part I: The 'Problem with Learning' is – A Description of Matters Talked**

During a two-year data generation period with Irish Aid the issues of communications failure, organisational disconnection, fragmentation and lacks of learning were continually talked by organisation members. These learning challenges were interpreted as deuterio in nature (Bateson, 1972), that is as difficulties of a second order of abstraction – texts that contextualise in other words. They are interpreting texts, functioning as 'representative' language-uses for reference/framing; but also they are performative as interpreting texts that make con/text. They generate life-worlds with unreflexive fashion. Due to their enduring, or chronic character as an interpreting pattern over the period of data generation, they are understood as performing or acting interpretations that are recontextualising enduring communicative practices going-on. These relating patterns might be imagined as 'bounded rationalities' (Simon, 1991), ways of interpreting or 'seeing' that are somehow stuck on well-worn paths. Since they are continually described by members as 'problems', they seem to be degenerative recipes or documenting methods (Garfinkel, 1967). Contrary to Hosking and Bass' evocative title, 'Lets not talk about it for a change' (2002), it seems that Irish Aid organisational members talk about *it* all the time; therefore, little changes for their contextualising pattern. The learning challenge as 'problem' thus becomes, with the language of relational constructionism, a 'fixed text'.

To take up the language of organisational learning, the governing variables of communication as deuterio-level processes do not become the subject of learning, and hence remain beyond the reach of change – they are 'undiscussable' in one stream of the literature (Argyris and Schön, 1996). In this sense a learning challenge is identified for exploration. Given the hegemonic nature of the organisational and business style that Irish Aid embodies (public, bureaucratic, multi-career streamed, hierarchical) deuterio-learning practice is typically uncharacteristic (Hosking, 2002). What is required is the sort of transformational learning that can shift basic assumptions about such core concepts as 'What is organisation?', 'How can it change?', 'What is it to learn?', 'What or how is practice?' and 'What might be possible here?'. These types of assumptions have been

identified as mental models (Stata, 1989, Senge, 1990), but for relational constructionism they are relocated away from a realm of bounded units (individuals, teams, groups, organisations) and find their becoming with the discursive modes of being-in-relation (Hosking and Bouwen, 2000). In order to explore paths to learning about (as well as through the assumptions brought to communication for this particular context) a detailed description of how they function at the level of language-use in practice is undertaken with Chapter Five.

A content review of the interpretations-made or talked by organisational members is undertaken to generate a description of the Organisation that *matters* in a generative sense. Interpretations-made are termed as the immediate ‘matters to hand’<sup>5</sup> – to rephrase, they are ‘what matters’ for learning and organising practice. As the ‘matters to hand’ figuring for the field, interpretations-made might have become ‘bounded rationalities’ (Simon, 1991) as noted above. In the face of really new situations people can find themselves confused as the recipes or rationales that they have been working with become inept or dissonant in some way for the new situation. Unattended to, such dissonance generates barriers to learning and growth. What is required is the generation of new contextualizing processes in order to reformulate what is ‘now’ encountered as problematic.

It seems that considerable environmental and practical changes were going-on for Irish Aid during the periods of data generation. As a critical factor for organisational learning, the ways in which these changes were *talked* mark the interpreting responses going-on. They seemed to generate experiences of stress, tension, fragmentation, disconnection and isolation. Practical changes included the challenges of delivering development-aid according to the protocols of Rome and Paris (OECD, 2003b, 2005); a dramatically rising ODA budget, and the pressures and tensions generated with the Irish Government decision to decentralise sections of the Civil Service away from Dublin, including Irish Aid. Although ODA budgets are now reducing and generating fresh difficulties<sup>6</sup>, the challenges of managing shifting political priorities is one constant of the development-aid context (Carlsson and Wohlgemuth, 2000). The ‘matters to hand’ talked up, although generally represented and performed by members as ‘problems’, can equally become practical opportunities for the deuterio-framing that organisational learning theory suggests is key. Consequently, how matters or topics are constructed is relevant and indicates some ‘hows’ of the relating processes going-on.

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<sup>5</sup> The ‘matters to hand’ motif is taken-up from Heidegger’s ‘ready-to-hand’ or ‘every day Being-with’ notion of *Dasein* (1973: 8), explored in detail with Chapter Six.

<sup>6</sup> Still an issue of relationships with/for the development-aid environment

### *Matters Figuring – The First Phase of Participant Research-Practice*

During the first phase of exploratory participant research-practice unstructured interviews were carried out with a self-selecting group of organisational members (eighteen in all) from a variety of sections, grades and career streams. Two opening questions were asked: ‘What is your role in the organisation?’ and, near the end of the interview a second theme was introduced in purposely-ambiguous fashion, ‘What does the term, “organisational learning” conjure up for you?’ This strategy met the exploratory and expansive purpose of this stage of the research practice; it also ensured that little directional bias was generated as to how members might frame their talk, although accepting that interviewees had been informed of the ‘organisational learning brief’ of the LEARN project beforehand.

A series of matters were ‘talked’ at this stage as ‘organisational’ and ‘problematic’. They included the integration of APSO<sup>7</sup> into Irish Aid<sup>8</sup> as aligning people, established resources and systems into the new situation; difficulties with how concerns could be voiced; the loss of organisational capital in the wake of change; different ways of working and difficult relationships; the relationship between Irish Aid and the Department of Foreign Affairs<sup>9</sup> in light of policies of increased ODA (thus incurring changes in aid instruments, human resource requirements and some political challenges) and programme coherence. All of these matters, coupled with related conflicting views on management approaches for team-working, performance management, information sharing and communication across sections, between Head Office and the ‘Field’, business planning, the challenge of linking evaluation and audit with strategic planning and implementation; the development of more structured relationships with large Irish Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Global Funds through new funding frameworks<sup>10</sup>, and finally, the establishment of a Civil Society Policy, all came to the fore.

Although these myriad matters might be understood as particular organisational challenges for a defined period of time, the patterns they indicate are on-going – the constant need for integration and disintegration of merging and blurred organisational boundaries in a harmonising aid

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<sup>7</sup> APSO – Agency for Personal Service Overseas was set up under the new ODA arrangements made by the Irish Government in 1974 for bilateral and multilateral development-aid under the Department of Foreign Affairs. The organisation recruited, sent and supported technical assistants, or direct assignees working with organisations in the developing world for 30 years. In 2004 APSO was disbanded and staff integrated into Irish Aid (then Development Cooperation Ireland) as part of a changing ODA policy drive.

<sup>8</sup> At this time called Development Cooperation Ireland (DCI)

<sup>9</sup> Of which Irish Aid is a Division.

<sup>10</sup> Multi-Annual Programme Scheme I and II (MAPS) and HIV/AIDS Multi-Annual Programme Scheme (HAPS)

context; the dynamic nature of relations between Irish Aid and its organisational parent, the DFA as political and programmatic goals continually shift and transform; the experience of organisational processes that are challenged and changing from the Field, and how this pattern continuously generates expectations for changed practice at the 'centre' where typically process shifts are slow; and the essential relationship between Irish Aid and Irish NGOs as a first portal of communication and dialogue with the Irish taxpayer. Such patterns of concern represent important on-going challenges for the practice of Irish Aid, not as problems to be solved but as relations to be lived, ways to 'go-on' that are appropriate to the ordinary processes and goals of the Organisation.

Each of these patterns are the engaged ways in which Irish Aid exists, and from an ecological view on organisational learning, are the *matters* of learning and change in practice. Although at times such a series of events might be considered 'unfortunate', or externalised as being 'intrusive' on normal practice or *extraordinary*, as exogenous triggers, given the complex and loose boundary structure of Irish Aid, the pattern of 'unexpected twists and turns' must be considered normal and therefore a sustaining matter for the learning environment to be taken account of. From this perspective the ways in which members talked about these organising practices offer a useful view for organisational learning.

Talking about the integration of APSO into Irish Aid (DCI), members spoke of how different they were finding the ways of working within the Division to how they operated as APSO – matters such as slow decision-making, more complex and remote filing systems, greater awareness of one's grade and position within the system and how information was or was not shared were all talked about. These comments were not complaints but rather descriptions of what was noticed while encountering a new organisational culture. Most members in this group were open and willing to learn new ways of working. One member who had recently come to Irish Aid from a large NGO interpreted the open competitive spirit of Irish Aid as more 'honest and direct' than what was judged to be the subtle forms of competition apparent as NGO culture.

Nonetheless, in the process of responding to changing organisational events members were also keenly conscious of blocks and barriers to that change:

*'Everywhere is so compartmentalized here, you could do so much more; a lot of the time you don't hear the stuff that is going on'*

*'Everything in DCI takes a long time. How DCI builds consensus, surprised at [that], [X<sup>11</sup>] copies all to everything and asks for comments, the Organisation reacts to be-grudgers, can be very frustrat[ing], [the] endless procedure of taking-on opinions'*

*'DCI [was] operating like an NGO before, fifty separate relationships. Now, DCI is supporting Znan, [Zambia] HIV/AIDS, but still mentioning small organisations'*

### *Topical Details – The Second Phase of Participant Research-Practice*

Using the term 'topic', understood loosely as 'matters concerning commonplaces' (OED) a perspective of an 'organisational topography', a description of the common or recognizable<sup>12</sup> matters engaging members at the time of the research process is generated. An interview strategy was used in which a general topic was introduced and members were invited to identify what were for them the 'key issues' in relation to it, for example 'the CSP for PC-A' or 'policy development in Irish Aid'. The main thrust of the topics introduced was towards inviting descriptions of organisational processes, which inevitably led to descriptions of development-aid processes. There were two aims in this particular strategy, one was to help me understand the nature of development practices and how Irish Aid embodies them as ways of working – getting to know the organisation-in-action, and secondly, to generate a view of member's own perspectives, the focus of *their* attention. From this starting point the interview followed the 'topics' talked-up with a 'walkabout'-type exploration thus allowing organisational members the freedom to talk whatever they wished. As well as describing many practical processes, members also generated judgements about those processes concerning their roles, the organisational structure and design, its culture and policies, as well as judgements about changes for the Organisation and the Development Process itself. Matters emerging from the new aid architecture and Irish Aid's role for this changed environment were especially prominent.

Several assumptions are made for interpretation. Firstly, topics talked at a given organisational 'moment' are normally contextualised views in all the senses of that term (local, historical, positioned, concerned, empowered). Secondly, given the organisational learning 'topic' of the interview (of which members were aware) organisational processes talked about in the context of the changing aid environment were highlighted and in some cases evaluated as topics of learning concern. Thirdly, topics talked are constructed here as an 'organisational topography' used as a gathering mechanism. Fourthly, by using the notion of a 'cartographical text' the 'features' of a

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<sup>11</sup> An omitted proper name.

<sup>12</sup> τόπος (topos) means 'place' (Liddell and Scott, 1891) suggesting a social designation, a marking *as* somewhere.



'landscape' that are 'marked' by members can be understood as generally common, topics talked normally in organisational encounters (i.e. away from the research lens)<sup>13</sup>. The concept of recognition is important here, a topography is a graphic description of *places* – points of the landscape that are designated/marked as 'places', that is points or 'topics' that are recognisably noteworthy to members. Thus an attempt is made to generate a view 'from the inside' (albeit with limitations). The reporting/re-performing of this view is necessarily a remove, a recontextualisation of initial content; but given the learning-value of reframing, this text is affirmed as an embedded and useful 'overview' of internal agent's organisational concerns or 'matters to hand'. To clarify the point; the 'highest peaks' or the 'biggest lacunae' tend to be the most visible features on a topographical map.

A map offers an overview that is not possible from the perspective of the terrain in which one dwells, cultivates or travels. One of the useful results therefore of any mapping exercise is reference as an orientation for in-field action. But a map is also a poor embodiment of the reality in which one moves, it carries none of the experiential quality of that engagement, it is a particular form of measurement of relations. The quality of those relations is another matter – always shifting and therefore of concern for learning and change. The matters emerging from this round of exploratory work can be gathered together as the processes of institutionalisation and coherence-building in a changing aid environment on the one hand; and as the roles of development specialists, desk officers and senior managers as a practical 'working-out' or 'local-site' for embodying such abstractions, on the other. From this topographical map, whose detail is described below, a view of learning as Irish Aid – style, practices and challenges – is generated.

### *A Description of Learning as Irish Aid*

Organisational learning as Irish Aid could be described as formal practices including lunchtime seminars, induction designs, 'down days' for reflection once a year for specific groups, the holding of and participation in meetings and conferences on particular themes, consultations with the Irish public (the formulation of the White Paper in 2006), the research work of the Advisory Board to Irish Aid (ABIA – now disbanded), programme country visits, and the on-going work of knowledge management through the Knowledge Management Working Group (KMWG).

Nonetheless, considering learning from a phenomenological, social or relational constructionism perspective, the description becomes rather more complex. Irish Aid learning is embedded and pragmatic, emerging with experiences of working with peers, of attending to the context of field and the political imperatives in play there. External review plays a part (from the DAC, the Irish

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<sup>13</sup> Recurring at different moments of the research process, so 'chronically common' topics also.

NGO community<sup>14</sup> and other donors) as do new practices and the awareness of gaps in skill for example that emerge as changes are made. Various members have roles that require linking with others but at times contrary messages are getting learnt with the cultural transmission of certain organisational expectations and behaviours as ways of working. Members seem attentive to personal position in the Organisation, generally not crossing implicit social boundaries (coffee taking is a case in point observed). Although an induction process goes on for new members, it is designed to some extent as formulaic. Learning by informal induction goes on nonetheless and some positive experiences or mentoring were described.

Taking an overview of Irish Aid's learning over the period of data generation and beyond there is a clear shift from a lot of unsystematic ways of working to systematised processes. It seems this learning happened with a mixture of incremental, cultural shifts and external and internal exigencies; understanding that these are fuzzy and flowing categories of the power or *forcing* energy of change. Prevailing through all this complex processing as the prioritised way of making sense is an imagined linear, cause/effect change model as the learning philosophy and methods formally taken up. The development process is imagined as intervention/engagement that *should* render visible results including the ancillary goods of comparative advantage, attribution accounts, auditable involvement. The logical-frame is a principle instrumental method for driving the development process and learning methods such as evaluation and review are geared towards 'results intended' and reviewed as 'outcomes'. What feedback loops are generated for this sort of learning context? During the data generation period the feedback seemed to continually become barriers to learning with topics figuring such as, no time for 'reframing' documenting lessons; institutional memory loss going on as staff changes were happening; inability at making evaluations while practice was going on; judgements that documenting and evaluating difficulties were in part due to the 'doing mentality' of Irish Aid; an understanding that prioritising time and other resources for this type of organisational work was not common. Value seems to be placed on learning from practice, especially the practice of the Field and the practical relationships and engagements going on there.

### *Features of an Organisational Learning Story for Organising Practice*

A feature of the situation described was the numerous staff changes made during the period of data generation and the time leading up to it. From 2001 development specialists were recruited for the establishment of the Technical Section in 2003 – four to fifteen in Head Office alone by 2005 (Development Cooperation Ireland (Dci), 2003, 2005); also significant is the integration of

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<sup>14</sup> With shared funding programmes such as MAPS, or in dialogue with Dóchas – the Irish Association of NGOs that frequently comments on Irish Aid policy.

APSO into the Division thus introducing another group of new staff. All through the period of data generation the programme of decentralisation was going on resulting in the departure and introduction of many staff members at all civil service grades.

Additional to these changes the exponential upscaling of ODA during the period (€319.9 million in 2001, €578.4 million in 2005, and €869 million in 2007<sup>15</sup>) and participation in the new aid architecture processes triggered by the Millennium Development Goals Declaration. In such a scenario, one imagines that experiences of confusion, frustration, disillusionment and disorientation, even conflict might be expected. Simon points out that when an organisation ‘ingest[s] new members from an alien culture’ they must learn an established framework, but at times when ‘the organization is faced with a totally new situation ... it must create a problem representation to deal with it, then enable its members to acquire skill in using that representation’ (1991: 132). With such a maelstrom of changing circumstances, the talking of learning and organising practice in such negative terms is not surprising. It is also possible on these terms to understand such a discourse as a connecting pattern making a certain sense. The presentation of ‘dysfunctional’ learning and organising practice on the basis of boundaries, fragments and ‘silo mentalities’ as an organisational story was common to many members, regardless of their particular role as Irish Aid personnel.

Another thread to this patterning of ‘dysfunctionality’<sup>16</sup> as organising practice is the question of identity as a feature of myriad staff changes. *The Technical Section Strategic Plan of 2003-2006* notes that, after a Division-wide consultative process, ‘this plan is a time bound framework which recognises the historical focus of Development Cooperation Ireland, the current unpredictable budgetary environment and the evolving nature of the Development Cooperation Ireland programme. It is intended that it is a flexible plan – but one the will lead to the establishment of a clear identity of Technical Section within the institutional structure of Development Cooperation Directorate.’ (Development Cooperation Ireland (Dci), 2003: 3 emphasis added). Questions of identity in a fast changing context abound, a simple motif of which might be the Divisional name-change in 2003 from ‘Ireland Aid’ to ‘Development Cooperation Ireland’ and again in 2006 to ‘Irish Aid’. It might be argued, given the concerns voiced and the ways in which they are framed that Irish Aid during the research period was an organisation in the process of managing significant transition. It might also be argued that such situations of change, although maybe not always as extreme, constitute

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<sup>15</sup>‘Our aid volume has increased five-fold over the last ten years. In 1998 it was €177 million’ – Irish Aid Press Release, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2007

<sup>16</sup> Irish Aid is a ‘dysfunctional government organisation, we all know that. You knew that before you started!’ Exploratory Interview, December 2005.

the 'normal' going-on patterning as Irish Aid, given its political function as a Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

In part response to some of these difficulties the 'Knowledge Management Working Group' (KMWG) had been established as an element for building greater organisational coherence and formalisation<sup>17</sup>. 'Knowledge management' had already been identified as an important, if under-prioritized organisational need, and linked with issues of 'institutional learning' and 'learning culture' (Irish Aid, 2004b). The notion of 'organisational learning' was in some way present with these terms, although with subsequent internal documentation on the topic, the 'learning' profile is diminished in favour of the more technical elements of a knowledge management system (Irish Aid, 2006a, 2008b). This seems to indicate an organisational bias towards recognisable and identifiable 'knowledge needs', a sense born out with the language and formulations of exploratory phases. The less tangible, although nonetheless textualized, issue of 'learning' seems to merge with other organisational embodiments, such as the strategic planning and implementation of Programme Country Strategies and their sub-processes. Although 'learning' is recognised as essential to this core organisational process, it is generally constructed according to linear cause/effect process-relations and positivist ontologies.

As a corollary to this notion that 'organisational learning' is a difficult concept to construct organisationally, it was noted that in response to the question about organisational learning put during the first exploratory phase<sup>18</sup>, members initially presented abstract notions according to their general awareness of the term. For some their particular job focus gave them a perspective, but most of the talk centred specifically on organisational difficulties or barriers identified in relation to notions of what organisational learning should be. These understandings were categorized as defining organisational learning as 'communication'; 'being able to access and use information'; 'sharing knowledge - including the transfer of skills', and 'effectively connecting learning and knowledge with performance and action'. The barriers identified by members to such learning actions were categorised as 'failures at communication' – mostly interpreted as due to a 'silo' mentality and organisational design, 'knowledge protectionism and competition as cultural norms within the Civil Service'; the 'difference' or 'otherness' experienced by development specialists within the dominant culture because of their roles and backgrounds, and exacerbated by their ambivalent contractual status as a distinctive group formed within a body of permanent employees; the traditional or anachronistic attitude towards new forms of management and information technology on the part of senior management and certain sections of the organisation; the high turnover of staff (especially due to the imminent Decentralisation

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<sup>17</sup> A story taken up in detail with Chapter Four.

<sup>18</sup> 'What does the term, "organisational learning" conjure up for you?'

from Dublin to Limerick), and finally for some members, the abstract or uncontextualized nature of the concept of organisational learning.

### *Matters Concerning 'Roles' as Relating Processes*

Organisational members talked a range of matters over the second period of participant research-practice from June to August 2006. As explained with Chapter Two this was a time of getting to know the Organisation, its language and work going on. By attending meetings, spending time about the offices (I was designated a desk and computer), and following up with a wide range of people by one to one interview, detailed descriptions of work going on were generated. In many cases these descriptions led to value judgements about the work and how it was organised. Valuations of the Organisation as a whole were frequently and easily proffered without being directly asked for – lead questions normally referenced tasks, roles and particular projects going on. With this wide-scoping approach a broad range of matters figured. They thicken a contentual description of learning and organising practice as Irish Aid, although with no particular task or process focus as yet<sup>19</sup>. These matters questioned how linking with others was functioning, how roles and briefs were practiced; they show something of the judgements being made about the complex or confusing organisational situation and were at times complaints about the same.

Desk officers and development specialists considered themselves overworked and with unrealistic job briefs. They described themselves as isolated in those briefs according to a 'silo design'; in some cases they felt their roles as defined were not sustainable with the changing aid process, and that often development specialists were not working with their area of expertise – partly due to the SWAp sectorisation of the Field, but otherwise attributed to the generalist culture of the Civil Service. Desk Officers on the other hand struggled with the difficulties of a high turnover of administrative staff, making it difficult to build relationships. This situation was linked to the Decentralisation Policy for the Civil Service.

Desk Officers are points of contact between Head Office and the Field, they coordinate the linking of budgetary and programming matters such as the formal appraisal process at PAEG<sup>20</sup>, as well as political concerns that arise. They also have a brief to coordinate any special events going on, such as a ministerial or presidential visit to the programme country they are assigned

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<sup>19</sup> The Country Strategy Paper (CSP) process emerged from the phase of exploration as the focussed way to go-on with the research practice.

<sup>20</sup> Programme Appraisal and Evaluation Committee (PAEG), a group made up of contracted consultants and Irish Aid personnel. This is not a decision-making group. Sign-offs on programmes and their components are the responsibility of the Minister or the appropriate senior managers.

to. During the data generation period some desk officers were assigned up to three programme countries making this linking role difficult to perform. Desk officers were conscious of their lacks of knowledge, especially in relation to the programme countries that they were assigned to liaise with. When possible, Desk Officers would travel to their assigned programme country in order to build connections and gain an understanding of the situation. This activity was considered extremely useful. Often though their experience was described as a 'piecemeal, bitty' approach to administration. Many members held that the basic work style and way of learning as Irish Aid is 'hands on'. For some this way of working was coupled with an 'ad hoc use of organisational systems' such as the management of travel proformas, daily diaries, dealing with public queries, payments to consultancy staff etc.

Members, mostly development specialists, consistently described themselves as 'different' in some way. While understanding themselves as link and focal persons between Head Office, the Field, other donors and international organisations, and with particular technical briefs or responsibilities, they seemed to consistently describe themselves in contrast to the general civil service members they worked with. Some understood themselves as 'in touch with the ground', as 'innovators' driving SWAp processes, strategic planning and new management systems. One person described specialists as having a 'private sector character, primarily goal-focussed' and directly contrasted this understanding with administrative and managerial staff who were understood to be 'organisationally' or 'institutionally' focussed.

The connection with Desk Officers as link persons was described as unclear. In different places, at different times specialists talked about a lack of knowledge and understanding between these two key coordination positions from time to time. Specialists described themselves as 'not decision-makers'. One person remarked, 'We are not managers' – which surprised me as I was noticing that their work, particularly as lived in the Field, seemed very much to be a management role. The distinction might formally be made between an executive management role (that of a senior development specialist) and a directive management role (that of a counsellor at the head of a section). As I noticed the practice going-on, these distinctions seemed fuzzy or blurred. Describing the situation with CSPs in PC-A the redesign and reorganisation of the CSP process seemed very much an articulation from the Field working new practice 'upwards' towards general practice for the whole Organisation. One should probably conclude that what is mattering here is who decides about the money – how, where, when and for what this resource is to be disbursed – nonetheless, in practice such 'decisions' are performed with a series of complex relating processes and are not as clearly defined in the doing as they seem to be imagined.

During this phase of participant research-practice I was particularly interested in the attempts towards building team approaches that were going on. I noticed and tracked a process whereby the Technical Section had organised itself into several 'Cluster Groups' as part of its business planning. This initiative is described in more detail with Chapter Four, but here it is sufficient to note that in response to difficulties with role confusions, disjoints and lacks of coordination or systematisation, initial organisational responses were towards networked and collaborative ways of working. The Cluster Groups were not successful.

One enigmatic question arose from this phase of the research practice. Describing their own role one specialist noted that there was a dichotomy between who was 'knowledge rich and knowledge poor'. With an organisation described by its members as a meritocracy and competitive environment this is a revealing observation. Representing oneself as 'knowledge rich' may become important in order to manage the insecurities of transition and change such as those going on for Irish Aid. As members described their situation, their organisation, as dysfunctional and as an 'unlearning organisation', a certain displacement of agency is going-on. Is this possibly a strategy for constructing personal or group expertise in the face of uncertainty? Maybe this is a relating-agency; a connecting pattern that all members participate-with as it is familiar or simple for the context? As such a pattern of competition is easily latent as a common ground for generating knowledge and a practice to go-on with. The affirmation of the subject (who or whatever) by negation of the object marks a hard differentiation and thus generates disconnection and isolation at another order of abstraction<sup>21</sup>. The opposite will also be true. As a follow on from this observation about people (units) being 'knowledge rich' and 'knowledge poor', the question emerged for me, 'What is the most valued knowledge as/for Irish Aid?'

### *Matters Concerning Organisational Processes Going-On*

As a short general sketch of matters arising the following series of themes or topics were figuring at this stage of the research practice. Explored in greater detail with Chapter Four, an organisational narrative or story can be constructed from these topics continually talked by Irish Aid members. Staged as movements or acts, the story might be told as the relating process of three organising energies<sup>22</sup> – towards 'Coherence' as an ideal state, with 'Institutionalisation' as narrative or frame, and a form of logical-modelling-for-results as method. As with Lewis Carroll's

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<sup>21</sup> Possibly noticed laterally but remaining unexplored or uncontextualised as organisational learning.

<sup>22</sup> The idea of 'energy' becomes increasingly important as a construct for re-imagining the organisational world as relational patterning – I take up the items of 'force' and δύνάμις (dunamis) with Chapter Five (Pragmatics) to mark and explore the dynamic and teleological nature of energy as a relationally constructed resource – which is another (relational) way of talking about agency.

story of the Hunting of the Snark, (Tosey, 2005), the ideal is not for arriving at, but journeying with. While, 'Coherence', best institutional or organisational practice, and perfect results-rendering models may be as imagined as the 'Snark', and enjoy as much materiality – the force or power of these energies is potentially real, and is generating the order that becomes in many forms of organising practice and development.

As Coherence-building the topics figuring formal actions were policy development, guidelines and incremental change processes. The Organisation was viewed by its members as being in need of 'Coherence'. But also as a meritocracy, a place of verticalism where team approaches seemed not to be institutionally supported; where confusion of roles and linkages or connections between development specialists and desk officers were unclear, and where decision-making was featuring as difficult; where the Technical Section seemed unsure of its 'identity' or place in the Organisation as a whole so that 'specialisation' was judged an organisational 'issue'.

As 'Institutionalisation' the topics featuring were quality assurance, audit/appraisal and approval systems, the push for an evidence-based and results-based management approach, as well as perceived resistance within the Organisation to these processes and shifting policies (the formal articulation for the first time of many policies) and the difficulty for Irish Aid of *documenting* as an organisational learning skill or task.

This last was understood as being almost counter-cultural to the predominant image of Irish Aid as practical, grounded and working primarily in the social sectors<sup>23</sup> with tangible outcomes. This picture of Irish Aid as 'pragmatic', as doing and making a visible difference, is strongly based on the tradition of Irish ODA (and a long missionary history especially in Africa) built on relationships in the Field, and capacitating others<sup>24</sup>. Value is placed on what is tangible – see-able, show-able. Coming with this basic orientation is a pride in a perceived positive international standing on the basis of quality development-aid and bolstered by a long-standing Irish ODA policy of Untied Aid. With all of this the practical orientation is towards flexibility and responsiveness to the Field, expressed in the current environment with a policy of mixing modalities<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Education, Health, Food Security, Water and Sanitation etc.

<sup>24</sup> For example the 30 year history of APSO.

<sup>25</sup> The different modes or mechanisms of development-aid disbursement such as General or Direct Budget Support, where funds go to a national treasury or specific ministry, Sector Wide Approaches (SWAs) or Area Based Programmes (ABPs) whereby funds are disbursed through pooled 'baskets' or local government.



For such an organisational identity, the last feature figuring the environment for this research story – the discourse of logical-modelling – might be viewed from the perspective and comfort of this valued ‘tangible’ culture as the villain of the piece. Sometimes, in the ways that development specialists talked about their organisational goals, this notion does not seem too extreme. The descriptions of resistance to change, inertia and organisational civil service culture as a barrier to learning suggest a divisive narrative getting made as a connecting pattern with which to go-on with the organisational process. Some of the topics featuring for this particular ‘forcing’ of the story are questions about who or what is driving this way of managing development-aid – the development specialists or the managers whose concerns for being able to account for what was a growing ODA budget, or both? The role of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD whose peer review process is a key indicator of quality assurance for Irish Aid; also relevant is the role of Irish Aid’s international partners in the development-aid arena, the Nordic+, DFID<sup>26</sup> and the EU. Irish Aid’s participation with other Multilateral engagements through global funds and the UN is also a factor.

One tension here might be described as the difficulty of ‘getting buy-in’ to the sort of ‘upstream architecture’ involved with the new processes of building Joint Assistance Strategies (JAS), or of pooling funding in ‘sectoral baskets’. These ways of managing development-aid are less tangible in terms of show-ability, they are abstract in a sense<sup>27</sup> and can be difficult to grasp. There seem to be more risks involved. New modes of development inevitably bring challenges to latent philosophies and value-systems. The work of building the new structures and processes of the JAS or the SWAp is complex and challenges unworked or uncontextualised understandings of ‘development’. A further feature of this complexity is that some of these new organising practices were described as becoming in effect ‘distractions’ for example. With the SWAp process, donors agree to harmonize their engagements. This means that if Ireland is committed to Health in one country, Denmark will prioritise something else. Some organisational members described how this process was becoming overly simplistic as energy was being uselessly expended on questions of ‘who’s in’ and ‘who’s out’ of different sectors. Further ‘intangibility’ was generated with the development of the policy of mainstreaming that was going on at the time to help the

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<sup>26</sup> The Nordic+ are a group of ‘like-minded donors’ who work together in many fora with common policies and approaches etc. The countries thus aligned are Norway, Sweden, Finland, UK, Ireland, the Netherlands and Denmark. Germany and Canada are linked to this group on the issue of Procurement and Joint Finance (Canada only). DFID is the Department for International Development of the British Government.

<sup>27</sup> A tangible instance of this difference is the difficulty that Field personnel have nowadays when a minister or some other dignitary is making a field visit – the question becomes one of finding a project where something can be ‘seen’.

Organisation create practical and policy links between the four cross-cutting issues of gender, governance, HIV/AIDs and the Environment that Irish Aid prioritises<sup>28</sup>. The topic of organisational learning itself could be placed in this category of ‘intangibility’ as indeed it was when one specialist in PC-A remarked, ‘this is just like mainstreaming, hard to grasp.’

#### *A Description of Organisational Learning from the CSP Review Workshop*

A third body of data thickens this picture from another moment of the research practice. During the CSP Review Workshop, I carried out a short session on the topic of ‘organisational learning’ with twenty-six Irish Aid practitioners. Each career stream and participants from all but one of the Programme Countries were present. Members were asked to highlight from a simple definition of a ‘learning organisation’<sup>29</sup>, which words they felt were ‘most challenging’ for Irish Aid. The following extract is from the final workshop report prepared by a third party on receipt of initial quantitative analysis of these word choices (recorded on individual worksheets):

The most recurring words chosen by respondents were "mobilizes" and "adapt" suggesting that the task of mobilizing knowledge in order to adapt is an important learning challenge for Irish Aid. Other ‘strong word’ choices were "actively" and "transfers". Reasons given for these word choices were that the organisation is seen as institutionally reluctant to change, not good at moving quickly and wanting to retain the status quo. Various participants explained these observations as being due to a changing environment, human resources being stretched, lack of capacity, high turnover of staff and natural inertia. (Irish Aid, 2007a: 17)

Analysis of communication difficulties was also included in this Report on the basis of the review of the strategic planning process of CSPs that was taking place:

Weaknesses in communication have been a source of tension between parts of I[rish] A[id],

- During the CSP development process it is recognised that there has been a lot of ‘to-ing and fro-ing’, without it always being clear when communications were opinions, advice, decisions or instructions. Delineating clear decision making points and roles for different players at different stages should avoid some of these problems

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<sup>28</sup> (White Paper on Irish Aid, 2006)

<sup>29</sup> ‘A learning organisation *actively* creates, captures, transfers and mobilises knowledge to enable it to adapt to a changing environment’

- There are particular tensions around CSPs – the extent to which they are technical documents, using the terminology particular to that profession, and the extent that they should be written in a language that non-specialists can understand – and if the latter who should undertake this. (2007a: 14)

These references describe experiences of organisational intransigence and inflexibility over time (this Report was written over two years after initial exploratory interviewing) as well as communicational problems that include, but go beyond issues of terminology to instances of management confusion and incoherence which in some cases led to complaints of inconclusive responses from Management and a lack of acknowledgement of planning documents and presentations. Such problems also led to conflict and a breakdown in communication on occasion.

The argument developing here is that Irish Aid has been working through a process of institutionalisation that has been disorienting and de-energizing for many members. The general organising context for this period of transition prominently features what can be labelled a bureaucratic and political environment for which change processes are susceptible to common ‘road blocks’ – waiting long for decision-making or the adoption of a policy, while at the same time being hostage to immediate constraints such as the Civil Service Cap on employment of local advisors and specialist staff, or the Department of Finance decision in 2004 to adopt a policy of decentralisation for headquarters of eight government departments and sections of the Irish Civil Service. With this ecology of learning and organising practice going-on about – the sea to swim – it is not strange that a pattern of fragmentation, gap and lack-making is supplemented with more of the same. To generate another practice a new contextualisation is required, a difference. This would be deuterio-learning.

### *Definitions of Organisational Learning from the Literature*

Although transformational learning emerges as a goal in the literature there are few empirical studies offering understanding of the processes through which such deep changes happen (Heraty and Morley, 2008). This may in part be due to the particular localised nature of transformational change. By nature this type of change does not translate from location to location; each context calls for its own particular transformations. The experiences of deep change in one group or organisation when written up in case format often become prescriptive in ways that hinder learning in other places, ‘sequestered showcases’ as one group of authors put it (Ulrich et al., 1993: 52).

Practice being to a large extent anchored in cause/effect linear organisational development change models there is no theoretical frame from which to critique organisational learning theory itself. Some argue that there is no such unified theory of organisational learning due to the multidisciplinary nature of the field (Easterby-Smith, 1997), which may indeed be the case when viewed from the perspective of the classic organisational learning issues of units, levels, boundaries, knowledge processes and the relationships between them. Nonetheless, when viewed from a different perspective of epistemologies of learning, the philosophical theory driving organisational learning initiatives and explorations becomes more unified and hegemonic. Despite recent focus in organisational learning research on discourse-based, languaged processes, in practice the behavioural model of learning and change continues to dominate.

The structure, tasks and challenges of government aid organisations are quite particular and different in significant ways from the typical business environment that gave rise to the concept, theory and practice of organisational learning in the first place. In order to ground organisational learning appropriate to government development-aid organisations *another view* is sought from which principles for learning in the development-aid field can be generated. The final step in this chapter will be to briefly describe the research organisation, Irish Aid, as a learning organisation according to this view. This description is based in a variety of data materials generated by periods of participant research-practice in which exploratory interviews, attendance at normal business meetings and document collection played a part.

Definitions of organisational learning reflect the disciplinary concerns of the definers (C. Argyris, 2005). In addition, a review of such definitions yields insight into the ontological and epistemological assumptions embedded therein, captured in the formulations of such key constructions as ‘organisation’, ‘learning’, ‘knowledge’, and ‘change’. Bontis, Crossan and Hulland bring together twenty-one of those definitions in their work to establish a macro-perspective on learning at the level of organisation (2002). Indeed, the title of their paper is indicative of how language-use reveals base-level assumptions; in *Managing An Organizational Learning System By Aligning Stocks and Flows*, the knowledge acquired at each level of the organisation is constructed as ‘stock’ (ie. suggesting a ‘thing’ that is stored), whilst the transfer or sharing of that knowledge in feed forward and feedback loops are constructed as ‘flows’.

We can loosely categorise definitions on a spectrum between a ‘realist ontology’ with its entitative-orientation on the one hand, and a ‘relational ontology’ with its correspondent process-orientation on the other (Dachler and Hosking, 1995, Hosking and Bouwen, 2000), as a useful way (for current purposes) in which to frame the literature of organisational learning. Paraphrased definitions set out by Bontis et al. indicate the spread. Examples such as,

‘organizational learning copes with the problem of balancing the competing goals of developing new knowledge and exploiting current competencies in the face of the dynamic tendencies to emphasize one or the other’ (2002: 439) (cf. Levinthal and March, 1993), or ‘a learning organization is an organization skilled in creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights’ (cf. Garvin, 1993), exhibit in their nominalised form, i.e. ‘knowledge’ and ‘organisation’ as nouns, a representational language-use that gives these constructions entitative being.

Other definitions that may be less focussed on the ‘products’ or ‘outcomes’ of learning, i.e. ‘knowledge’, or ‘effective organisation’, but rather on the processes of learning such as Argyris and Schön’s, ‘organizational learning is a process of detecting and correcting errors’ (cf. , 1978), or Day’s, ‘organizational learning is comprised of the following processes: open-minded inquiry, informed interpretations and accessible memory’ (cf. Day, 1994), modelled closely on Huber’s learning constructs (1991), maintain a mid-point position on the ontological scale in that attention is on the actions that generate knowledge, at the level of the individual and the organisational system, but that action is understood from a behaviourist perspective, which locates change-agency at the individual level and tends to see that change as a cause-effect relation.

Another tendency is the reification of organisation or knowledge by attributing agency to the construct as in the following definition of the learning organisation as, ‘an organization which learns powerfully and collectively and is continually transforming itself to better collect, manage, and use knowledge for success’ (cf. Marquardt, 1996). This organisation has ‘agency’ and ‘self’, albeit in neutral form. The issue is captured in Argyris and Schön’s question, ‘What is an organization that it might learn?’ (1978). To which they answer, a collective of individuals in interpersonal relationship. The shift to more systems oriented approaches for which organisational learning is a conceptualisation of how the ‘whole is more than the sum of the individual parts’, expressed in constructs such as ‘organisational memory’, carries with it this reifying tendency of which some authors are critical (March and Olsen, 1975). It is an attempt to relocate ‘agency’ beyond the individual that is ultimately ineffective since it is simply a moving of subjectivity to an imagined entity. The question of agency-location will be returned to later in this paper.

In Fiol and Lyles 1985 review they interpret all approaches as either behavioural or cognitive (1985: 809), a clear enough indication of prevalent initial disciplinary approaches, but this perspective on organisation changes, and with it theories of learning and the research methods to investigate them. Definitions such as ‘organizational learning represents a complex

interrelationship between people, their actions, symbols and processes within the organization' (cf. Schwandt and Marquardt, 2000) introduce, with the inclusion of 'symbols' into the interpretive mix, a suggestion of a processual discursive ontology.

A review of the topics or questions of organisational learning leads to an inevitable consideration of the constructs of 'levels, processes and values' as central to any model, or theory of learning in organisation. While the issues of transfers or flows of lessons learned, knowledge (tacit and explicit) and expertise across levels may have subsided, its current manifestation is in discovering ways of researching 'practice' itself as the central unit of analysis. The 'organisational learning' question in this instance might classically be formulated as, 'What is the organisation learning to learn as understanding of practice itself (as epistemology) grows?'

Having reviewed some definitions of organisational learning some general comments are necessary that can progress this work towards an understanding of organisational learning that is appropriate for development-aid organisation given the learning challenges arising in that context. By highlighting the topics and approaches, as well as methods of research and change-actions evident in the literature it is possible to frame the field as a whole according to *another view*. To arrive at this view it is necessary to establish the grounds on which another view is possible. The first step in this process is a categorization of philosophies of learning borrowed from the field of adult learning in which six theories are identified. Organisational learning approaches will be linked with these philosophies of learning showing that the dominant approach has been a behavioural philosophy of learning. This is not surprising given that the concept, although routed by Argyris from several disciplines and developments (2005), has been framed and explored on the whole by researchers and practitioners from a background of cognitive psychology, or one of its off-shoots (i.e. business management).

It has been noted in Chapter One that new methods of research, centring language-based processes are increasingly prevalent, throwing up in their turn a shifting focus towards practice, differentiation and the political and power issues of learning. Nonetheless, this shift seems basically a research-driven agenda and not very evident in practice-oriented learning organisation type initiatives. Certainly in the research field of this project, development-aid, not only is the practice of organisation (including the learning initiatives prevalent) modelled on a positivist, linear and modernist paradigm of planning, action and change, so too is the more foundational construction of the Development Project itself. Although researchers exploring organisational learning in aid highlight this situation and where possible seek out ways to 'push the boundaries' in new forms of learning practice and reflection (eg. Eyben, 2006b), these attempts seem

piecemeal and so out of the ordinary as to be constructed as anomalies in a certain sense, at least in the environment of government bilateral and multilateral aid management.

The second step in establishing the grounds for *another view* of organisational learning is to shift the focus from philosophies of learning to epistemologies of learning. These are obviously closely linked as any philosophy of learning will prefigure understanding of how that learning happens. From a behaviourist construction, epistemology generates knowledge which is 'knowing how to stimulate the learning subject towards desirable ends', with learning understood basically as reinforcing that desired behaviour. The learning subject is inevitably the focus of attention. Linked in practice with a humanist philosophy of learning that celebrates the development of the individual, it is not surprising that the primary embodiment of the 'learning subject' has been the individual, or at higher levels of organisational aggregation, a group or team of individuals. Having established an epistemological frame, a different view or construct of learning as ecology is presented and explored. It is this view of an ecology of organisational learning that is preferenced here as grounded in the issues of organisational learning theory and responding epistemologically to the learning needs evident in the development-aid field.

## **Part II: An Ecological View of Organisational Learning**

### *The Philosophies of Adult Learning as Another View*

One body of literature useful for development-aid organising practice but under-referenced for organisational learning is that of adult learning. Resources such as a categorization of learning philosophies and a participative and empowering understanding of how learning takes place link with expressions of social learning theory (eg. Jacobs and Cochlan, 2005) and shared enquiry (eg. Heron and Reason, 1997). As with organisational learning theory, theories of adult learning, or andragogy (Knowles, 1970, Merriam, 2001), come from different philosophical perspectives and traditions (Elias and Merriam, 1995) and these will be reviewed briefly.

The philosophies of adult learning are useful for this project principally as a frame of reference with which to differentiate the theories of learning implied with the approaches to organisational learning. The assertion that 'organisational learning' is not, and should not pretend towards being a 'theory' (Easterby-Smith, 1997) has been made due to the presence of different disciplinary perspectives, concerns and methods in use. This view suggests that it may be best to construe 'parallel agendas' and 'complimentary contributions' as a way of understanding the relationships between descriptive and prescriptive engagements with the concept. Nonetheless, it is also accepted that 'organisational learning' has been predominantly based on a psychological research

paradigm with anthropological methods and concerns coming into play in latter stages (Berthoin Antal et al., 2003). While critical and discourse focussed approaches are still emerging, they have little practical exploration as ways of organising practice. The general trend towards less individualistic and cognitive constructions in the research literature belays the experience that especially in practice, epistemological assumptions do not shift at the same pace as emerging methods of research.

The body of literature dealing with adult learning is similar to organisational learning in that approaches to adult learning and andragogy (Knowles, 1970) bring together professionals from a variety of disciplines, backgrounds and philosophical traditions. The field is often referred to under the umbrella-term of ‘adult education’, but as the active role of the adult-in-education has grown in priority (Merriam, 2001), as well as an increasing diversification in the contexts through which people access such programmes or projects, the term ‘adult learning’ has become more prevalent. The construct of adult ‘learning’ as opposed to ‘education’ coheres more readily with organisational learning since the andragogical element (i.e. the *teaching* side) is less important. The term is not solely a symbol for the changing role of the learner, but also evokes a philosophical orientation and principles of participation; it is therefore the term of choice used here. The different philosophical strands of adult learning have been brought together in a comprehensive historical overview by Elias and Merriam (1980, 1995) under the labels of Liberal, Progressive, Behaviorist, Humanistic, Radical and Analytical education. Organisational learning approaches seem to naturally link with the Behaviourist, Progressive (or pragmatic) and Analytical traditions.

The Liberal tradition of adult education or learning, as defined by Elias and Merriam, is not central to this work but relevant insofar as it shows how placing value on classic texts or established knowledge is insufficient for a living learning practice. The Liberal approach was often expressed by reprinting and widely disseminating ‘Great Books’ with encyclopaedia projects and travelling libraries. Knowledge was thus valued and constructed as *already acquired*, a thing to be ‘poured into’ minds ready and waiting, as if filling a glass with water. This figure of knowledge, which is static in some senses and ‘already complete’, has enduring life. Such an approach makes of the individual learner or learning organisation a passive receptor, a malleable space to be filled. This understanding of knowledge continues in form with modern consultancy for which the common relating process or practice is generated when the ‘expert’ reads the situation and makes recommendations, to which the organisation then responds.

The second tradition labelled by Elias and Merriam as ‘Progressive’ adult learning is in many ways a response to the Liberal tradition. In the development of the philosophy of learning this approach is judged the first departure of the Modern Period after the enduring Liberal tradition,



hence the 'progressive' appellation. The progressive may also be termed 'pragmatic' with one of the most influential thinkers from this approach, John Dewey, seeing the need to reconstitute learning and education as practical, applied and experientially grounded activity (1938). The principle that education and learning are not only relevant but have an important role in society is also a feature of this approach (Dewey, 1916). This Progressive stream finds certain expression in organisational learning approaches taking an action perspective for which the organisational learners are active participants in the process of researching their own organisation with a view to practical and systematic change. The methods of Progressive models of learning are scientific, using a 'problem-solving', 'project', or 'activity-method'. Such methods are evident in the strategies of action research, or indeed learning-organisation-type change initiatives that carry more of a positivist or 'scientific' outlook. The work of authors such as Reason and Heron brings these principles of action learning and participative enquiry to the organisational learning realm (Heron and Reason, 1997, Reason, 2003).

The Behaviourist tradition of adult learning takes a cognitive view of the adult learner and is the tradition of the early theorists of organisational learning as reviewed with Chapter One. The focus is on the individual for whom learning involves cognitive processes leading to changes in behaviour and driven by stimulus and response in forms of reward, reinforcement and measurement of results. Learning objectives are clearly set and measurable according to a linear logic of progression. Performance management systems grow from this philosophy of learning. The difference here from the traditional Liberal education approach is that adult learners participate in the setting of objectives and goals and are also involved in their evaluation while the notion of knowledge acquisition is somewhat carried over. The principle of self-directed learning is central to adult learning theory for which not only the 'learner' is active in the design and review process but also the 'teacher' is deconstructed as 'expert' and becomes 'learner' also. In many adult-learning programmes 'teachers' will often be named using other words such as, facilitator, coordinator or animator, evoking participatory, resource or service-type roles. This reconstruction of the 'teacher' prefigures changed ways of seeing the manager as 'servant' in organisational settings.

The Radical tradition in learning philosophy strongly rooted in the practice of educators such as Paolo Freire (1970), and the conscientisation and literacy programmes of Latin America does not seem to have much interpretation in organisational learning approaches although the critical perspective it engenders no doubt has had some influence on recent critical and deconstructionist research, based on linguistic and social constructionist methodologies and focus. The inherent critical consciousness of the constructionist outlook brings to organisational learning an attention to the powerful and political nature of all interpretive processes including

learning and knowing, in organisation or otherwise. The principle that comes through this Radical perspective on adult learning is that learning is transformative of oppressive, exclusive and abusive structures or systems. The participation of the adult learner not only assures a reinterpretation of the relationship between 'learner' and 'teacher' but also a shift in consciousness that, in itself generates a change in power relations. Power is not given but taken, maybe better expressed as 'taken-up', in a repositioning of agents and agency that has the quality of changing the order of Order. Conscientisation does not mean flipping the occupants of master/slave roles over, it means overcoming that particular relating set.

The last adult learning tradition following on from the Radical position and connecting with more recent trends in organisational learning is the Analytical Philosophy Tradition that also relates to constructionist methodologies. Elias and Merriam, in the first edition of their work identify this tradition as the latest newcomer to bring resources to the field (1980). Early expressions of this tradition sought to clarify conceptual thinking (i.e. philosophy) by means of Scientific Realism, Logical Analysis and Logical Positivism, all proponents of the theory that only those propositions that are verifiable by recourse to sensory knowledge or logic are meaningful, metaphysical thinking is nonsense. The main difference between the early and later phases of the analytical approach is that there was a shift from understanding language as representational to understanding language as performative or *communicational*. Austin's famous title shows this well, *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). What matters is not whether a word precisely represents a reality 'out there' but how a word is used in context to mean what the user intends or understands it to mean. 'Out there' is not directly available to meaning or knowing since these actions are always 'interpreting'. This shift of focus is classically embodied in the contribution of Ludwig Wittgenstein whose *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) and *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) move from an early realist position to a later interpretive theory of language-use. For the philosophy of learning the Radical position has been important for its critique of such key concepts as 'adult', 'the education of adults' and 'adult education', and the critique of adult learning overall. Educational and learning processes too have been the focus of this work, as is the relationship of adult learning to society as a whole.

The connection with research methods that explore constructions of organisational practice and learning on the basis of conversation and ordinary practice in order to focus the 'living' quality of organisational life will be clear. This tradition also connects with ethnographic methods centring discursive modes. The basis of ethnomethodological approaches such as the analysis of conversation or activity-typing (Sacks, 1984, Levinson, 1992) are reflected in adult learning as a prioritization of the *situatedness* of the learning situation or context. A critique made of earlier analytical approaches to language as used from the adult learning field is that it can overly narrow

understandings of learning by prioritizing the rational over other aspects of human meaning-making (i.e. emotive, intuitive, practical) (Elias and Merriam, 1995: 194), the social orientation coming into discourse and linguistic analysis in methods such as socio-linguistics and socio-pragmatics re-orientate analysis of discourse towards the social and textualised nature of language as discursive action and it is this perspective on linguistics analysis that suits the interests of researchers in organisational learning.

Consideration of the philosophies of adult learning in relation to organisational learning generates a clearer picture of functional assumptions about learning embedded with learning practices and expectations. Assumed or un-worked images of what or how learning actually *is* generate organisational learning experiences and designs. One example will illustrate this point. For most of its history the literature of organisational learning has dealt with an overarching organising practice for business with hierarchical, production-oriented, and competitive advantage goals. One of the first considerations of organisational learning as a construct was for the 'Firm' (Cyert and March, 1963). Hence the matters of concern featuring deal with information and knowledge creation and flow (often conceptualised through *levels* of organisation). Even though there has been much consideration of cognitive, interpersonal and interactive processes, and all of these viewed through a learning lens, it is not easy to find labelling or explicit exploration of the underlying theories of learning that motivate or animate such processes – in other words, the practical goals and therefore methodological orientations are assumed. Argyris has been critiqued on this basis (Dachler, 1994, Davies, 1998). This form of blanket or unidirectional orientation is not, nor cannot be imagined as the situation for development-aid organising practice.

Using the adult learning distinction of pedagogy from andragogy is useful in this respect. Andragogy has been defined as, 'the art and science of helping adults learn' (Knowles, 1970), a term defined to distinguish adult learning from its roots in traditional learning theories of pedagogy focussed on the education of children and educational psychology. The terms have been linked to organisation suggesting that the predominant hierarchical and bureaucratic organisational form carries with it a pedagogical learning theory or set of assumptions (Dailey, 1984). These assumptions generate a learning model and style in practice that coheres with many people's early educational experience – expert teachers, authoritative decision-making, fear and compliance as motivation, performance measurement – all expectations brought to not only explicit learning initiatives as organisation but also carried to authority-based relations. It has been noted that learning seems easiest with peer-to-peer relations (Wenger, 1998, Peroune, 2007). Although there is plenty of literature mapping out many networking and task focussed

communities and teams as the optimum learning context, the distinction of andragogy from pedagogy brings another perspective as to why this might be so.

With another formulation of the development of approaches to adult learning, Plumb notes the archetypal constructions of learning as building, knowledge acquisition, a dichotomy between ‘Modernity’s Man’ and ‘Society’s Being’ in which a negative postmodernism falls into a hopeless relativity due to a series of rejections of Enlightenment principles (2008). In an analysis of adult learning that is important to the evolving view of organisational learning developing here, he suggests the metaphor of ‘dwelling’ as particularly helpful to establish a learning practice not prefaced on a building ontology<sup>30</sup> in which one builds upon a ‘surface to be transformed’, i.e. a preconceived reality, nor is one locked-into a social givenness that negates all meaningfulness to intentional action, but one dwells in one’s environment first, letting from that dwelling the ways of building ‘arise within the current of ... involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of ... practical engagement in ... surroundings.’ (Ingold, 2000 in Plumb 2008: 70) As will become clearer in the following section, this metaphor from the field of adult learning captures well a complimentary focus for emergent approaches to organisational learning that seek to establish learning practices based on changed ontologies that are less subjective and free from some of the pitfalls of the classic dualisms of much philosophy and epistemology. The shift is away from objectifying tendencies and towards an engaged, embodied practice that is in tune with the environment imagined as familiar and ‘home’; therefore a ‘place’ of dwelling as the primary becoming or response.

### *Moving Towards Another Epistemological World – An Ecology of Learning*

The adult learning frame renders a position of critique for organisational learning understood according to the three-way categorisation of ‘organisational learning research’, ‘learning organisation’ ideal-type prescription, or ‘knowledge creation’ literature (Berthoin Antal et al., 2003). The construct can also be understood as based on notions of adaptive change, transformational change and epistemological change (Ebrahimpur and Jacob, 2001). This three-way categorisation corresponds loosely with three underpinning philosophical ‘worldviews’. First, an instrumental view (organisational learning research/learning organisation) that examines with descriptive and prescriptive modes how learning happens, generates change and is encoded as behaviours and interpersonal relations from a Newtonian or mechanistic understanding that is somewhat adaptive. Although significantly different, evolutionary or systems approaches have been taken up in some respects for research and practice, as a second category possibly more in tune with a transformational worldview.

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<sup>30</sup> Even the terming of social and relational *constructionism* generates ‘building’ as life-world

Linked, but different to a systems or evolutionary theory of learning is the epistemological approach. Not a question of knowledge creation for production, but more an analysis of how knowledge is made in general, this view frames by way of philosophical description the different understandings functional for what it is to learn that underpin the general literature. Relational constructionism literature dealing with organisational learning refers to the constraints of the hegemonic entity-making ontologies (Hosking et al., 1995) but is only beginning to empirically explore these in practice in order to clarify how the methods of relational constructionism might be most useful (eg. Bouwen, 1998, 2001, Van Looy et al., 2000). Using the theories of learning identified in the literature the following questions might be asked of each approach, ‘What is knowledge?’ and ‘What do you do to learn?’ At heart, organisational learning is a practical exploration of these questions.

Different methods for either learning about organisational learning or doing organisational learning have with the development of the concept encompassed laboratory studies using hypothetical analysis, phenomenological analysis of actual systems, explorations of new phenomena emerging on the back of enhanced technology and the interface between technological and human systems. What is not so prevalent is exploration of the ecology of learning as the environmental, con and inter-textual, embodied, pragmatic and material functioning of learning, a construction of ‘practical learning’; not as cognitive process (Fiol and Lyles, 1985), nor history-dependent routine (Levitt and March, 1988), not as interpersonal relationship dynamics (Crossan et al., 1999, Argyris and Schön, 1996, C. Argyris, 2005), nor culture (Schein, 1997), not as community-networking (Lave and Wenger, 1998) nor critical deconstruction (Contu et al., 2003), but in a sense as all of these and more, with constructions as yet unmade. Particular exploration as enmeshed practice, as phenomenological contextualising. A practice lived in the experience and modes of learning, embodied as a sort of artesanship, knitting or crafting that is the on-going textuality emerging (always) with the relating processes of sensing, meaning, language-making, generating personhood and community – but *moreso*, practice *and interface* as complex making and unmaking (of whatever) that Hosking describes as an ‘ontology of becoming’ rather than being (2007). From this ecological view of learning the relating of theory/practice becomes very close; the knitting dynamic is a tight weave. Relating this process so intrinsically, gives ‘it’ a little body.

Influenced by Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty among others Shotter writes from a philosophy of epistemology position. He talks of a ‘form of understanding which exists in seeing connections’, a sensibility to the immediate situation that is a deeply participative way of thinking embodied as ‘seeing the face’ and ‘hearing the voice’ of social situations (2001). The form of

learning practice that Shotter imagines is close to this ecological view of learning in which the question of the 'learning subject' gets turned on its head. Somehow, this notion of participative thinking gives a 'bit of body' to a different learning subject, i.e. a learning subject that is not a subject. Moving away from the individual as learner, the system or the community/network as learner<sup>31</sup> we are left with a conundrum of learning agency – where to situate 'it'? Another 'answer', for generative and inclusive learning, is found by holding loosely the subject/object (S/O) duality in order to explore the local ecology more freely. This is, I think, what Hosking means when she says that critical relational constructionism, 'could be called an anomalous discourse of construction – in that it cannot be located on a map whose coordinates are realist-relativist (ontology) and objective-subjective (epistemology)' (2007: 672). This is 'another map' altogether. The S/O differentiation is softened to the extent that 'connection' becomes centered; it becomes as, Shotter constructs it, *agency*, an agency we respond-to inasmuch as we make it, a kind of force that we are, but we are also not. Organisational learning is a phenomenon of weaving - for which research is secondary activity always catching up, practice is key. But research too is practice, research is learning. With either tendency, as organising or as research, practice with an ecological view of learning makes us participants in actions that are always beyond us.<sup>32</sup>

The texts or constuctions we work with, or to borrow a useful term from Spanish, 'el tejido' which means the pattern (crafted notion) as well as the weave and the cloth, are a meshing of the practitioner and the material to hand. From the perspective of a development-aid organisation, the primary and critical 'material to hand' for 'success' or even 'results' is the relational environment which constitutes that 'day to day doing development-aid'. The 'relational' is the primary environment through which government development-aid practitioners move and have their being/becoming, and therefore it is precisely in this first and foremost environment that an appropriate organisational learning practice is situated. This situating of an ecological view of organisational learning in Irish Aid practice will be explored in greater depth below.

This is a view of 'learning as dwelling', 'a process of intertwining that privileges neither agency nor structure' (Plumb, 2008: 69) in which the learning subject weaves in tune with the malleable 'materials'<sup>33</sup> available in the immediate environment in a sort-of dialogical or responsive relatedness. Bateson sought to describe the ecology of the mind, the actual interface of the mind

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<sup>31</sup> Which generally always routes learning to the individual as a hallmark of the organisational learning perspective.

<sup>32</sup> Salvador Dali's painting *Impressions of Africa* marks this situation. The painter painting reaches out to an unknown viewer thus marking the boundary of the frame by reaching out from it.

<sup>33</sup> A word used loosely here to indicate the givens, modal or mediated of any situation

in practice and in (or out of) tune with the natural and cultural world about – the ‘real’ in which we move (1972). The learning ecology view tries to see something similar, albeit fleetingly. Methods of learning are formed and styled as systems of learning, systems as theories and theories as ontological assumptions with their attendant epistemologies. Since, the aim here is to generate exploration of and for the relating processes as practical learning what is needed is a different lens (and lever). One of the learning ‘problems’ of Irish Aid has been judged to be (by members themselves) the fragmentation that they say characterises their organisational experience. A review of the literature shows that little research has sought to understand such a problem as an ‘ecology of learning’ problem – that is, a problem of discontinuity between the material to hand (the environment in all its manifestations with light boundary-setting) and the practices embodied for learning with that particular environment. The result must be a form of alienation of learning practitioners from the very media and modes of their learning.

The oft cited ‘single/double-loop learning’ distinction is a typology of learning that categorises different stages or qualities of the learning process. It is clear that learning involves a progression in which the types of advance are different due to the nature of the predicament, including the ability to generate a different perspective. The acquisition of information is a skill that is different to the analysis of information for interpretation called knowledge. Knowing in a particular practice or discipline is a skill that is different to the skill of seeing and understanding the scope of a field (Ackoff, 1973). These stages are hierarchically dependent in that interpretive processes require processes of acquisition – a step or stage that might be likened to the naming stage of an experiential learning model (eg. Kolb, 1984). It is a question of globality of frame; each critical step in the learning process is the generation of a greater view or frame of the core processes in which the learning subject is involved at that time, in that place.

Obviously, the more the learning subject gains an ability to globalise each frame of reference, the more global the skill becomes. In other words, the greater the ability to apply that skill in diverse environments of practice, there is global application. Here we find an origin for the notion of organisational learning as ‘learning to learn organisational learning’, Argyris’ idea of triple-loop learning. Bateson labelled this type of learning ‘deutero learning’, although later he suggested that it might be better described as trito-learning since the quality or type of learning he wanted to indicate was of a reflexively conscious frame of reference for which ‘metacommunication’, communication about communication, became possible (1972: 210). This reflexive quality embodies the immediate and the relational aspects of attention or view in a way that a ‘reflective’ perspective does not. The reflective looks back and re-views, the reflexive attends to *now* in an attempt to change the future from this here and now.

Adaptive and transformative learning (as understood in much organisational learning literature) is another language of learning based on either a behaviourist notion of learning-triggered-change for which the concepts of stimulus and reinforcement are important, or a cognitive, knowledge acquisition model for which the processes of information integration and flow are important. The behaviourist language of learning which is so prevalent for organising practice is ultimately a language of containment and control that is very useful for many goals and environments, but not for all. There needs to be a greater plurality of learning practice, a multipraxis, given the different tasks and fields of many different organisations. This is where the ecological view of learning becomes useful in offering a way to go-on with the many environments of organisational learning practice, and generate contextualising and particular practices with whatever happens to be the local 'matters to hand'. It is another language of learning, not of control, but of possibility. To use the single/double loop type distinction, the governing variables that come into view from an ecology of learning perspective are the relations between ontology (matter) and epistemology (method), the practical connecting of theory/practice.

Change, from this ecological perspective is not 'triggered' in a cause/effect relation, but is realised or generated as practice that *works-through or out* whatever is to hand. Getting away from either/or, 'better-than' language grounded by dualistic worldviews, the talk is of *qualities* (characterising/patterning) of the learning process. This frame is not 'better', it is just different. It is a matter of overall appropriateness and a desire when it is useful for task or value to function with all the qualities of learning. Nor is it a question of levels in the sense that higher levels of management should appropriate the skills of ecological learning, no doubt they might, but for each distinctive practice that embodies organising practice there is room for an ecology of learning approach that can potentialize the setting in ways that are attuned to the contextualising process. This is of course an on-going relation of theory and practice since the material to hand is always changing in dialectical relation with the practice to which it corresponds. In all of this what is sought is 'another map' that enables development-aid practitioners and organisations develop a frame of organisational learning appropriate to their particular contextual opportunities and constraints. It is a construction of organisational learning that transcends its roots in business organisation and goes beyond its foundational boundaries to generate new empirical exploration, learning models and different practice types.

To give form to this construction an example from the Irish Aid context is useful. Mainstreaming has been an important action-knowledge that the organisation has sought to generate, it is a question of 'knowing how to' mainstream the cross-cutting issues, i.e., gender. The organisation addressed this learning need by tendering for and contracting two consultants to analyse and present their needs, which was followed up by a series of workshops. The experience of learning



was for practitioners somewhat alienating and superficial, they were still not confident they knew 'how to do' gender mainstreaming after the learning process. From the approach to organisational learning generated here, the organisation does not know 'how to know' about gender mainstreaming, or to put it in learning language, does not know 'how to learn to learn' this particular type of knowing. It is true that as practitioners continue to be challenged and work with the policy of cross-cutting issues they will learn locally and in practice how to do mainstreaming – learning ecologically, but from a learning strategy or design perspective the organisation is working with a less than perfect learning model that is ecologically detached and not attentive to actual practice. It costs a lot of money to bring in experts who in turn transfer their knowledge in what are essentially laboratory conditions (i.e. workshops) for a less than optimum result; this is a knowledge acquisition model in action. Knowing how to learn differently could benefit the organisation in several ways in this case; affirming and empowering practitioners in their practice, building and learning about an embedded mainstreaming strategy, enabling partners in the field to participate in the process, reduced 'expertisation' and accrual of competencies to individuals alone who may be moved or leave, less feelings of 'fragmentation' and alienation from processes and others in the organisation.

With a definition of organisational learning clarified we can now turn to the field of learning, where and how is learning enacted? In traditional approaches to organisational learning the locus of learning has been primarily constructed as cognition and behaviour resulting in a subjective orientation, the learner was the individual and 'it' happened within an imagined internal space. The locus has been shifted towards an agency-centred view in which agency is understood to be a quality of the ecological interface or 'dwellingness of relations' as they are embodied in practice. This ecology of learning view distributes agency in practice as the embodied mix of qualities of media (a layer of embodiment) and mode (as a way or style of occurrence or experience). An 'ecology' deals with 'the relations of organisms to one another and their physical surroundings' or the 'interaction of people with their environment' (OED).

To think ecologically about learning is to consider the interface of media and mode, to understand something of the knowledge generating process enabled dynamically. I have talked about this interface as 'dwelling' with the material and matters to hand for which the metaphors (building and dwelling) for being are related in a different way. By centring the field of learning as environment, and that on ecological terms, a changed epistemology for organisational learning (that does not negate or dis-embodiment any of the philosophies of learning identified) becomes possible. For this epistemology learning process is based not solely on an epistemology of possession, nor indeed of practice (Easterby-Smith et al., 2000), but on a sliding scale of ever shifting agency-types towards an 'epistemology of participation' to be lived as practice. This is a

re-focussing of attention on the ‘situation’ or ‘event’ as the ‘third way’ of organisational learning (Elkjaer, 2004), but here the ‘third way’ involves exploration of how a reflective capacity of ‘having an eye for the dynamic and often emerging qualities of phenomena’ (Elkjaer, 2004: 427) can turn reflexively towards, and as, a future of changed practice.

## **Conclusions – Irish Aid Challenged to ‘Learn to Learn’ as/for an ‘Ecology of Learning’**

Organisational learning traditionally has focussed on issues of coherence between cognition and behaviour, action and results, organisation and environment, processes of knowledge creation and integration; and levels of aggregation. These constructions have been by and large based on an epistemological frame for which learning is generally positive and enabling of the learning subject as the central agent in the process. A *different view* of organisational learning as an ecology of learning has been generated for which the question is no-longer, ‘What is an organisation that it might learn?’ (Argyris and Schön, 1996) The question about the learning subject becomes a question of learning agency in which the subject is displaced and becomes with the environment. This *displacement* or *disposition* is as possible for individuals as it is for organisations since the focal point is no-longer entitative but processual. It is also paradoxically a practical *positioning* and *placing*. Centring relating processes, figured here primarily as linguistic practices (but not exclusively so) makes the matter epistemological.

There are several reasons why constructions of organisational learning need to shift for the practice of development-aid. Firstly, the concept of organisational learning grew out of a thoroughly different context with a different set of goals in mind. Organisational learning has primarily been a project of enhancement of a ‘firm’ or ‘company’ in terms of its ability to perform, align its people, projects, practices and systems, innovate and generally build productivity. The focus has been, even for the research community that was often critical of its promise, primarily on the product. But what is the ‘product’ of a development-aid organisation? There are certainly markers of achievement, exercises in monitoring and evaluation, budgets met. But these are often the subject of critique – not only their effectiveness but also their rationale. Development, by any measure is a process not a product and devilishly difficult to describe. What would indicate ‘development’ in one place or for one group might look like something else from another perspective. The notion of ‘development’ is just that, a construct often embraced uncritically. It seems therefore that an epistemological shift could well serve the Development Project – constructed as development-aid organising practice or as Development goals themselves.

Secondly, it has also been noted that organisational learning literature has framed learning as a subject-driven activity. For development-aid organisations the problem with this construction of learning is that within the field the concerned stakeholders participating in the development process are clearly working to different (although not necessarily mutually exclusive) ends. This makes for a complex environment where the boundaries of organisation are porous; defining *who* exactly is Irish Aid would be case in point. Shifting from a subject-driven understanding of learning to an environmental or ecological view opens up the question of agency to fresh interpretations and possibilities that may better serve the development process since by definition participation is constituted by virtue of be(com)ing the field. There is need for *invitation* to a process from which one is excluded by hard S/O ‘boundary-making’ that objectifies the ‘invitee’. Differently, with an ‘ecology of learning’ approach the ‘environment’ weaves-with all participants<sup>34</sup> so that the relating, or making of power shifts.

Thirdly, organisational learning as constructed in the literature, especially as prescriptive modes, is based on control and knowledge acquisition as the ultimate values from a behaviourist and cognitive perspective. This is either a backwards orientation making the project of learning always recessive or an alienating orientation, distancing vital knowledge ‘out there’ or even ‘stuck’ somewhere in the system. If the goal of the enterprise is improved productivity and profits, then the approaches of control and acquiring/accessing knowledge make good sense since, although the means may vary and generate conflict, the end is not in doubt. For a development-aid organisation the situation is not so simple. Not only is development a complex process that is political, powerful and subjective, it is also constantly changing. Situations change, disasters happen, groups of people move in and out of processes, key individuals move, policies are fashionable; shape-shifting is the norm. Development is therefore something we do, not a goal attained. It is part of the way we ‘go-on’. Business may also be so constructed as a way of going-on, but its ends are clearer and more easily measured. An epistemology of learning that is forwards oriented, always generating possible new practices, relations and worlds is therefore more coherent for the field in question. The future is an unknown, but an epistemology that enables learning from the present (rather than only the past as in reflective practice) has

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<sup>34</sup> Note how the elision of a subject or agent for this sentence (syntax) is formally problematic – for relational constructionism the subject/agent is located as a sort of living-interaction and is therefore everywhere, with every what and how, in every way they are connecting, the ‘subject’ is the shape-shifting process itself becoming the ‘object’ and vice-versa – which of course means for our formal constructing of our life-worlds that the subject/agent seems to be(come) nowhere, we can’t ‘get a hold’, which can be disconcerting.

generative capacity. This is an epistemology that is reflexive and attentive to the environment, especially in practice as explained above.

Finally, the notion of transformation as understood in dominant organisational learning approaches does not go far enough. From a behaviourist perspective there can be no real transformations since the goal of learning is always already defined. There are interpersonal shifts that can generate new levels of interpersonal connection and understanding, but the shift is still superficial in organisational terms since it means a re-alignment of the boundaries between *this* group of individuals. This is why a 'transformation' in one situation, generally does not translate to another, and possibly why much of the learning organisation literature in its tendency towards ideal-typing is criticised. The problem of transformation is not one of 'realisation', but rather one of epistemology. If we understand transformation to be a change of relations (relationships as well as the syntaxing of meaning and sense) then this is always possible, given the right situation and mix of individuals. But if we understand transformation to be a change in how we construct relations, encompassing hard/soft and minimal differentiations, then the boundaries of relations become more flexible and permeable. Considering the complexity of the development process and the sort of learning that development-aid organisations need to learn, a construction of transformation such as this has the potential to considerably change understandings of the environment as a 'place' to dwell and work within and may have practical use in the on-going challenge of development practices of harmonization and alignment.

From this development-aid perspective we can highlight some principles for organisational learning for aid. What is needed is an understanding and practice of learning as a process, not a product (nor outcome), learning that displaces the subject and understands agency as ecological, learning with a forwards-looking orientation achieved in reflexive praxis (attentive practice) and learning that is transformational in the sense that since S/O boundaries (and all dualisms) are flexible and porous, all 'fixes' (texts or otherwise) are open to epistemological change, not just interpersonal ones.

It is in this light that the challenge of learning is constructed here as a challenge of the ecology of learning going-on as Irish Aid. From the perspective of the philosophies of learning we can describe the model of learning embodying Irish Aid practice as based on a mixture of the Liberal knowledge acquisition approach and the Behaviourist reward, reinforce, measure results approach. This second approach is the model of management typical of such a civil service organisation type for which the use of systems of performance management and individual yearly work-plans and targets are the norm. Cognitive and levels approach examples abound. Meetings aimed at sharing information and offering expert advice on whatever the topic to hand happens

to be, are a continual feature of Irish Aid practice. The *Programme Coherence Meetings* are a case in point in which the goal has been to enable the flow of information and knowledge. Lower level meetings mirroring this model have also increased (the regular formalised meeting of technical specialists with desk officers is another case in point) as have initiatives such as 'Lunch Time Seminars' and Stakeholder Meetings such as those regularly held with large Irish NGOs incorporated into the MAPS II programme.

All these moves are intended to address the difficulties of information sharing and communication across different sections of the organisation. Nonetheless the issue of communication continues to be 'talked up'. The ecological view enables us to describe this challenge differently. By identifying the theory (or philosophy) of learning underlying the practice (which embodies an epistemology) we can see that knowledge acquisition and flow is the espoused learning value evident in the learning design of initiatives. Somehow this approach misses the point, nothing changes. The ecological view of learning shifts the focus from subjective knowledge acquisition or behavioural change towards attentiveness to the environment with reflexive enquiry; Who is participating, what are they saying, what are we doing, seeking to do, how are we doing what we are doing? All are generative questions that attempt to enable a reflexive awareness of practice in action.



## Chapter Four: Learning as Irish Aid Organising Practice – Towards Practical Learning

*'We are still in boxes'*

Irish Aid Practitioner – talking about annual business planning, June 2007

'We continue to search for the right technique or "how to do it," hoping that such will be on the next bandwagon. But it will not be there. There is no sure and simple technique. Anyone who appears to offer as much is immediately deserving of our skepticism'

*Thomas Groome*

(1980a: xiii)

'Transition ... figures power in its purest form'

*Jonathan Levin*

(1999: 67)

### **Coordinates – Chapter Four**

- This chapter explores how a topographical description of a learning landscape can broaden horizons. This is a general orientation to the remainder of the thesis. It is also a frame for telling several 'stories' of organising practice as Irish Aid.
- What would 'deuterological coherence' for organising practice appear as?

## General Introduction to Chapters Four to Seven – Topography for Practical Learning

By establishing the general topic as Organisational Learning with ‘Another Map’ and, continuing with a strategy of describing (showing and telling), setting forth the methods for exploration as contingent and unfolding-as-practice, the beginnings of a different orientation for organisational learning to that which is prevalent<sup>1</sup> is pre-figured. A description of the ‘matters to hand’ figuring with exploratory phases of participant research-practice has been presented. It was noted that the coordinated sense of Irish Aid learning practice as first interpreted by organisational members was of ‘learning’ as a ‘problem’. Organising practice seems represented (and thus re-made) as fragmenting, isolating with a discourse of gaps and lacks.

A metaphor of ‘dwelling’, taken up from the literature of Adult Learning for a changed, ecological imagination as the learning landscape of organising practice is useful. Intrinsic to this primary image for how we are as world, including how we organise, is the notion that as dwellers first (before we are builders) we take up whatever comes to hand as our material of matter both as and for response to our needs. Our needs are environmental matters and are best lived as such. The link is made to weaving cultures working according to the resources and exigencies of the environment in, from, as and for-which they are integral. The weaving of modern organisations is not a matter of reeds and straw, but of words, technologies and exigencies of context woven in no less ecological fashion, thus making organising worlds. It seems that often, ‘organisation’ is formally imagined with talk, procedures and operational tools that inhibit other imaginations and have consequences for how learning can happen. The technical or a strategic political approach is often constructed as ‘practical’ or ‘pragmatic’. Differently considered as ‘flexible and possible space’, ‘organisation’ as ecology is probably more *practical* than the formalising interpretations that seem to figure most.

From this ecological approach to organisational learning the term ‘practical learning’ emerges as a different construction for learning as organisation, or learning-in-organising (Gherardi and Nicolini, 2003). The remainder of the thesis is an exploration of the term. Several describing strategies are taken-up for doing-so. For this Chapter the bracket or container of ‘story’ is used. The story is of formalising response (as Irish Aid) to the lacks and gaps talked with the exigencies of the new development-aid architecture going-on. This ‘story’ was not consciously talked as such by organisational members. The processes described for this story are interpreted as

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<sup>1</sup> According to the literature reviewed and the data generated with Irish Aid.



contingent practices that went on in the moment. Often it is the case that such organising cycles are only storied with a text (such as this one) and for which the retrospective view enables connections to be described that were not apparent at the time of happening.

To begin, a narrative is constructed to tell a tale of organisational work for 'Coherence'. This story is 'located' as Irish Aid Headquarters; as organising practices tracked and reconstructed from documents collected, interviews and notes-taken during participant research-practice. Secondly, a story is told of an 'organisational learning project' taken-on as research practice with an Irish embassy team in one programme country, called 'PC-A'. There was a certain contingency for this phase of the research practice whereby, in order to access a field-visit and thus generate rich data as 'Field', a practical orientation was required. A 'knowledge-audit' was therefore carried-out and written-up for PC-A as a 'baseline' for on-going organisational learning practices. This 'consultancy-type' method of doing organisational learning practice is evaluated for the general story of the thesis.

With a lateral move (before the storytelling begins) a topographical describing approach is explored as a useful bracketing tool. This is done *first* in order to mark at this point how 'topography of the learning landscape' became a key metaphor for imagining and making sense of the various 'fields' figuring as spaces for learning as the project went on. A topographical approach to learning as organising practice offers useful resources for the exploration of an ecology of learning for organising practice.

### *A Topography of Practical Learning*

A topography of practical learning is an extended description of a learning landscape, centred and structured about features of note. As a *living document* a topography (like a good travel-guide) must take account of the ecologies of learning that order (instance) pragmatic practice; and the topics of learning that order (instance) dialogic practice. This way of figuring the learning landscape of any field is constructed with a dialectic understanding of how knowledge or practical learning is made, or related. Based on the core movements for knowing and learning briefly presented as the *Figure of Practical Learning* at the beginning of Chapter One and reproduced here for ease (see Figure 1) the two core dimensions, movements or modes of learning as 'ecological/pragmatic' – which is the analogue mode (or 'surrounding') of *becoming*, and 'topical/dialogic' – which is the digital mode (or 'signalling') of *knowing*, are inherent to a dialectic understanding of the *relatedness* functioning as learning. The nature of these relating processes of becoming and knowing are explored as detail with these on-going chapters of the thesis.

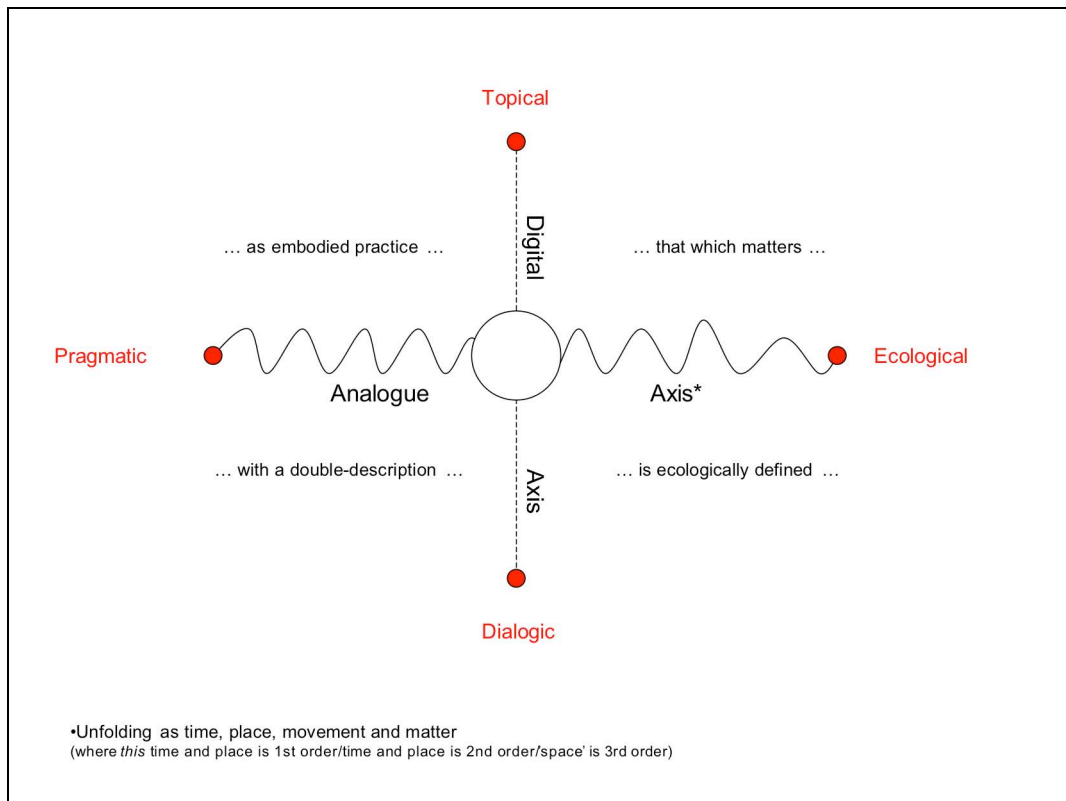


Figure 0-1 – The Figure of Practical Learning

Working with ecologies and topics is descriptive and formal, showing us something of the pragmatics and dialogics made and unmade as *used* and changing topographical guides for organising practice. A topography renders a thick contextualisation of the times, places and relations for which topographical guides are functional and thus opens or ‘lifts-up’ for exploration new entry points for changed practice. Nonetheless, the necessary starting point for any new contextualisations is always with content. The functionality of topographical guides is conditional *on, from* and *for* specific texts<sup>2</sup>. These ‘texts’ are labelled ‘topographical guides’ in order to foreground the ecological-pragmatic and topical-dialogic nature of their making and teleological constitution<sup>3</sup>.

Practical learning is continually instanced by and with the use of topographical guides, instruments of a sort that might be likened to a notion of ‘prosthetic devices’ which have an ‘indicative function ... like a blind person’s stick ... or ... the pointers on dials indicating some

<sup>2</sup> As a cyclical, multidimensional continuum, intertextuality or weave from ‘forms of talk’ to ‘public documentation’ to ‘forms of talk’, and onwards processing.

<sup>3</sup> A complex teleology constructed for this project as the *forcing* or *power* of trans/inter and contextualising relating processes to generate texts, frames or ways of going-on that are beyond the view or control of any one ‘unit’, i.e. as individual, group, team, organisation, society ...

remote state of the world' (Shotter, 1995: 139). These guides are constructed implicitly and explicitly about and with intertextual practices. A key example of this dynamic processing for development-aid is the logical framework matrix and the *out and in-workings* of this device as used for formal organising texts such as guidelines or protocols (and even policy). An organising-device (instrument, tool or process) generally relates, as rationale and orientation, to a macro-discourse. In the case of the logical or 'log-frame' the general discourse of orientation is a form of positive or scientific management – grown originally for engineering-type industries; military, construction, mass production etc. – and often talked for this particular organising context with umbrella-terms such as 'logical modelling' (OECD and Worldbank, 2005) or, at a second order of abstraction, as 'effective aid'. In order to work 'coherently', when coherence means that methods are attuned to the needs of the world about and beyond<sup>4</sup>, a learning orientation is required that enables continual appraisal of what and how we do that which we do, understood as contingent practice (Garfinkel, 1967). *What* and *How* are all of a piece, one action; although the nature of the functional *relating* proper to *doing* that action is curious and complex.

Therefore 'practical learning' is not just a useful term, it is a new language for learning as practice. It is a way of recognising our 'ethnomethods'<sup>5</sup>– our common ways of accomplishing our knowledges as the ways which enable us as actors, as performers, and as *relating* processes – in order to *take them on*<sup>6</sup>. The goal is to generate paths whereby such practical learning appraisal becomes common everyday practice; a way of doing/learning in which many people are already skilled. This is a deuterio-learning perspective and task since we are considering 'a practical learning of practical learning' in order to practically learn with cycles of ecological practice. Such an ecology of learning imagines participative and inclusive organising practice as more than seems currently the case. The challenge is reflexive. It requires many new ways of imagining, describing, framing<sup>7</sup> and exploring that can help us to design tools and processes in less one-dimensional fashion as we do at present, as *organisation* above all.

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<sup>4</sup> This is one way in which public service organisations are fundamentally different from organisations ordered for commerce. A public service organisation is attentive to the needs of the environment in order to *respond* appropriately, shaping that environment no doubt in the manner of response – but not intending to sell a product. Attentiveness to the changing needs of the environment is critical in a *particular way* for organisations tasked with participating in the creation of the common and social good. This is why the ecological/pragmatic – topical/dialogic frame-for-learning is particularly useful here.

<sup>5</sup> To adjust a term from *Ethnomethodology* (Garfinkel, 1967; Francis and Hester, 2004)

<sup>6</sup> That is 'critique' and 'develop', i.e. *go-on* with them using an attentive eye.

<sup>7</sup> Especially with 'instrumental practice'.

**Topography:** noun

The arrangement of the natural or artificial physical features of an area: *the topography of the island*;

- a detailed description or representation on a map of such features
- Anatomy and Biology: the distribution of parts or features on the surface of or within an organ or organism

Origin: Late Middle English via late Latin from Greek *topographia*, from **topos** ‘place’ + *graphia* (‘writing’)

(OED)

This definition, actually a series of situated descriptions might be linked to the poem, ‘The Naming of Parts’ by Henry Reed<sup>8</sup>. This text came to the fore as conversation between me and my research supervisor. At the time it was referenced by my supervisor I could not make a clear connection and yet I knew there was one. I noticed with a subtle opaqueness that the text was useful, but not enough to take notice at the time. Its usefulness becomes apparent as this particular cycle became ‘complete’. With a sense of it for the frame of current purpose and task – which is to outline a topographical approach to describing method – ‘The Naming of Parts’ becomes a practical resource for learning. This little episode of meaning-making offers clues as to the nature of relating processes for practical learning. As will become apparent, the naming of parts – or abductive describing – generates abstracted meaning in powerful ways.

Phenomenological methods are about nature, the essences of topics (things, phenomena, relations between them, and the like) reached with describing acts of *a posteriori* reflection. The power of describing for knowledge-making is at the heart of the rationale of topography. There is the movement of *naming* (which includes noticing – the question of perception) and a short description of the ‘thing in itself’, which is an ‘arrangement of features’. We can notice that all nature of *things* (for want of a better word) is to be found with the describing which curiously, even in itself, is an arrangement of features, a naming of parts.

From the strange symmetry of potential-being (Matte Blanco, 1975, Dalal, 1998)<sup>9</sup> the active response of *becoming*, a *noticing* that is at once *naming* or topicalising, that is at once *describing*, that is

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<sup>8</sup> *New Statesman and Nation* Vol. 24, No. 598 (8<sup>th</sup> August 1942)

<sup>9</sup> Symmetry as the necessary ‘ground’, ‘nothingness’ or ‘infinite setting’ for becoming is explored with Chapter Six.

at once *organising* as recipes, classifications and figures that is at once *exploration, experimentation* or even, to foreground its *receptive* nature, ‘experientation’ is at once a *noticing*, a *naming* and on it goes. From the ‘first’<sup>10</sup> description of any thing, topic or how as itself, the picture (and it is surely a graph, a script, and of multiple dimensions) is thickened, coloured, con/textualised as a ‘detailed description or representation *on a map*’ towards which a disciplinary description of another thing in itself, ‘the distribution of parts *on the surface of or within* an organ or organism’ comes about. So, each time we are returned to description as the analogue-surrounding, the unending, going-on process of knowing – whether we like it or not – to which the necessary *response* (also whether we like it or not) is figuring, the most curious feature of which is timelessness, and which, because of our ‘time-ness’, is very difficult to grasp.

I have written description and figuring *response* as if a period of passing-time were of the nature of the describing-action, when in fact our describing is figuring and our figuring is describing. It seems in the end a matter of preference where to *begin* our attending – so that even the notions of deductive and inductive method get a bit fuzzy. And there is the topic of *method* as what is at stake here.

Methods are a way of slowing up the process of knowing so that we can notice with a deuteroreturn<sup>11</sup> how we are achieving or producing what we are doing anyway. By means of reflexive attending we take our ‘doing anyway methods’ *on* (as every sense of the phrase) with *a priori* steps of tentative ‘knowing’, that is, poising *about and with* (Shotter, 2008) the unknown as something akin to the actions of scaffolding or darning. Thus we *try-out* and *play-with* to create new knowledges – which become of course descriptions of *then* new experiences – returning us to an *a posteriori* orientation. By means of a notion of *abduction* in which the parts are set apart and described for a ‘return’ using bracketing methods such as *sequencing* or *storying* practical learning takes place<sup>12</sup>. The abductive method *places* the parts in a describing cycle that is un-ending

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<sup>10</sup> There is of course no ‘first’, we find ourselves as a ‘given world’; as Alice noticed when, ‘Just at this moment, somehow or other, they began to run. [She] never could quite make out, in thinking it over afterwards, how it was that they began’ (Carroll, 1973: 214), a situation recognised by relational constructionism (Dachler and Hosking, 1995, Hosking, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> As like being on two floors of a building, or inside and outside a sphere at once.

<sup>12</sup> This abductive method might be likened to Shotter’s notion of practice as ‘finding and making’ that is ‘not a process of induction (for it does not depend on the discovery of any regularities), not is it one of inference (for the unique and particular nature of circumstances cannot be understood by assimilating their details to any already established theoretical categories and premises). As each part of the description is supplied, a conceptual whole has to be fashioned to accommodate it. Mentally, we have to construct a context (world) into which it can fit and play its part, where each new fact points to or indicates a reality in

(although here will end for the pragmatic purpose of finishing this text) as a mirroring of the phenomena of learning itself; as Bateson notes, ‘*wholes* can never be presented’ (2002: 106). This text (as writing and reading) becomes like getting on a bus or a train, as passenger and conductor at once. Going along/about/with/in/on – it cannot be conclusive – we just decide to get off this particular bus at a certain stop.

Noting abductive and describing methods of practical learning as going-on does not discount the praxis question, the ‘so what’ injunction of any knowing project. For this text, the moral ground held is a position for ‘participation’ *with* or *as* any process; whether abstracted as ‘learning’, knowledge-making, organising or development-aid. It is a position made and held with personal experiences, understandings, beliefs and desires. There is nothing more to say about that only to state my belief that it is better to include than exclude, to explore rather than ignore, to generate participation and recognition rather than dictate or mandate too quickly; on the basis that *generative-life* becomes (with) such relating processes. This is a personal as well as professional praxis. Order is required for coordinated and collaborative action, peace and security; for knowing anything. But importantly, all ordering for *generation* requires attending, open ecologies enabled for change according to the diversity they evoke.

With his poem, ‘The Naming of Parts’, Reed juxtaposes the language of pedantic military instruction with the lyrical description of nature. When set together, they generate a symbolic knowledge, slightly humorous, clearly ironic. From ‘The Naming of Parts’ Reed went on to complete his ‘Lessons of War’ series with titles such as, ‘Judging Distances’<sup>13</sup> (a study in time) and ‘Movement of Bodies’<sup>14</sup> (a study in place) in which this symbolic-play is extended and brings force to the practical meaning of war. It is a powerful method of critique. A method of abduction that renders new message. As such, in aesthetic mode these poems expose the workings and limitations of orders when following narrow logics.

### *Some Textual Practices for Practical Learning*

There are some textual comments to make at this point of presentation that are more than *merely* technical; attending to the functioning of the con/text of the text. The predicament is with

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which they all have their place or function. And the hermeneutical process continues as each new fact is added to the account: the whole must be progressively transformed and articulated, metamorphosed in fact, in a two-way, back-and-forth process, in such a way as to afford all the parts of the whole an undistorted accommodation. In this form of knowing, then, a process of making or construction is at work.’ (Shotter, 1995: 140-141)

<sup>13</sup> *New Statesman and Nation* Vol. 25, no. 628 (6th March 1943)

<sup>14</sup> *Listener* Vol. 43, no. 1106 (6th April 1950)

writing as linear fashion since, ‘language itself has a basic time-related property: linearity’ (Verschuieren, 1999: 151). This is the property that makes sequencing so important for communication<sup>15</sup>. The construction is made with linear systems of communication, i.e. typographical marks on a page at first order of abstraction<sup>16</sup>, and ‘English’ at second order of abstraction. Since the text increasingly becomes ‘about’ (but also ‘with’ as reflexive mode) dialectic patterning as practical learning, it becomes necessary to invent and imagine with the language-use of the language to hand, semantically, syntactically and graphically with typographical marks. This challenge is not considered a problem to be endured but rather as a praxis of learning since working *with* the language-to-hand strikes me as fitting to the general topic and in harmony with the predicaments of common organising practice. For these reasons some *latitude* is hoped for from the reader in order to *go-on with* some of the ways in which I play ‘about’ and ‘with’ words and terms. In order to discover the sense, rhyme and reason of the text emerging, one needs to be flexible on some of the more commonly fixed uses of ‘Keyboard English’.

To give some example of these ‘plays’ or contingent practices the following are noted. Footnotes are used when there are a variety of ‘faces’ or aspects of a point to be held in place simultaneously, as are brackets (such as these). Such measures assist in managing the lateral and directional tension of the text. Secondly, many words are placed aside others when, as a sort of ‘a-syntactical’ or ‘more-symmetric mode’, items such as ‘about/with’ or ‘for/by/with’ or ‘to/for’ are co-placed. To ‘duetero-ise’ semantically, items such as ‘explain/explore’ or ‘position/place’ are co-placed using the ‘/’ mark (backslash) as with Figures 2, 3 and 4 below.

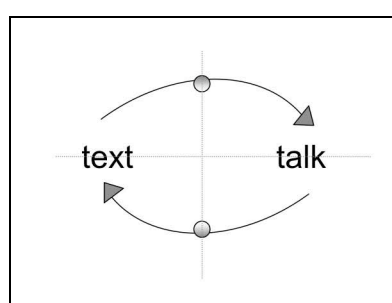


Figure 0-2 - The Dialectic Dynamic of Talk/Text

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<sup>15</sup> And a challenging task for the processing/textualising of this text.

<sup>16</sup> Already abstracted from *mark* with the use of computerised technology – the text curiously is materialised ‘at the end’, when *printed out*.

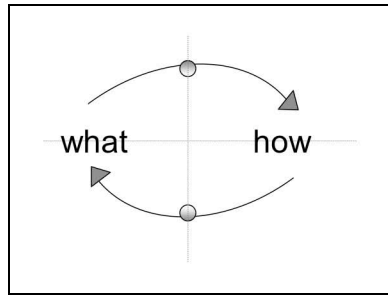


Figure 0-3 - The Dialectic Dynamic of What/How

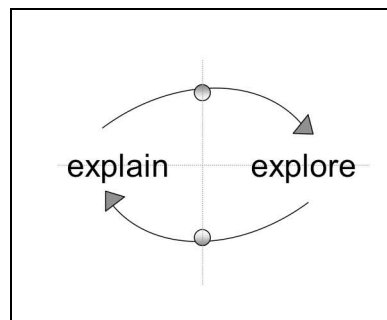


Figure 0-4 - The Dialectic Dynamic of Explain/Explore

The thesis and structure of this text as its parts, as language-used, aims to attend to its dialectical making. Using devices such as ‘/’ enables the placing of propositions as *relating*. This strategy also enables a holding with tension important deconstructions such as ‘con/text’, thus keeping the relating nature of this dynamic continually, ‘to hand’, ‘in mind’. And again, when the ways in which a text becomes social/relational<sup>17</sup> are of such importance, they are continually presenced or held in place for/by/with this textualising strategy.

The ‘-’ mark (dash) is used to link or couple words in different ways as complex actions, which seems also an analogue relating method. This is useful since with this device a meaning, especially a commonly used meaning, can be ‘played-with’ or flexed/shifted, so that the relating of form and function can be collapsed somewhat while with the same instance held-in-place (!!). A thus graphicalised syntactical-form, that *shows* as ‘method-in-use’ or ‘language-used’, aligns/differentiates the figuring in question as analogue-surrounding/digital-signalling. The use of brackets is also taken-up to hold in place different modes of a concept or action at once. For example ‘order(ing)’ as a way of noting two uses of this word-item for which ‘order’ is nominal and ‘ordering’ is functional. By textualising as a complex-item in this way the dialectic structuring

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<sup>17</sup> Here’s the use in fact because *this social/relational dynamic* best expressed does not carry an ‘and’ as if social *and* relational were different, in fact they are distinctive descriptions, hence the holding of the distinction, and the space of the relation, with the “/”.



or relating process of the construct is shown somewhat so that it can be remembered in the moment that ‘order’ becomes ‘ordering’ becomes ‘order’ becomes ordering and so on ...

Ancient Greek (including original lettering) is used as a describing method where instancing traces of early contextualisation of a word-item enhances potential use by generating another extension or embodiment. This method is also useful as a way of *disturbing* the text a little. Taken-up as a praxis, a jolt-in-flow that does no harm and makes for a ‘stop’ momentarily, keeps the general message for learning generating this text as exploration to hand – How/About learning/organising processes sufficiently open to difference?

Finally, there is some playfulness with word-terms that is necessary to at least liquify or loosen the boundaries of some common or expected constructions ordered to the ‘thingness’ of English. This at times makes the syntax (and therefore meaning) seem peculiar, certainly unfamiliar. When typing the phrase, ‘trying to map out patterns with matrices that showed *something* of the actions being accomplished’, it occurred to me that the more precise formulation from my perspective would be, ‘trying to map out patterns with matrices that showed *somehow(s)* of the actions being accomplished’. With this syntax we still are provoked to imagine an *object* that makes the term intelligible with the preposition ‘of’, i.e. without an implied *object* the term would reduce to, ‘trying to map out patterns with matrices that showed *somehow* the actions being accomplished’, when this ‘somehow’ stands-for the particular construction practices of the actions being accomplished. These explorations show Shotter’s insight that we talk *as if* in order to create a materiality for going-on with (2008).

Placing these textual uses for the context of practical learning it is helpful to note that language is ‘a syntax and category system appropriate for the discussion of things that can be handled, while really discussing the patterns and contingencies of relationship’ (Bateson, 1972: 372). Bateson thus affirms that it is the possession of hands which is the critical factor for the development of language, ‘human beings use language, which is primarily oriented toward things, to discuss relationships’ (1972: 372), meaning that syntactical and categorical languages are ultimately ‘thing language[s]’ (1972: 375). Now, since the topic of this text is not ‘things’ in any sense, although they must be talked *about* and *with*, it is easy enough to see how there might be some difficulty in making the cloth to measure. From ‘things’ the movement here is initially towards the ‘matters to hand’ talked by organisational members as that which matters, then towards ‘topics’ that mark and stand-for a general processual milieu of going-on practice that I am calling ‘practical learning’ – and practical learning described as story, topograph, dialectic pattern and reflexive enquiry as research practice. Noting how language functions indirectly Bateson shows how the

learning of context, or deuterio-learning requires learning to attend laterally, dialogically, dialectically – as roundabout ways, for different articulations of what might become ‘practical’.

### *Planning to Plan’ – Practical Learning as Irish Aid*

The general and pressing predicaments of Irish Aid are those predicaments to which Irish Aid as a development-aid organisation responds. There is a circuitous logic to this statement that is akin to ‘begging a question’; nonetheless there is also a sense in which the logics of learning are *relational* as signalling processes of interaction between environment and agency, exigency and response, context and task; to label some ways of this dynamic phenomenon. Taking an organisational learning perspective on the workings of organisation sets the focus on *learning as organising practice*, or to use another term from the literature, ‘theory in use’ (Argyris and Schön, 1996). Thus learning becomes a term linked to meaning/knowledge and sense-making beyond a narrow technical, propositional-knowledge or skill-based understanding of the word. An on-going framing activity that is not static, learning embodies and is embodied with discursive practices for organisation such as meetings and document-drafting. Learning is an activity that goes-on, but also *moves-on* the practice in some ways. Conclusions about that practice are continually reached. Some are generative, some degenerative – although judgement may not always be clear-cut as processes are incomplete and polymorphous, intertextual and at many places and times. Organising processes have a *processual logic* that includes these complexities. In the midst learning going on with particular organising tasks forms and goes-on making epistemological and sense-making principles, models, values and operational rubrics, understood as relating processes. On these terms some texts as language-used, documents drafted and interpretations made (at meetings and interviews) render access to a textual approach to organising practice. With the texts, and the processes by which they are generated, organisational learning practice is explored as ‘practical learning’ with organising tasks.

Strategic Planning is one such task for which learning plays an important role. Taking ‘predicaments’, the ‘matters to hand’ figuring for the present moment, as frames for organisational response, strategic planning is a way by which organisation orders itself for the task in hand as response to a pressing environment. For Irish Aid, the global task is ‘poverty reduction’ (White Paper on Irish Aid, 2006) which with the changing practices of the harmonising/aligning development-aid architecture need new operational articulation on many terms including the planning and organisation of Country Strategy Papers.

For this organisational exigency some key terms emerged during the data generation periods – ‘coherence’ for Head Office/Quarters, as a marker for communication, connection and aligned policy and actions; and ‘linkages’ for the ‘Field’, how they might be identified, understood and

made across a whole programme for a programme country. Living with these predicaments in the 'Field' is increasingly an experience of rounds of meetings in the capital cities of the developing world. Meetings with groups from ministries of health or education, meetings between donor, or sectoral groups, meetings with civil society partners or funding agencies. As head offices, this means meetings for coherence and communication, and searches for ways of rationalising and aligning the complex strands of any programme, and across programmes as a whole. This is the overarching story of Irish Aid presenting with the data generated. As a 'connecting pattern' (Bateson, 2002) this global story figures with all the texts, as topics-talked in different ways, at all stages of data generation.

Planning (strategic and business) as Irish Aid is understood as a critical organisational concern or 'matter to hand' with which organisational learning was going-on at the time of data generation. It is initially explored as stories of 'planning to plan' as an organisational response to patterns of growing complexity, exigency and the forms of 'gap discourse' foregrounded with Chapter Three. This is an organisational story of 'planning to plan' that goes-on towards future actions and practices. It is a story of deuterio-learning and change, also rooted by a description of practical learning with a CPS Process in a particular programme country. It is the beginning of a description that moves from a pattern of story towards second-order patterns under the terms of pragmatics and dialectics in order to create new possibilities as organising for reflexive enquiry.

#### *Rationale for Exploring Strategic Planning with CSPs as Practical Learning*

Planning as an organisational process foregrounds the contingent nature of practice for which central questions might be termed as, What should we do? How best to do it? It is also discursive practice *about* discursive and operational practice, in other words can be classed in a sense as *organisational* learning for organisation, or indeed as a certain form of double-looped, if not necessarily *deuterio* learning. Planning becomes the focus of this description for some other opportune and critical reasons also.

Firstly, whether in the strategic mode of planning a country programme for a five-year period, or in the business and management mode of organising coordinated team activities, planning is a heavily-tooled practice that gives a tangible sense – with accessible texts – of the imagined processes of knowing. In this case documents (as artifacts of production) that embody organising process and orientate it towards the future are reviewed. Secondly, at the particular time when data generation was underway, Irish Aid was at an important juncture as organisational identity process whereby a lot of activity was generated for institutionalisation or organisational development and sub-processes of the same. Indeed it might be argued that these planning processes were the connecting or critical *figure* that was 'Irish Aid' over the period of data

generation. The decentralisation of Irish Aid Head Office to Limerick is not irrelevant to this situation.

Many new policies were being drafted for which changes in ways of working were required.<sup>18</sup> These changes needed to be designed using signposts and guides that could function as contingent paths for new practices – the CSP Review Process comes under this rubric. Other examples include the practical challenges presenting to Irish Aid from participation in, and adherence to a number of international protocols such as the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness 2005* and the *EU Code of Conduct on Complementarity and Division of Labour 2007*, both of which required new designs for organisational tasks emerging for the environment. Organisational processes such as quality assurance and monitoring and evaluation, to name a few. The focus on planning attends therefore to living process for the Organisation, as well as orientating the enquiry towards an Irish Aid concern that this research would ‘build on existing systems of knowledge management’<sup>19</sup>.

The planning work going-on came under the general category for Irish Aid of quality assurance<sup>20</sup>, which in turn can be understood as an organisational response to a changing development-aid context and the exigencies of participating in donor group processes such as the DAC peer review. From this perspective ‘planning as quality assurance’ may be framed as a critical organisational learning focus or ‘story’ functional as Irish Aid organising practice during the period of data generation. As these processes are oriented in very practical ways towards the future, and will need to be revisited again and again in due course – this organisational learning perspective remains pertinent to on-going organising practice.

By recognising that a central *figure* for Irish Aid process at the time of data generation, as practice, organisational order and organisational learning, was the function of planning, it is possible to further frame these actions as the organisational learning tasks of planning to ‘plan better’. And here we find a critical reason to foreground planning practice for this description; the stories about learning, and about what practitioners do in their everyday worklives (as a sort of embodied account of that learning) are ‘told against a backdrop of’ (or are ‘relating to’) this particular figure in which the resistances and challenges to such practical shifts take shape. From this juncture we can generate a picture of dialectic learning as Irish Aid – practical, everyday,

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<sup>18</sup> I consider ‘policy development’ a sub-process to ‘planning’ for this project since the focus here is on the coordinated and ordered response *in practice* to a connecting pattern.

<sup>19</sup> [PO1-03/07/06-3]

<sup>20</sup> [PO1-04/07/06-1], [PO1-06/07/06-2]

contingent learning that matters<sup>21</sup> – as well as how that function may be flawed or incomplete in practice.

Equally, the formulation of a ‘(planning to) plan’ relation sets up a deuterological structure to the enquiry which is appropriate for a research focus on organisational learning. A base-premise of organisational learning is that learning as an organisational form is *contextual*, meaning that learning happens in ‘spaces’ of a higher order of abstraction, or of a different logical-type to primary action/reaction (Bateson, 1972). Hence the use of the graphic-device of brackets from the language of mathematics that helps show the differentiation of logical typing, and the contextualising nature of this type of relating process. The ‘(planning to) plan’ formulation shows how the task was one of creating the conditions so that planning would be easier – a response to/for the environment was required for/from the organisation<sup>22</sup>. As ‘(learning to) learn’ this is a practical engagement with organisational learning, an embodiment of the same – so that a story of learning can be told here on practical terms. As becomes clear, for process unfolding in time there are many complexities that even this deuterological structure for attends to inadequately. The fact that Irish Aid was learning to frame planning guidelines just as three CSPs were at an ‘implementing phase’ and several more were in various stages of production, shows that the imagined ‘brackets’ used here for ‘story’ are useful up to a point. They betray the practical reality that most things are happening at once and all the time. There is rarely an opportunity for doing ‘one thing’ and then ‘another’, especially as complex processes of task and accountability such as Irish Aid.

Finally, I note that for the international arena the role, effectiveness and power-relations inherent with planning initiatives and instruments of harmonised development-aid, such as PRSPs and JAS processes, are critical and pressing ‘questions’ for development-aid practitioners and organisations, which gives these explorations with learning as Irish Aid a relevant space within the wider development-aid context.

Figure 5 below graphically shows the general story to be told as ‘Coherence’ and ‘Planning (to Plan)’, while also threading the research process story of topic definition and access over time with the Organisation (as described with Chapters One and Two).

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<sup>21</sup> I.e. The dialectic is always functional in some form (since this is learning and Irish Aid does learn) but is insufficiently attended to.

<sup>22</sup> So note how Irish Aid listens to the environment, gets environmental feedback – through independent review (2002 Report and DACs) as well as the exigencies of participating in donor groups, especially in programme countries – where the most practical implications are ‘logged-out’ and thought through.

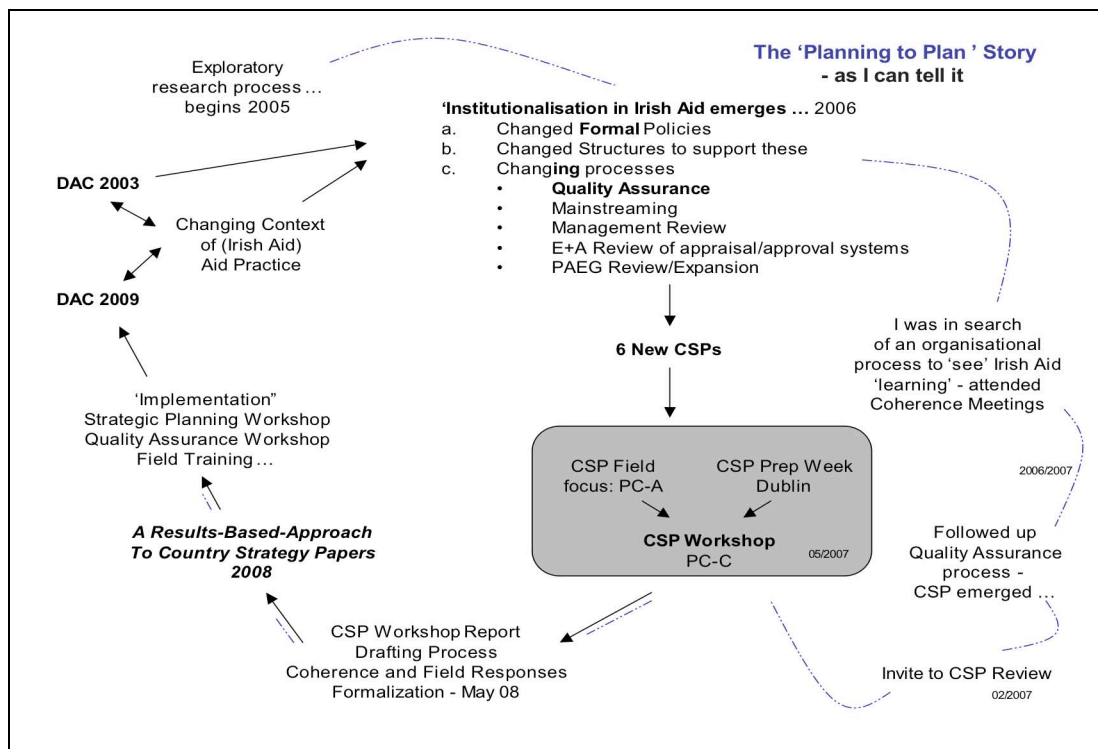


Figure 0-5 - Finding 'Place' for Research Practice with the 'Planning to Plan' CSP Review Story

## Part I: Learning as Organising Coherence - The Figure of 'HQ'

### Story 1: Initial Stages of Planning to Plan'

This particular story can be taken up somewhere between 2002 and 2003 when, after the *Report of the Ireland Aid Review Committee* 'strongly endors[ed] the elaboration of country strategies, in conjunction with the governments concerned, as the key instrument of bilateral aid' (Irish Aid, 2002: 72), the *DAC Peer Review of Ireland* made the following 'considerations for the future':

'Ireland should continue refining its country strategy preparation processes so as to enhance partnership principles further and explore how the preparation of individual civil society strategies can be used to promote local civil society and private sector in programme countries more actively, strategically and directly.

In parallel to its review of management arrangements in programme countries, DCI [Irish Aid] could consider redefining the roles and responsibilities of headquarters and field offices for a range of issues relating to country strategy, programming and operations, financial management and administrative procedures'

(OECD, 2003a: 75 emphasis added)

These suggestions were taken up and over time led to the production of new guidelines, '*A Results Based Approach to Country Strategy Papers*' (Irish Aid, 2008a), approved by the Senior Management Team of Irish Aid in May 2008. The link at this point was clearly made to the initial DAC suggestion (among other reasons outlined for this initiative) internally and publicly:

A. Internally

'Over the last year we have been engaged in the updating of all aspects of the planning/procedures/guidelines leading to approval, implementation and evaluation of Country Strategy Papers (CSPs). The CSPs are the core of the bilateral programme and over a 5 year period expenditures will probably reach over 1.5 billion.

The purpose of the updating is:

- (1) 'To respond to the recommendations of the 2003 OECD DAC Peer Review in preparation for the 2008/09 Peer Review'

*(Source: Internal Email, Irish Aid)*

B. Publicly

'The 2003 OECD/DAC Peer Review of Ireland made recommendations in relation to improving Irish Aid's CSP processes and in 2006 Irish Aid strengthened CSP processes as follows:

- inclusion of programming components in the CSP submission to the Project Appraisal and Evaluation Group (PAEG)
- Focussing on results and performance management
- Formulation of PAEG CSP appraisal and approval criteria
- Development of a CSP Mid-Term Review instrument
- Improved guidelines on CSP annual planning and reporting
- Acknowledging that CSPs can be developed in the context of multi-donor Joint Assistance Strategies'

(Irish Aid, 2008a: 4)

This latter frames the scope of the exploration with planning as organisational learning from the international context from business-planning to everyday performance management.

The significant organising situations emerging during the period from 2003 onwards were a growing ODA budget, new Irish and international commitments to harmonised and aligned aid, and the unfolding process of decentralisation of the Head Office of the Division from Dublin to Limerick. With a felt need for greater organisational capacity, transparency and accountability as well as unease generated from high staff-turnover as part of the planned move, the impetus to formalise many operations and ways of working, managed heretofore with a relatively intuitive or culturally implicit rationale, becomes a strong figure with the data generated. This figure is framed with the general topic of ‘Coherence’ – to take-up an Irish Aid term.

The key year for this part of the data-story is 2006 in which the issues highlighted by the *DAC Review* of 2003, coupled with other changes, began to come to fruition as public organisational talk in the form of initiatives such as new Programme Coherence Meetings, Cluster Groups from the Technical Section, and Cross-Sectional Meetings such as those between CSP Focal Persons (Development Specialists) and ‘Desks’ based in the Sections of Programme Countries I and II. This ‘coherence-talk’, formally *textualising* yet again in 2007/08 with the new policies, guidelines and instruments produced and adopted by Senior Management, becomes the ‘surface’, or ‘text’ to which this research project relates and responds. This description of the documentation, which maps a particular story of institutional change, generates a sense of the organisational context for which the talked texts explored with Chapter Five offer a ‘thicker’ or more ‘coloured-in’ surface topography.

In the interim period from 2003 to 2006 the key movements seem to be simultaneously the articulation of the *CSP Guidelines 2004* (which remained in draft form throughout their ‘lifetime’); the establishment of the ‘Technical Section’ in the Division coupled with the development of strategic and business planning – initially in Technical Section and then extended across the Division; the beginnings in earnest of the policy development process; and finally, the elaboration of CSPs for Uganda 2004-2006, Ethiopia 2005-2007 and Lesotho 2005-2007. The 2004 *CSP Guidelines* set out their purpose:

‘... to provide direction to DCI [Irish Aid] staff in Dublin and in the field to develop Country Strategy Plans which are responsive to an evolving programming context, are of the highest quality and whose preparation and content reflects a high degree of consistency across the DCI programme.’



(Irish Aid, 2004a: 1)

The provision of direction was necessary in order to improve the structure and process of development of CSPs for an atmosphere of institutional changes ‘within DCI’, ‘changes in the programming context internationally, and within partner countries’, and ‘to bring a greater degree of consistency to the manner in which CSPs are developed and to the structure of CSP documents’ (Irish Aid, 2004a). These *Guidelines* note why it is necessary to revise the approach to CSPs, the details of what a CSP is, how it should function, its scope, principles of development, suggested process and timelines, relevant roles and responsibilities, and include some evaluation and monitoring indications. This is a twelve-page straightforward text that was not intertextualised throughout the organisation in a meaningful way *as a formal text* since at the CSP Review Workshop it was clear that many people did not know the text, or even of its existence. Nonetheless they had been working with the emerging CSPs according to its suggested practices, and certainly in response to the changing process and procedural contexts highlighted therein. This is so in such ways that the subsequent judgement that, ‘These Guidelines were not presented for formal approval by the Senior Management Group at that time but were accepted and applied as de facto principles’ (Irish Aid, 2007b: 2) rings true.

From this twelve-page document, through the learning and formalisation process under discussion here, there resulted a published ‘user-friendly support for HQ and Embassies/Missions to develop and implement better quality Country Strategy Papers’ (Irish Aid, 2008a: 4) of sixty-two pages, with accompanying summary booklet (twenty-seven pages) and Resources DVD on which key documentation in five separate components is recorded. The difference between these two texts from 2004 and 2008, from the perspective of this research, is the *process* of their formulation or contextualisation – a difference reflected in their comparative lengths and complexity. The former text embodying implicitly a drafting process in which few, and probably Head Office-based persons participated; the latter embodying the reflections and struggles of many people, across the Division and field, with their particular CSP-making processes going-on and the rigors of designing guidelines that would reflect their experiences and be ‘user-friendly’ for a constantly-changing, and at times novice staff. A key change is that one of the first features that strikes on initial reading of the 2008 text is its tone of accessibility and simple explanation.

This organisational process of learning and change, from the recognition of a need for wide-ranging institutional formalisation to the official articulation of one major component, Programme Country Strategic Planning, is the story that is told here as an organisational learning story. The plot-points that will be followed in order to identify features of the connecting-pattern

that function in this particular learning ecology are broadly speaking, instances of the organisational search for coherence ('programme coherence meetings' and 'clusters'), tracked here towards processes ordered to strategic planning as quality assurance (incorporating new strategic directions, ways of working and operationalising instruments) and particularly described with two distinct but organisationally related con/texts – the organisational event of the CSP Review Workshop, and a knowledge/learning-audit of the CSP Process of a particular programme country, PC-A.

### *Story 2: Coherence – programme meetings/agenda/clusters*

During 2005 a new space 'emerged' at Head Office in order to enable, 'an opportunity to bring in conversations from the margins, from the corridors, from the coffee shop' (*member interview*). The name used for this purpose was formally articulated in Meeting Notes as 'Programme Coherence Meetings', but talked about the place simply as 'Coherence'. These meetings were imagined as open, living conversations in many respects:

We have one page Coherence minutes, people get it and can read it in one minute, any longer and it gets put in an electronic file for later and then forgotten about. The end is to stop, stand out, the minutes go out within forty-eight hours, then people can come back and comment. There are PAEG minutes, these are detailed and different. There are changing terms of reference all the time, we want flexibility about issues we might talk about. This is emerging policy, we need debate, disagreement etc., talk about the political issue that no-one is talking about for example. As we worked through the process the sharpness has emerged ... we want to take a look at where we are spending money, where the programme is going, about issues in the organisations we are funding. There are no TORs for it, they straight-jacket it, actually the agenda is the TORs. It is a part of the machinery, it is where the brain of the Division is located, all things come in, are absorbed and thought through. It is the driver where it all comes together.

*(member interview, November 2006)*

This organisational response to the context of 'emerging policy' was in many senses synchronistic; a response to 'a need to make things clear, think things through', and was generated from an experience of 'the two sides ... not connecting, the mindset was disconnected' (*member interview*). When Coherence began to take shape from a very practical decision for a joint country visit that included members of the different sections of 'Programme Countries', 'Civil Society' and 'Multilateral UN, EU',

It suddenly was right. People were ... saying “this is the right thing to do”. In a sense their own vision took shape, there was a need there but no-one had articulated it. When this meeting began people said to me, “great, this is really what I wanted”.

*(member interview, November 2006)*

The engagement was also to be qualitative in a way that would enhance the analytic capacity of the organisation,

We need to ensure that the debate is as open as possible, Coherence is part of our governance. It is a debate that never stops and we need to let the debate run, we need to get out from under the bonnet and look at the whole garage, it is an opportunity to look up. We invite the Political Division from DFA, for example the issues about PC-C, they do come, it makes it Department wide.

*(member interview, November 2006)*

This very positive view of ‘Coherence’ was reiterated again in 2007 when the CSP Review Workshop was in preparation at Head Office, ‘The Field don’t know who brings all together, we have worked on this with Coherence Meetings, to bring together the Headquarters view, shaping up this’ *(member interview, April 2007)*. The desire to keep this space alive and critical was reflected in various operational dimensions as noted in an email instruction to the note-taker for Coherence, ‘we agreed brief notes should be taken at all future meetings, with an emphasis on follow-up action points, decisions made/to be made’ *(internal email, 05/10/05 [POBF-emails])*.

Over the period from October 2005 to December 2007 sixty-one Coherence Meetings were held (an estimated ninety hours of talk). In 2006, thirty-four meetings took place with a concentration from February to March (seven), and October to December (sixteen), showing the October to March period (at year ‘ends’) as a key ‘planning to plan’ timespan for Head Office (*see Fig. 6*).

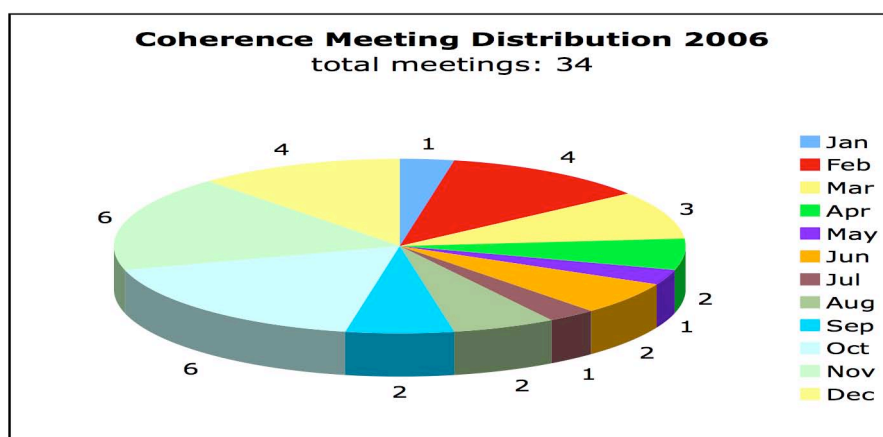


Figure 0-6 - Coherence Meetings 2006

A similar chart for 2007 shows a more even distribution with fewer meetings and therefore less talk-time<sup>23</sup> suggesting a slight shift with the overall organisational process, possibly from ‘planning to plan’ to the planning work itself, i.e. completing six CSPs – which could also be interpreted as an emerging shift of critical focus from Head Office to the embassies and regional connections in the Field (*see Fig. 7*).

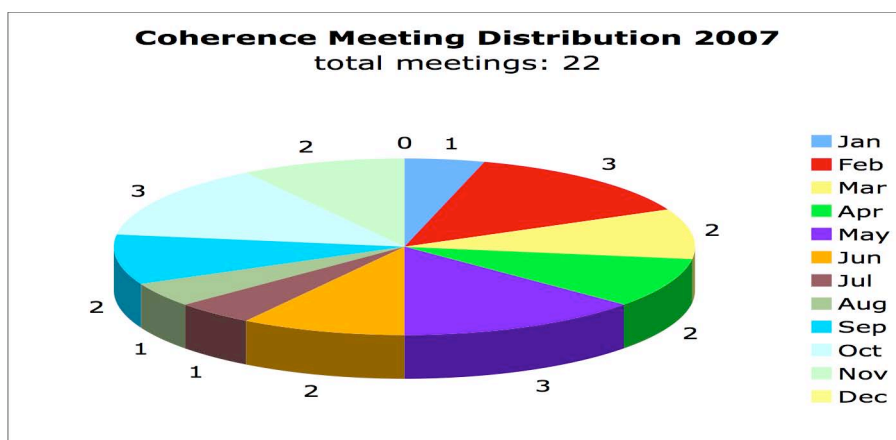


Figure 0-7 - Coherence Meetings 2007

The emergence of specific ‘Coherence Meetings’ as Irish Aid-practice was a responsive strategy to a felt need for greater connectedness as ways of working; which in turn is a second-order response to the need for policy coherence as part of the international harmonisation agenda. In practice this need is most critically experienced as a search for organisational ability to see and make the critical connections across country programmes, through the new interpretive patterns

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<sup>23</sup>Calculated at approximately thirty-one hours based on precedence while the 2006 calculation was empirically generated from participant research-practice data.

of mainstreaming cross-cutting issues<sup>24</sup>, or in the face of the practical challenges of coordination with a SWAp, or defining a CSP process in the context of an advancing JAS process. The term 'Coherence' is also linked formally to the guiding principles for quality assurance and aid effectiveness (White Paper on Irish Aid, 2006: 9) as with the notion of 'policy coherence' across different government departments as an important feature of ODA rigor. As one organisational member remarked, 'There is a pyramid of coherence'.

The fact that communication across sections of Irish Aid should figure prominently in this environment is not a suprising response to, and is a constitutive feature of, the advent of international policy articulation for development-aid discourse with the Millenium Development Goals and the Rome and Paris Declarations etc.. As data was generated and issues of communication lacks, barriers and failures were figuring; Irish Aid was in the process of discovering how to respond to the same. These are not parallel processes. The research goal of exploring the talking of organisation was figuring the 'talk of organisation' as the 'matter to hand', especially that talk that seemed to repeat or get recontextualised for different contexts thus indicating an intertextual and critical pattern.

Several initiatives for communication and connection were in train, some more apt than others. An interesting example of a search for coherence that was unsustainable were the 'Cluster Groups' at Head Office. This initiative seems to have found place through the Technical Section Business Planning process from which development specialists formed into groups or 'clusters' around specific issues. These were formulated as 'key performance areas' or KPAs labelled as, 'Human Development', 'Cross-Sectoral', 'Development Processes' and 'Administration', and were linked into a 'management of responsibility-matrix' for their progression (Irish Aid, 2005b: 17-19).

This connecting-pattern was designed in order to define the role, as well as make accessible, technical specialisations across the Division, and included subordinate needs of peer support for development specialists working in different sections, maintaining their identity within Irish Aid, while also generating a 'well functioning management sub-structure' [PO1-27/06/06-1]. These needs were defined according to an institutional background characterised as a 'a public service model that does not respect teamwork across sections'. It was a strategy envisaged as a 'way of managing differences ... [creating] structures that facilitate cross-sectional dialogue ... and organisational exchange'. An organisational member from Technical Section recognised nonetheless that 'in some ways [we] further marginalised ourselves because we did planning and structured teamwork' (*all quotes from member interview* [PODec05/Int.7]). In other words, the very way of working ordered towards generating connection was judged in fact as contributing to

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<sup>24</sup> Gender, Governance, HIV/AIDS and Environment (White Paper on Irish Aid, 2006)

marginalisation. There were related difficulties with the Cluster approach as it unfolded; time-pressures, work-loads, varying degrees of quality in cluster-leadership and a certain sense of these being ‘add-on’ structures that were burdensome in ways that were not serving their initial purpose [PO1-27/06/06-1]. The conclusion of this initiative seems to have come with a judgement that teamwork was a failure for the Division.

What strikes here is the defensive nature of this intertextual construction in which the identity of the Technical Section is imagined as something to ‘maintain’ in a somewhat alien environment where development specialists require ‘peer support’ [PO1-27/06/06-1] and an ‘opportunity to input into discussions’ (*member interview* [PODec05/Int.7]). Where those with specialist knowledge are ‘trying to put it in some form of institutional base’ (*member interview* [PODec05/Int.7]). The specialist role is imagined as, in ways incongruent, or without a natural ‘home’ within the organisation, and teamwork is designated as alien to the Division as a whole. While real experiences will have generated these perceptions, it is noted that this model was unsustainable – enjoying a relatively short institutional life-span. According to the textual data it was insufficiently integrated into people’s organisational roles and responsibilities as institutionally defined. This cycle of organisational learning can be understood as just that, as an experiment that ‘outlived its (anticipated) value’ [PO1-27/06/06-1], but that nonetheless was, at a time, a way to ‘go-on’. The awareness that lead to knowing this *organisationally* came though a discernment of incongruity – in which cluster work was experienced as ‘something extra’ – that was perhaps already present in the assumptions guiding initial design and which are suggested here as defensive positions that were ultimately, organisationally unsustainable.

These initiatives for coherence offer some insight into the lessons being learnt. That talking across sections is helpful, ‘the right thing to do’, while teamwork is judged ‘incongruent with the public service model’ and as ‘failed’ for this context. Nonetheless, it is precisely teamwork that becomes key for the CSP process of PC-A under the rubric of ‘clusters’ as will be described below. For the cluster-teams of PC-A the different elements of the CSP are grouped and managed on a week to week basis [cf. the ‘three big things’ document]. This is the way of working that is subsequently institutionalised for the new CSP Guidelines as ‘an essential element of developing and implementing the CSP’ (Irish Aid, 2008a: 10). From a wide-perspective the question of teamwork as a viable model for coherence (including communication, linkage and effectiveness) is organisationally in the balance since intertextualisation of the approach seems partial. Possibly this mode of working in coordinated fashion is more easily established with the Embassies/Missions of programme countries than for the practical learning practice of Head Office? If this is the case the question can be asked, ‘Why is it so?’ The answer may lie with the bias of public organisation towards decision-making as primary action, that which is most highly

valued and remunerated with formal textualisations – from logical models to job descriptions to business planning frames – meritocracy seems environmentally problematic for team approaches which makes this an ecology of learning consideration. It seems that without learning to learn about and with meritocracy as prime ordering or ‘stabiliz[ing] effect’ (Hosking, 2004, Hosking and Mc Namee, 2006c, Hosking, 2007) the on-going construction of an ecology of ‘team approach’ will be under-contextualised.

### *Story 3: Coherence Agenda as TORs leading Institutional Texts and the CSP Review*

Organisational members, especially at Head Office interpreted ‘Coherence’ meetings and the terms of reference (TORs) for them as the unfolding agenda making the structure potentially very responsive and flexible. A simple scan of agenda items over the period of 2006 into the first quarter of 2007, shows instances of organisational public-talk featuring a range of topics including updates on the process of CSP Guidelines as they emerged through CSPs in Programme Countries; policy and strategy drafting updates and discussions; PAEG proposal appraisals; reports on field visits and particular events such as workshops or international fora; and occasional reports from other types of Irish Aid programmes such as the HIV/AIDS Initiative, Partnership and funding instruments, civil society programmes such as MAPS, and some multilateral funding partnership agreements. The most recurring agenda item over the period is the CSP Generation and Review Process, noted at times under a ‘regular items’ label [eg. PC Meeting Agenda-19/05/06-6], with the ‘policy drafting process’ in second place.

It is also noted that the developing process of meeting practice as suggested in the changing formats of agendas. In 2005 the agenda is predominantly of a reporting style noting many items (eg. [PC Meeting Agenda-08/12/05]) with little detail. This style changes as the CSP and policy making tasks unfold over 2006 and into 2007. From mid-2007 there are indications of a need to manage the agenda more tightly; agendas become on the whole shorter<sup>25</sup>, discussions are provisionally timed, people are marked to guide discussion of the item, and items are signposted for ‘discussion’, short or ‘general’, or for simple reporting, updating etc. Initially, as described with interview data above the format was envisaged as open and flexible. As time goes on with this process, some more conventional practices become apparent such as creating a ‘minutes and matters arising’ item, as well as an ‘AOB’ item. It seems that as this process, which emerged very much as a practical need, repeated and became normal practice – a natural institutionalisation process took place, so much so, that this initiative aimed at creating better communication and links across the programme on an ad hoc and flexible basis is now a formal structure at the heart of the internal appraisal system for CSPs (Irish Aid, 2008a: 9, 11, 58).

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<sup>25</sup> With the exception of [PC Meeting Agenda-24/07/06-14] with fourteen items noted.

In practice the drift towards formalisation was present from an early stage. With participant research-practice I noticed that the pattern of talk was structured according to a standard model whereby the chairperson would clearly frame and drive the discussion of a topic. After a topic was introduced the chair would ask or invite a participant to make a contribution, especially if the topic was pertinent to their organisational role or specific task. In these cases the pattern unfolded with the form of *presentation* (at times with support resources such as power point materials or printed word documents) to invited *comments* from around the table to *concluding remarks* from the chair, which generated a boundary and span to another topic or agenda item. Opening and concluding remarks tended to contextualise the topic *organisationally* as the primary focus. This pattern of interaction while creating space for discussion, was structured in such a way as to generate a technical focus for the topics talked, and members talked from the boundaries of their organisational briefs.

By taking seriously the notion that the TORs of Coherence were the Agenda itself, we can see how that agenda became more focussed and formalised over a period of time in which the critical 'matter to hand' was the official articulation of institutional texts; policies, strategies and guidelines. So key was this recurring agenda pattern that on occasion the process of doing these tasks was externally reviewed (cf. [PC Meeting-26/02/07-33]) and on other occasions discussed in general as a organisational process (eg. [PC Meeting-15/09/06-17]). At a simple-level such institutional texts are typically made with a series of stages that could be termed a process of scaffolding – from 'issues papers' to discussion to initial drafting to more discussion/critique to final drafting to senior management approval to publication. This pattern can be slightly expanded to include the observed practice of drafting interim guidelines and strategies as ways to 'go-on' in the pressing practical situation – hence the role of the 2004 CSP Guidelines, or the PAEG Appraisal Process Interim Guidelines in 2006. Irish Aid thus learns with the practical strategies of generating texts as scaffolding devices, as well as responding at times to felt needs – such as 'Coherence' as space for discussion across the sections of Head Office.

Nonetheless, as one senior management member noted, 'there was a need there but no-one had articulated it' (*member interview*). Possibly relevant here is how the opportunity to articulate such needs are contextualised? At time needs that remain unarticulated as 'public-talk' find expression with what I have categorised as 'private talk', that is talk that intertextualises 'public' expression in somewhat ambiguous fashion. During exploratory interviews many frustrations were expressed with the Organisation, while even after the CSP Review Workshop members expressed interpretations of frustration and feelings that, 'nothing had changed'. Coherence was originated for communication that would make a difference, that would generate a new sort of information.



During participant research-practice these embodiments of new communication were noted as practically going-on as reporting, as updating and, at times as exploratory discussion during ‘Coherence’ meetings. These are times when Irish Aid embodied a certain reflexive openness, expressed also with an attention to how the meeting was to be managed, but it seems that this function has become formalised into the appraisal process and may therefore need another flexible space of textualisation.

One of the important organisational topics talked during this period was quality assurance with a link specifically made to CSPs. A *Note on quality assurance seminar, 7th June 2006* [PO1-27/06/06-7] marked ‘this organisational process (CSPs) as the primary embodiment of the drive for quality assurance’ whereby ‘developing a quality assurance framework for corporate Irish Aid’ is ‘learnt’. This link was borne out with the holding of a quality assurance seminar at Head Office in the months following the CSP Review Workshop; to which members of two of Irish Aid’s Nordic+ partners were invited to share their practices of quality assurance. Practical ‘opportunities in the current CSP formulation processes’ for quality assurance were sought and identified as:

- Mainstreaming work
- The development of monitoring and performance management frameworks
- on complementarities, linkages and synergies between the aid modalities that Irish Aid applies in the country specific context
- Division of labour and JAS processes
- Revision of guidelines to strengthen the CSP appraisal process at PAEG

*(Note on quality assurance seminar, 7th June 2006 [PO1-27/06/06-7])*

The knowledge that quality assurance as an organisational development is learnt with practice of the CSPs is interesting as a knowledge of how practical learning functions. Nonetheless, what intertextualises and thus *forves* or embodies an abstract process such as quality assurance, or indeed organisational learning, is the discursive process that makes such notions or goals practical, and by which members can make adaptive changes. This phenomenon was noted with the difference of textual articulation between the 2004 and 2008 CSP Guidelines above. A possible frustration therefore may be generated when significant people do not participate with important discursive processes, thereby not adapting practically. This tendency at time with hierarchical organising may be a source of barriers and incoherence with formal change processes. When there is little shared conversation people tend to work from different constructions.

#### *Story 4: The CSP Review and Workshop*

As an important thread for the general story being told here of building policy and procedure coherence, one process emerged as the ‘figure to follow’ with the participant research-practice strand of attending Coherence Meetings. In late 2006 this process came to my attention by way of a presentation given at Coherence. It was about a recent Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the CSP in PC-E which was presented in the context of an overall CSP Review Process, or revision (as it was labelled in some documents and comments). This talk about the MTR learning exercise of PC-E was insightful in explaining some perceived difficulties underlying the desire to formalise strategic planning processes overall;

‘We are not good at internalising learning, we rely on others to tell us, E+A tells us this, we have yet to institutionalise this.’

*(internal meeting participant research-practice notes – Conversant A)*

‘This was not an evaluation, it was an internal reflection, looking at their performance.’

*(internal meeting participant research-practice notes – Conversant B)*

‘[I am] struck by the openness of the Embassy, it depends on personalities, some are more open, [there is] a need for a framework that goes beyond personalities.’

*(internal meeting participant research-practice notes – Conversant C)*

These three comments recorded express various aspects of the learning conundrum as Irish Aid at the time and frame features of the CSP Review process – the need to ‘internalise’ and ‘institutionalise’ learning as something that the organisation can do for itself, the recontextualisation (in this conversation) of the ‘internal’ as a marker of learning, ‘it was an internal reflection’ and ‘not an evaluation’<sup>26</sup>; and the noting of the openness of this particular Embassy Team doing their MTR, which the conversant attributes to particular ‘open’ personalities, thereby deducing from an organisational perspective that ‘a framework that goes beyond personalities’ was needed. The play here is on learning imagined as an internalised,

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<sup>26</sup> The contextual meaning here is useful in indicating the dichotomous imaging of evaluation as ‘programme’ focussed and separate in some way to ‘internal reflection’ that is linked to performance. The notion of a dialectical practice of practical learning being developed here offers resources for exploring new meanings or relations between processes of evaluation and performance review.

reflective and open process which is at once institutional and frameworked in some fashion. The implied desire is for a sort of learning maturity embedded with organisational process where 'performance' becomes an easier, and possibly unmarked topic of talk and learning, which as a coherent scenario is more closely aligned with practices of programme evaluation. This is the level of practical learning that the CSP Review was being ordered to address with such conversations. In other words the story getting made in the talk was generating an image (or imagined state) of institutionalised openness, reflection, performance, coherence etc.

A learning exercise at a whole-organisation level, a Review Workshop, was to be held in one of the programme countries where as many participants as possible from Head Office and all programme countries would gather together with the support of external facilitation. This decision had been flagged in early 2005,

'Agreed to revise Draft CSP Guidelines shortly after HoMs/HoDs meeting based on the consultations and dealing with matters such as the JAS and the Issues Papers.'

'A regional meeting to be organised later in the year which will focus on JAS/CSP experiences. Such a meeting will allow for a more comprehensive revision of the CSP Guidelines and their presentation at a SMG for approval.'

*(Minutes of Meeting between Technical Section Head and CSP Focal Point Persons)* [PO1-27/06/06-10]

Several topics of note here help to expand understanding of the context to this Review. Firstly, the changing circumstances of doing a CSP where a JAS process is underway, the complexity that this brings since requisites for coordination and collaboration are much higher. Secondly, the more procedural topic of the 'Issues Papers' which, ironically, seems to have become a difficult issue within this context in different ways. This was a document in which all the pertinent issues for a programme, or component of a programme, were gathered together as a preparation step towards a CSP. It was becoming questionable as to how useful or appropriate this type of document could be when key issues were being framed by a wider institutional context, i.e. the JAS. There were also difficulties resulting from the fact that practitioners in the Field (no doubt in light of these changes in harmonisation and alignment) were interpreting what type of document the Issues Paper was in different ways. Seemingly, these different presentations were generating further confusion across the Organisation with some programme countries presenting highly developed papers, and others coming to Head Office with simpler documents. A further complication seems to have been that Field practitioners were feeling unclear about how to

proceed with the CSP process judging that management responses to the 'Issues' presentations were insufficiently clear. Later, during the CSP Review Workshop itself, the topic of confidence as Irish Aid surfaced. Speakers interpreted that it was lacking for the Organisation. From the perspective of the complexities (environmental in relation to institutional and vice-versa) being explored here, that judgement about confidence begins to take shape.

*The PC-K presentation was the first time something specific was brought to Coherence in the form of an issues paper, so in fact it kind of showed that where decisions are really required from senior management you need to actually focus on that. At the Coherence Meetings you don't necessarily get responses or directions out of the seminars themselves on the issues, on the issues paper. Now that's just by default because XX was meant to have chaired them all but ended up kind of chairing none of them over the last year, so I mean it should have been chaired by the chair of Coherence for that purpose, that was the idea but it just didn't work out because of the burden of work; so there's a real need to bring the issues to a Coherence Meeting so you have, you know senior management coherence and the direction and then to bring it back, that's what they did on the Wednesday, to bring back decisions, so then at least everyone is going away more satisfied.*

*(Member interview – February 2007)*

There is much to note with this quote, how the limits and possibilities of 'Coherence' are interpreted, how the role of one senior manager is so pivotal, while at the same time almost impossible due to 'burden of work'; but of primary interest is the understanding that decisions satisfy, and that these are possible when you have 'senior management coherence and the direction'. It is precisely these resources that seem to have been lacking as a time of great organisational transition and change was underway.

During a participant research-practice phase focussed on the CSP process in general I got a sense that a particular management meeting with the HoMs/HoDs, which took place in late 2005, had been difficult. It is outside the direct scope of the data generation period, nor a meeting to which I had, nor would have had access, nonetheless it seems to have been a critical moment of Organisational realisation that a review was necessary. Of interest for the learning topography being described here a question emerges as to where insight and understanding that leads to action for change is generated? In this case the challenges of the Field, the JAS as an environmental shift and the issue of the 'Issues Papers' as a response within that context, seem to have been the critical 'matters to hand' which, it seems *became* so when formalised as talk at 'HQ'.

The stated objectives for the Review Workshop were to ‘open discussion of issues; strengthen common understanding; [and reach] agreement on ways forward in relation to [the] revision of CSP Guidelines, Procedures and Systems’ (*Draft Programme – Participant’s Version, Revision of CSP Guidelines, Procedures and Systems*). The goal was to attend to the practices of strategic planning as evidenced with the core organisational activity of preparing, drafting and managing Country Strategy Papers. These papers, CSPs, are the main instrument-in-use for the management of the bilateral engagements of the Irish Government with eight programme countries (and five other partner countries where there are sizable funding commitments).

In 2006 six of these papers were under preparation,

‘There are real opportunities around the set of CSP’s for 2006, in particular in relation to engaging in constructive dialogue between HQ and missions ... there is a requirement for DCI [Irish Aid] HQ to adapt a common approach for developing CSP’s in 2006. We have formulated an outline matrix ... The regular Programme Coherence meetings will take stock of progress and issues’  
(*memo to colleagues from senior managers*) [PO1-06/07/06-2]

Nonetheless, this was not a straightforward exercise, there were different views on what such a ‘common approach for developing CSPs’ might be, which brings light to the concern for ‘open discussion ... strengthen common understanding ... [and reach] agreement on ways forward’ as noted above,

‘Its hard to shoe-horn all CSPs into one process, [its] good to have process but there are differences ... stretched resource issues and travel adds to that, [we need] to look on a case by case basis’  
(*internal meeting participant research-practice notes*) [PO1-24/07/06-8.5 pgs./p5]

Before the succinct aims of the Review were articulated in the process-design document there was a full week of preparation work in April 2007 in which I took part (as participant research-practice) with the outside facilitator contracted for the process and the key ‘lead’ driving the process from within Irish Aid. During this period the aims, which offer an overview of some important Irish Aid organisational concerns at the time, were explored with at least twelve open discussions with members from every section of the Organisation. From this work the ‘matters to hand’ were brought together. One senior manager summed them up as a need to generate an institutional understanding of what policy, strategies and guidelines are, ‘and matrix’ them; the

CSPs needed to be linked with harmonisation and alignment and the division of labour perspective. There needed to be a stronger focus on quality assurance and managing for development results. The Review Workshop was seen as a ‘useful process in this context’ in that it was ‘timely to sit down as an organisation and consider the issues involved in country, desks, Technical Section and the responsibility for CSPs historically’. The sense was that responsibility for the CSP was in an ambiguous ‘position’ and that it needed to be clarified and ‘spread across the Organisation’ (*all quotes from interview-notes during participant research-practice*).

There was also need for a systemic look at the lessons being learnt in programme countries (and captured at that time with the Mid-Term Reviews (MTRs) from three programme countries) and to link those lessons to planning. In many cases Irish Aid was funding partners but was not in the habit of bringing them together in order to share information and learning. The risk for this process (and overall with so many changes in train<sup>27</sup>) was judged to be that the complexity of the situation – organisational as well as in the aid environment as a whole – could confuse too much. There was a need therefore to ‘bring a degree of simplicity and clarity in this complex scenario’. While the JAS processes were to be welcomed and engaged with they were also seen as, ‘incredibly complex, protracted and political’. It was important to ‘engage but have the management instruments to advance workloads as these processes advance through their phases’. For this context what was sought was a recognition that there is ‘a discrete identity for Irish Aid in an increased opaqueness’ where it is necessary ‘not just to fly our flag’ but to recognise that ‘there is a comparative advantage that we have, its different in different programme countries, but [we must be] careful not to lose these ways of working [and our] focus’. From the organisational perspective ‘there is a lot more at stake here than coming up with a new set of guidelines, [it is] to enable people to reflect’. In order to know how to ‘demonstrate what kind of impacts will more programmatic approaches give’. These are the critical tasks that Irish Aid was in the process of learning to work with, understand and develop according to their own practices at the time of data generation (*all quotes from participant research-practice interview-notes*).

For the research project the initial Coherence Meeting that triggered my awareness of the MTRs and the general CSP Review processes resulted in the decision to ‘present a plan to RR<sup>28</sup> for a country visit that would be in tune with this process and its aims’. This thought occurred as I judged that, ‘RR is very engaged with process’ (*Research Journal 1*), ie. when ‘seeing process’ was the search-focus that was shaping my access journey with the Organisation. I prepared a short document that made clear links between the MTRs and the ideas of organisational learning and sent it to RR with a request for an interview. When we met I asked questions about quality

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<sup>27</sup> Including decentralisation of the Division to Limerick

<sup>28</sup> The person leading the CSP Review Process for Irish Aid.

assurance, the policy development process and the CSP Review itself. At the close of the meeting I was invited to track this Review and attend the Review Workshop. This was the point at which the organisational story of practical enquiry and institutionalisation of many new ways of working coincided with the research process that sought to attend to common learning-practice within the organisation, particularly learning process as practiced ‘anyway’, irrespective of the research project (*see Figure 5 above, Page 134*).

During the preparation phase for this Workshop it was framed as an initiative that Technical Section had taken the lead on in a larger frame of activities for programme development including the revision of key policies, guidelines and strategies, as already noted. The context noted was that of harmonisation, alignment, the division of labour, and the quality assurance agenda that these policies were driving, including the approach of Managing for Development Results. It is noted that in this discussion there was some enquiry as to ‘who are the drivers’ of Results Based Management? The response generated linked the ‘drive’ to the Field, that programme countries were ‘ahead on this’ and that PC-A, PC-C and PC-F were ‘beginning to give this attention’, but that for the ‘organisation in general [it was] in very early stages’ (*internal meeting – participant research-practice notes*).

As topographical description these stories of coherence-building, quality assurance opportunities, organisational practices and complexities with many core organising practices including the drafting and managing of CSPs – generate a view of a learning landscape that was challenging, confusing in many respects, generating difficulties for decision-making, common understandings, confidence and fears with accountability. Irish Aid seemed to be learning nonetheless with these challenges as practicalities, organisational members often described this as the principal way that their organisation learns. The ability to generate a ‘talking space’ when it was needed, or the consolidated response to the DAC 2003 Peer Review for institutionalisation, or the practical connections made between quality assurance, mainstreaming and the CSPs – all suggest that learning goes-on with all these practical responses to a fast changing environment. Also apparent though are the difficulties, with clarification, with conflicts arising when decisions are slow, with unchanging practices, roles and structures. There is some sense that certain patterns of organising practice remain unchanging despite all the practical learning going-on for the context. These patterns are explored in greater detail with Chapter Five as contextualising processes ordered to a pervasive formal logic and imagined order according to a fixing rationale of linear and results-based ‘coherence’.

## **Part II: Learning with a CSP – The Figure of the ‘Field’**

### *Story 5: PC-A at the CSP Review Workshop*

As a general introduction to this series of stories about practical learning with a CSP in a programme country, the topics talked at the CSP Review Workshop by the Head of Mission are outlined. They give a sense of how the ways of doing strategic planning for programme countries were changing due to the exigencies of the new aid architectures of harmonisation and alignment. It is also noted that responding to these challenges seemed in many ways thwarted by decisions taken on staffing levels beyond the scope of Irish Aid itself. The story that emerges throughout participant research-practice with the Team at PC-A was how practical ways to go-on are generated at the local level. The patterning of this dynamic is returned to as an organising pattern at the end of Chapter Six.

During the CSP Review Workshop presenters from the programme countries were invited to talk about various topics from the perspective of their country context. Presentations had been prepared in advance with embassy teams. The key 'matter to hand' presented under the topic of Human Resources (HR) from PC-A was that new skills are required for a changing aid context. As Irish Aid PC-A what mattered were the changing aid modalities; a shift from Area Based Programmes (APBs) and projects to budget support modalities (DBS, GBS); a growing ODA budget as well as the constraints on staffing due to a cap on public service numbers coupled with a DFA instruction to design strategies such as the CSP according to current staffing levels; the pressure on technical capacity resources at Head Office and how that was a problem for the Field; and the lessons learnt from the previous CSP where it was judged that HR management had been weak. These matters emerged with the context of aid effectiveness and harmonisation. These new approaches were understood as key HR challenges whereby the multidimensionality of aid, the drive for policy coherence, and the focus on results, audit and accountability all meant that new skills were needed for the aid process.

In general, the Irish Aid response to this new context had been the mainstreaming, as 'priority issues', of 'gender equality, environmental sustainability, HIV/AIDS and good governance' in 'recognition of [their] centrality ... to achieving poverty reduction' (Irish Aid, 2006b: 1). These issues were judged in the *White Paper* to 'cut across and inform all of the work of Irish Aid' (White Paper on Irish Aid, 2006: 15) and as such needed a strategic organisational response in order to textualise their cross-cutting nature as cross-cutting practices. Although labelled as 'priority issues' through the Mainstreaming Strategy document (Irish Aid, 2006b), the term in use across the Organisation during participant research-practice was 'cross-cutting issues', suggesting



that the figure which mattered was the practical how-learning question: ‘How to do the ‘cross-cutting’?’

From this complex organisational and development-aid context a response was crafted in PC-A with the CSP Process and presented for learning during the CSP Review Workshop. Under the general term of Human Resources, ‘Teamwork’ was outlined as an adequate response to the needs identified – needs that went beyond the terms of previous Irish Aid management reviews which focussed principally on staff numbers. These needs were framed as new skills to be acquired – greater technical specialisation for development specialists, a broader understanding of the development context for DSs and incoming staff, knowledge of evolving Irish Aid Policy, administrative competencies, forms of ‘reality checks’ and an attention to ‘soft skills’ in the processes of induction and management, including skills of presentation, networking and chairing of meetings. Of all the means by which these skills were to be developed (formal courses, workshops, mentoring, field visits, exchanges etc.) the question was being asked about how much this sort of organisational development was a priority for Irish Aid. There was a suggestion that a specific ‘Training Function’ was needed for Irish Aid as a ‘growing organisation’.

The justification for a ‘team approach’ to the CSP in PC-A was given as a desire to combat such barriers to teamwork as the ‘legacy of history, culture, hierarchy’ so that the multidimensionality of aid and the cross-cutting challenge could be met. This approach aimed at breaking down the ‘silos’ and isolation characterising Irish Aid practice heretofore and creating the circumstances for interchangeability, continuity and flexibility, and the emergence of collective wisdom. The means designed for the PC-A process were a structural organisation of staff into small team ‘Clusters’ aligned to PC-A’s PRSP, and ways of working and job descriptions that reflected the principles of teamwork developed (with a desire to link these to PMDS practice). These principles were outlined as an inclusive approach to tasking, empowerment of staff, and attention to changing terminology that prioritised the unity of the Embassy team, i.e. ‘avoid ‘programme meetings’ or ‘the aid side’, as well as attending to the social aspects of embassy life. There was a recognition that this was to be a slow process of change.

As an immediate response the topic taken-up for talk by the group gathered was the social gatherings that had been mentioned. An initial question as to the nature of the shared participation of local and expatriot staff was made, this was followed with a question about how Irish Aid was viewed as an employer by local staff. From here the question developed around the notions of a two-tier system of local advisors, the career structure available to them and the invisible-ceiling between the role of local advisor and development specialist, ‘Do all those key

managerial posts have to be Irish people, is it possible to have a DS who's local? 'That's the key thing, but that's not for us to decide.' ([CD/2/3/20]AP).

With this discussion other HR issues arose such as the ratio of local advisors to budget size in programme countries, and that as related to the harmonisation question of division of labour for sectors. This link may need some explanation. One of the goals of harmonisation is the rationalisation of donor involvements across sectors to reduce transaction costs and overlaps. According to this rationale donors have been working to reduce the number of sectoral commitments that they carry. The critical HR issue, especially for local staff when a decision to withdraw from a sector is being made, is that whichever sector is cut implies the cutting of jobs related to that sector within a particular donor organisation. Related issues of monitoring and management levels required to meet the HR challenges – whether of local staff, external 'draw-down' consultants on a regional or national level, and related tensions were discussed.

#### *Story 6: Field Visit Preparation and Methods Used*

With the CSP for 2007-2010 the Irish Aid Team in PC-A were taking a 'whole-of-programme' and 'team approach' to the CSP. The challenge of improving 'linkages' between global principles, strategies, business planning and implementation instruments and actions was described as central,

'One area we have been thinking about is linking, and how we link better within the Embassy, with HQ and also with other stakeholders in PC-A. ... We are currently developing our next Country Strategy Paper so it would be very useful for the output of your work to feed into a section of the CSP on how we can work/link better and become more of a learning organisation.' (*email to researcher from DS in PC-A – 22/08/06*)

The research project offered an opportunity to the Irish Aid Team in PC-A to take concrete action on organisational learning according to their CSP:

This project is a collaboration between Trinity College Dublin and Irish Aid. It aims to support Irish Aid as a learning organisation by exploring learning practices in use with a view to greater institutionalisation of such practices within knowledge processes and systems. It operates at two levels - with Irish Aid HQ and in selected country programmes including PC-A.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Supporting PC-A's Development – CSP 2007-2010, No. 7.9, p.27

The matter/topic of 'linkages' figures the need to forge new paths of connection and collaboration with principles of 'harmonisation' and 'effective aid'. A descriptive and explorative approach was taken for which a series of data generation methods were used including team-sessions to explore organisational learning theory and practice, participant research-practice at internal and external meetings occurring during the field-visit, team-member to team-member interviews based on a short interview protocol<sup>30</sup> prepared by the researcher and forwarded to the Team before the field-visit, interviewing of team members by the researcher and general participant research-practice of embassy life and interaction over a period of two normal working weeks. The frame used to focus data generation and to organise the subsequent 'report' returned to the Team at PC-A was a knowledge-audit developed by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). This audit-frame looks at knowledge activity under the labels of 'organisational knowledge', 'relationships and collaborations', 'organisational contexts', and 'external factors' (Ramalingam, 2006). The goal of using this frame was two-fold. On the one-hand it was important that practical information and a starting-point for organisational learning practice was generated. On the other-hand the generation of data that could offer a view of learning practice embodied with the CSP process as everyday, practical experiences dealing with the 'matters to hand' was considered important.

A knowledge audit creates a platform from which an organisation can build its learning practice by offering a view of the learning context including challenges and opportunities as a focus for specific learning initiatives (Ramalingam, 2005). The product from this work was three-fold; a written narrative that described the findings of the audit, made connections with the principles of organisational learning and suggested some initial opportunities for developing organisational learning practices; a detailed matrix which connected specific features of the knowledge-audit description to specific learning steps and tools; and finally, a powerpoint presentation in which an initial frame for on-going organisational learning work by the team was set out – all of which were sent to the Team at PC-A within a month of my return to Ireland. As a baseline picture of the organisation as its knowledge, relationships and processes, organisational context and external factors (Ramalingam, 2006) this overview offered a sort of baseline for new organisational learning design. The suggestion was that by improving knowledge sharing and knowledge management with specific learning steps and tools positive conditions conducive to practical learning could be enhanced.

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<sup>30</sup> The protocol took a broadly appreciative approach asking members to reflect on learning experiences and the 'team approach'. The goal was as much processual as propositional in that a value was placed on the *fact* of member-to-member conversations about their learning with everyday tasks and experiences as preparation for the field-visit.

The practical aim for the Team was to enhance and build on opportunities already created through the CSP design and drafting process<sup>31</sup>. This was not a stand alone initiative but was located by the Team as an element of their business planning and came under their CSP principle of ‘aid effectiveness’. It was also highlighted that this phase of the research work was an opportunity to document on-going learning processes from a particular organisational context that could be shared with the Organisation as a whole.

#### *Story 7: A Knowledge Audit of Practical Learning with the CSP for PC-A*

It was important to situate and focus organisational learning as specific actions and as the normal work of this Team. This strategy was used to assist the Team with the task of identifying criteria and measurable indicators for impacts on aid effectiveness when a learning organisation approach is actively promoted; thus a ‘results-based’ approach was taken-on. This results-based orientation is a valued, and expected organisational ability for the current context of aid management. The PC-A CSP takes place with a harmonised and aligned environment which presented the Team with a range of challenges including learning to be effective promoters of the CSP Principles on a wide and crowded aid agenda, identifying ways of measuring the impact of the programme when many external factors out of the team’s control are operative, and developing new structures and skills in reponse to the changing context.

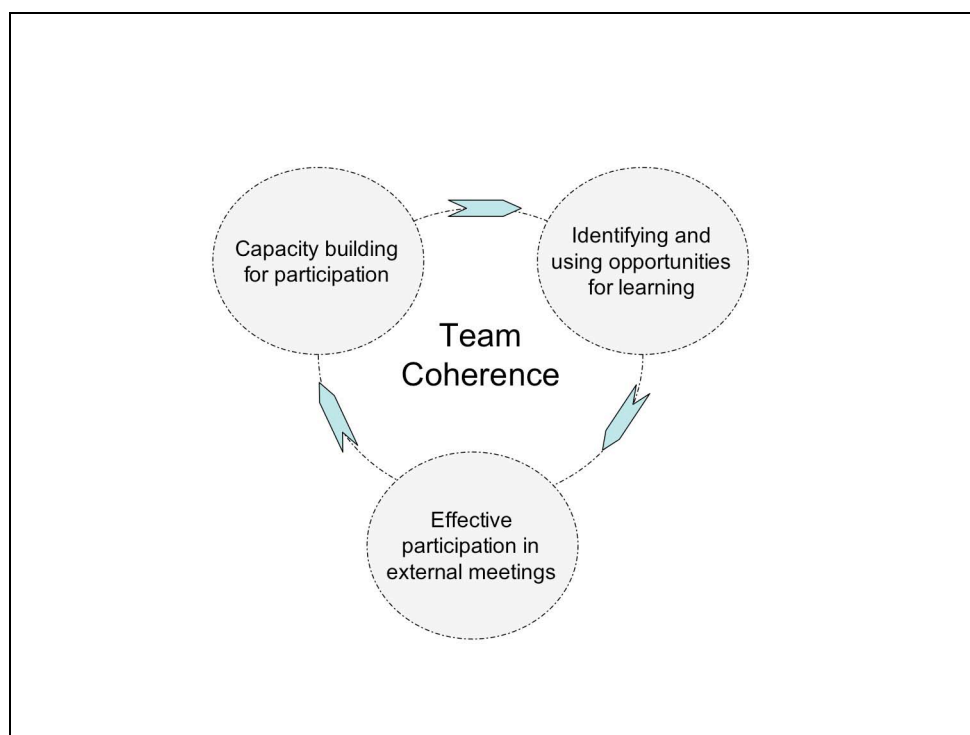
The CSP drafting process had resulted in a CSP integral to this Team. The strong identification and ownership among members of the three core principles of the CSP, and the team approach itself were clearly apparent during the Field-visit. This way of working was adopted as the most effective way of delivering the programme. A central aspect of a team approach is the ability to effectively manage a way of working that is linked and coherent by means of creating communication and coordination opportunities as a feature of everyday life. The learning focus for this initiative was on improving linkages as a team, the rationale being that a coherent programme depends on the existence of a coherent team.

An analysis of Team members’ descriptions of the term ‘linkages’ shows it to represent both **actions** (‘interactions and communications made at a moving pace’, ‘being aware’, ‘informed’, ‘enabled’, ‘objective focussed’, ‘knowing what, how, who to link’, ‘connecting what I do into another’s action’, ‘having a common goal and gain’) and **conditions for action** (‘being a team’, ‘together’, ‘related’, ‘having an open interactive environment’, ‘communication’, ‘working as one,

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<sup>31</sup> Including where possible, connection with team members whose primary task is administrative and consular embassy work.

hand in hand’). With the aim of generating learning about how to make better linkages and how to create the optimum conditions for doing so, the learning project focussed on three areas of team coherence: capacity building for participation, identifying and using opportunities for team-learning and outputting/multiplying this learning with effective participation at external meetings – a core process for delivering the CSP. All three areas emerged from the knowledge audit as important and challenging for the Team (*see Figure 8 below*).



*Figure 0-8 - Learning for Team Coherence and Enabling Linkages*

As an element of aid effectiveness, building strong linkages across a team creates the conditions for well coordinated action. As managing for development results (MfDR) the connection was already established between results and the principle of ‘promoting organisational change through learning and accountability’ as part of the drive for donor/agency efficiency and contribution (Irish Aid, 2007b: 10). This connection offers ample justification for taking such a process view of aid effectiveness and dedicating time and resources to learning with these areas. This learning focus nonetheless must include seeking ways to institutionalise new practices generated by the Team and the ability to change these practices when required for a changing context.

The Team had realised that adopting a new ‘whole programme’ approach for the CSP also required a new way of working – a ‘team approach’. The insight was captured with the dual

‘whole programme and team approach’ of the Strategy. The recognition of the importance of the ‘team approach’ generated opportunity for developing a changed learning ecology, it was also apparent that there was openness to learning new ways of working. To give one practical example, members were aware of a need to develop and change, where necessary, templates for business and reporting procedures. With such an approach nonetheless members were aware of the challenges; maintaining a functional balance between new and familiar processes and procedures, managing team energy and cohesion in the face of institutional resistance in other quarters or conversations, staff changes, a change of leader with a change in leadership style, to name a few that were described.

### Knowledge – types, common processes and challenges

The different knowledge-types generated with Embassy work were organised into three main categories: administrative, managerial and technical for the knowledge-audit. Knowledge was defined as having content and process features (knowing what, knowing how), as being explicit (shared and accessible), tacit (knowing how to do something intuitively) and implicit (being culturally attuned). Since the learning focus for the project and research was on practical, experiential learning the audit sought to centre ‘knowledge-in-use’ or ‘know-how’ and for this reason common tasks and processes were focussed. As core tasks the following topics were described; people, programme and budget management, complementing line managers, and general administration. Of greater relevance for developing a learning strategy/ecology for linkages as a team are core processes. These were described as, carrying out standard procedures (planning, reporting, processing of requests), communicating (accessing, distilling, circulating, distributing and using information) and significantly; meeting. With an average of 43% of time perceived to be spent in meetings by the ‘development-aid’ team members and 30% of time when including the whole Team, the effective use of this time becomes crucial (*see Figure 9 below*). Also relevant is the fact that external meetings are often long with very full agendas.

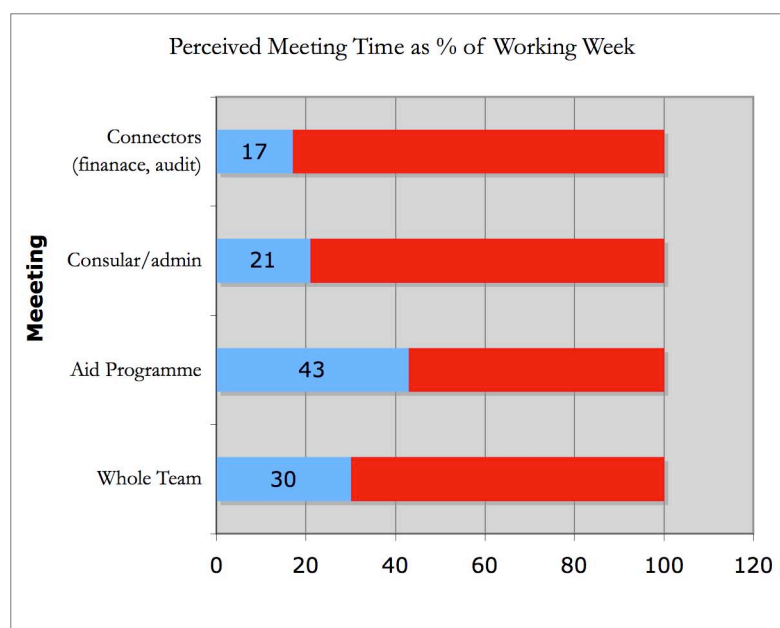
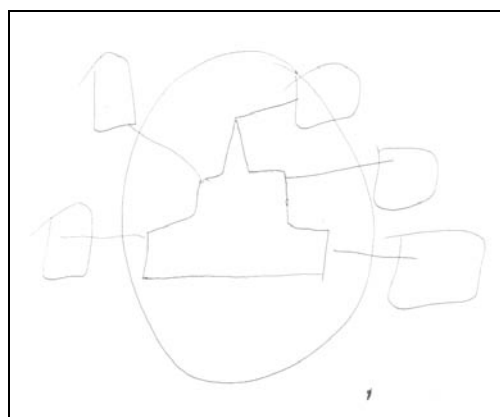
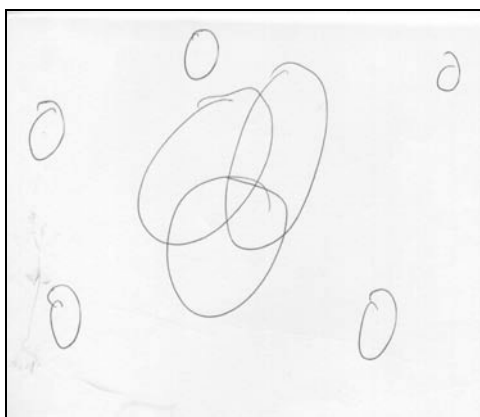


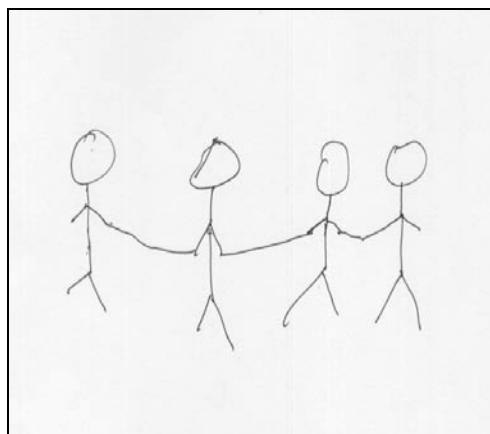
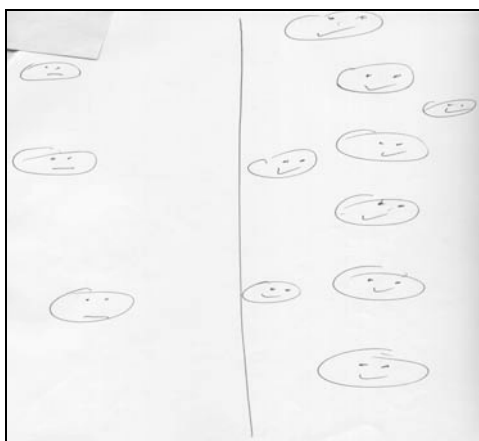
Figure 0-9 - Average Time Spent in Meetings as Perceived by Team Members

It is important to note that the Embassy Team is complexly organised (*see Figure 15 below*) with a number of staff working exclusively on the Aid Programme, a number working with more general consular and diplomatic tasks, and some such as the internal auditor or financial controller working across all areas. This ‘division’ was marked by Team-members and considered a potential fragmenting categorisation that was unhelpful. The comments of the Head of Mission at the CSP Review Workshop also figured this matter or issue for collaborative organising practice (*see Story 5 above*).

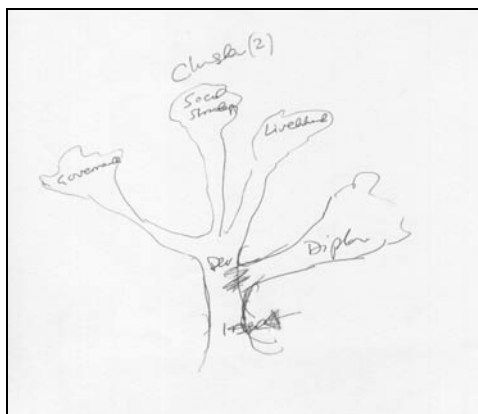
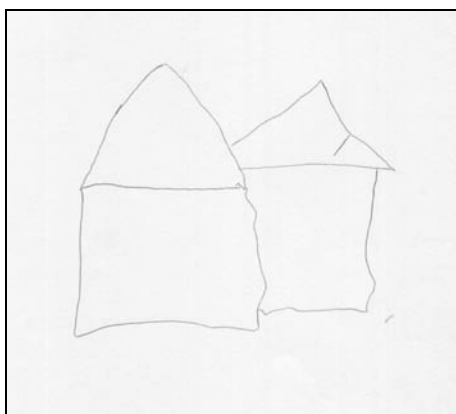
While it is not possible for the current study to explore comprehensively the following images generated by Team members when asked to ‘draw a shape or image to describe yourselves’ during one of the learning workshops, this selective example shows how the ways in which the Team and its connectedness are imagined are diverse and rich sources for exploring the ecological context of normal organising practice.



*Figure 0-10 - Images Relating to Connectedness*

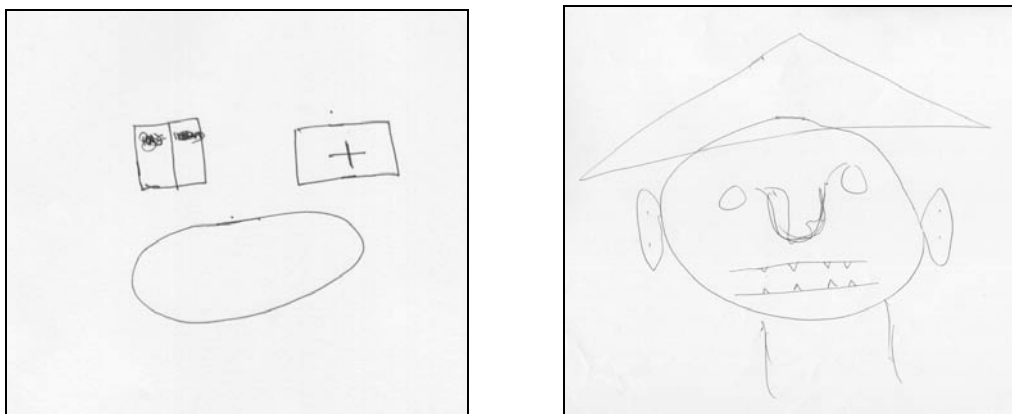


*Figure 0-11 - Images Relating to Team Experience*



*Figure 0-12 - Images Relating to Programme Organisation*





*Figure 0-13 - Figurative Images*

From the Team perspective the key processes-in-use for delivering effective aid are informal communication (building relationships and sharing knowledge), meeting (internal/external coordination and engagement) and taking advantage of specific organisational processes and initiatives to create connections (ie. CSP planning and drafting, the State Visit of the Irish President to PC-A, the Launch Workshop of the CSP). The aim is to use core processes more effectively by focussing learning work on the three areas already outlined (capacity building for participation, identifying/using opportunities for learning and effective participation in meetings).

#### Relationships and Processes:

Organisational processes described included CSP and PAEG advancement (in all their components), business planning, annual and quarterly reporting to Irish Aid Head Office, consular liaison and administration. Systems designed to support these processes are standard organisational procedures and manuals, hard and electronic filing-categorisation, IT (including the use of shared folders and email) and a low-cost satellite phone link to Ireland.

As the team approach being developed systems in support of linkages across the programme were aimed at enabling participation and inclusion of all Team members. Examples of this orientation include the use of the cluster model for business coordination and planning and the cascading of management down through the whole Team. The administrator with responsibility for all security guards liaises closely with the 'Head of Guards' who acts as coordinator and communication link; guards and drivers are represented at management meetings; local advisors are 'leads' in the task of developing strategy; and attendance at high-level meetings is delegated to

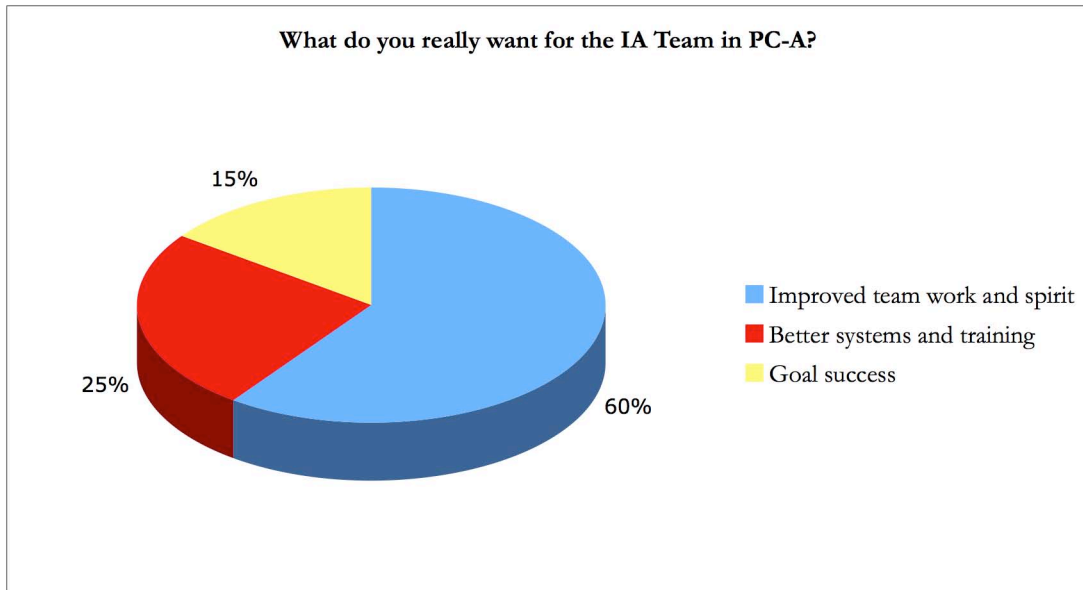
development specialists when necessary. There are many examples of an inclusive management style throughout the Embassy way of working.

Organisational initiatives have also been utilised to develop team identity. The State Visit and the CSP Launch workshop in particular were described by Team members as key moments of the past year for creating change. Workshops (mainstreaming, local advisor training workshops, the HIV/Aids Policy work) and specific tasks (such as managing recruitment, logistical support to the JAS process and the GBS Annual Review) were also identified as learning exercises. These named experiences highlight how learning is optimum as practical action when responsibility is shared, there is a clear and relevant task focus, and in best cases, shared with others and clearly contributing to overall goals.

The ‘team approach’ itself emerged as the key factor for learning with twelve of fourteen members highlighting its importance in relation to learning and development. In six of those cases learning was associated directly with a team experience, while when asked ‘What do you really want for the Irish Aid Team in PC-A?’ responses fell into three broad categories: team work and spirit (including working across sectoral boundaries, good meetings and a ‘one team’ sense and goal), better systems and training and, goal success (ie. CSP implementation). As seen with Figure 14 below responses display the importance of an enabling environment in the process of delivering an effective programme. The weighting is not unusual<sup>32</sup> as theory suggests that three times more process awareness and proficiency is required than task competence for successful management (Heron, 1999: 356).

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<sup>32</sup> Since the question focussed on desire for the **team**, this may have triggered responses that reflect a team-process bias.



*Figure 0-14 - Team Focus: 75% on Teamwork/Systems and Training*

Relationships are important in this context and factors such as leadership style and open communication throughout the Team are relevant. Relationships for this Team seemed to be positive and contributing towards learning opportunities. A simple information flow chart displays the formal ties within a line management structure and the plentiful informal sharing that characterises this Team. This chart was generated by asking all (but two) team members who they mostly communicated with in their everyday work (*See Figure 15 below*).

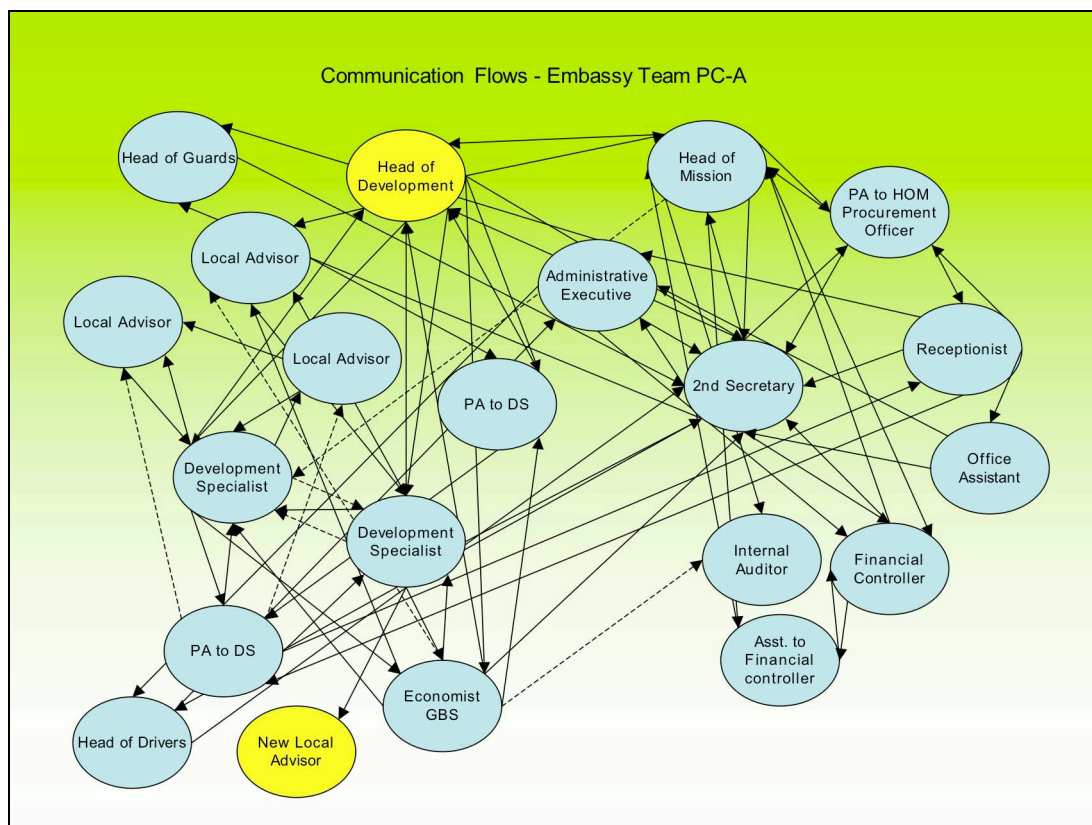


Figure 0-15 - Communication Flows as Described by Team Members

The cumulative impact of strong participative process, organisational initiatives characterised by learning and changed practice, and an atmosphere of open communication and sharing created a learning environment that is the result of, and an opportunity for, a highly motivated team. Participation in the knowledge-audit exercise itself evidences team openness and engagement where fifteen team-member to team-member preparation interviews took place, nineteen interviews with the researcher, three organisational learning meetings, invitations for the researcher to attend eleven meetings (five internal, six external) and strong administrative and logistical support. Considering the fact that such an exercise had not been undertaken previously for Irish Aid, this level of engagement is not insignificant.

### Organisational Contexts

From an organisational learning perspective the aim of an organisational model or structure including support processes and technology is to enable learning by creating the conditions and resources for knowledge making, sharing and management. The management of human resources, team and individual capacity, team environment, connections with the broader organisation and availability of resources, including technologies are all relevant features.

A positive human resources situation is important for a team approach. The Team described particular challenges arising in this context as the transitions to come about as a new Head of Mission (HOM) and local advisor joined the Team. Considering the importance of the team approach for this organisation, the induction of these new team members (including the departure of the current HOM) represented a challenge and learning opportunity. Questions such as, 'How will the Team introduce new members to the CSP, its rationale, focus and goals?' or 'How will the Team incorporate the particular experience, skills, goals of the new people into its working environment and approach?' could be usefully explored.

A related challenge was the significant transition imminent for that following year when core members of the development team would finish their terms of office in PC-A. A strategy for maintaining coherent delivery of the CSP would be the specific preparation for this change by building the capacity of those Team members likely to continue working in the Embassy throughout the life of the CSP. These members are normally local advisors, programme assistants, finance and audit personnel. A team approach if taken seriously will impact on notions of leadership and governance, therefore a team needs to be aware and learn how to manage possible tensions that can arise when such changes in key personnel have the potential to shift expectations and assumptions about organisational ways of working.

Capacity building may have different strands – skills for meeting-management, not just chairing but also participating effectively, understanding how teams work and learning to manage team dynamics emerged from the knowledge-audit as possible areas for training. On the support-function side IT skills and new ICT resources were identified as areas for structural improvement and training. The use of certain basic tools, email and the shared folder, were identified as an area for improvement. An empowering tool in developing these skills would be carrying out a critical analysis of the barriers and resistances of Team members to these tools. A team approach well integrated creates the conditions for a team to do this kind of work for itself. A further area of capacity building identified was developing presentational skills through use of PowerPoint and workshop techniques; other enquiry and appraisal skills such as participative 'process mapping' were also highlighted.

An opportunity for capacity building may be exploring local learning models and ways of working with a view to situating the Team and programme within the local context in new ways. Team members from the local programme country will have privileged access and insight into this area due to their cultural connectedness and education within the local education system. For example, an assessment of local partner's ways of working and critical networks could yield fresh insight into how to maintain a sense of connectedness with the situation on the ground. This is a way of generating a new strand to the 'reality check' task (Ramalingam, 2005: 36, pt.1).

A further challenge emerging from the audit as organisational context was tapping into the potential benefits of knowledge sharing across Irish Aid programme countries, for the teams involved and in support of South-to-South learning. Infrastructure to support this type of sharing such as ICT systems, video conferencing technology and low-cost satellite phone links will complement other new organisational ways of working such as Communities of Practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) that focus on specific tasks (i.e. developing a CSP or sector strategy) or on-going areas of policy action (mainstreaming the cross-cutting issues). These measures display a horizontal organisational model that can complement the hierarchical and centrist structures of communication and accountability evidenced in the flows of talk and products from Field to Head Office and back again. Precedent for horizontal learning exists as Irish Aid practice where it is common for groups with similar tasks or responsibilities to habitually meet and learn together (e.g. HoM/HoDs<sup>33</sup> meetings, Local/Sectoral advisors meetings, financial auditors meetings). The induction of new people into a team becomes easier with this model since a 'community' is available to guide and support members who are new to particular tasks and processes. Equally, development specialist staff when circulating throughout the Organisation would have greater knowledge of the particulars of different programme countries when they are stationed there for the first time.

In PC-A the Team is relatively small with nineteen members (including ancillary staff working within the Embassy compound). Team members involved directly with either the aid programme or political/consular work amounts to sixteen. Typically, fairly high levels of communication and common focus are possible with this size of a team. In larger teams, different models and techniques for developing a team approach would be needed.

Creating a learning environment also includes practical supports such as having a natural meeting space where people can simply interact daily. For the Team at PC-A ways of creating spaces where they could eat together on occasion were sought. For example the kitchen at the Embassy was very small and inadequate. The notice board was another communication tool under-utilised. It was located in a dark corridor and was unlikely to attract attention. Moving and using this 'shared space' is a small but practical opportunity for interaction. While a social committee existed, finding appropriate social activities across cultural boundaries was noted as a challenge.

The leadership and governance style within the Embassy seemed to be open, participative and communicative. This style contributed to a learning environment but could also present a challenge to the Team when working with styles beyond the immediate Embassy context that are

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<sup>33</sup> Heads of Mission/Heads of Development

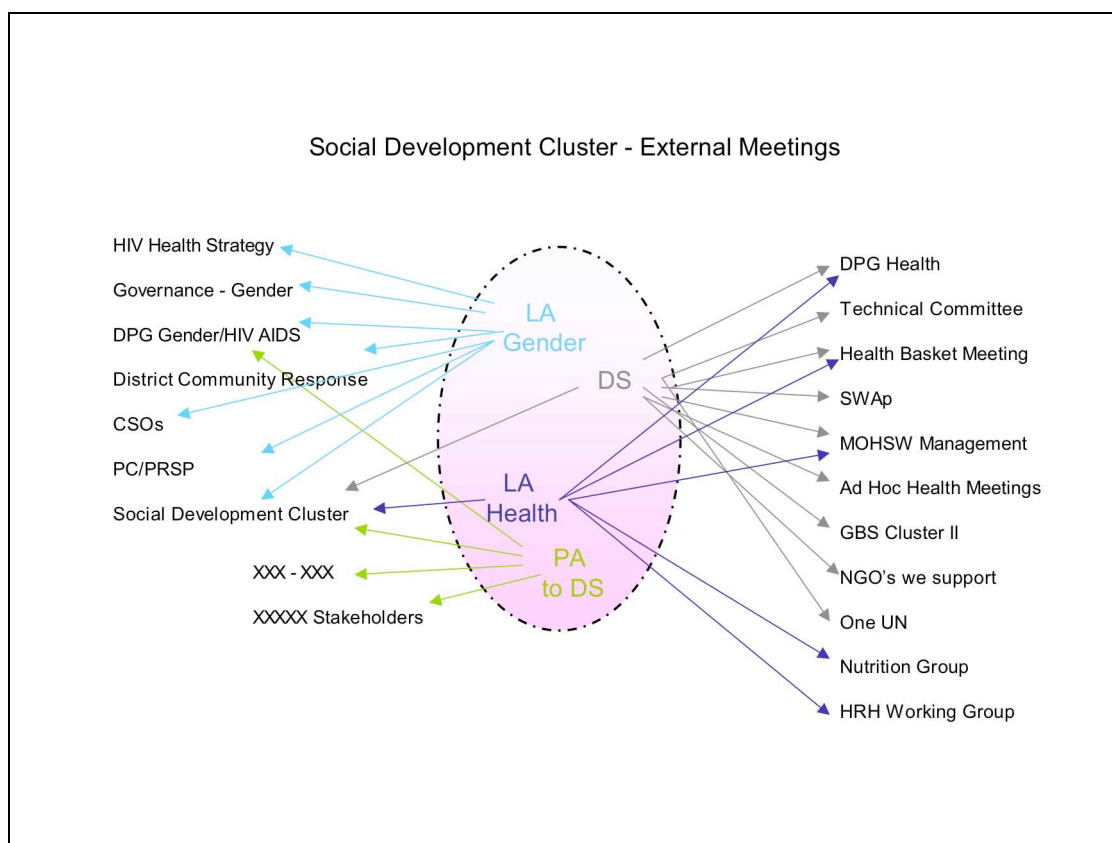
embodied as more hierarchical forms. Managing collaborative work with the Government of PC-A (in sub-groups, working groups), other donors and Irish Aid Headquarters often requires more unilateral ways of working. There may be opportunities for the Team to share what is being learnt through the ‘team approach’ with other donors, partners and Government departments. A reflexive ability to be aware of how the ‘team approach’ is different to other approaches would be useful. Sharing the learning and exploring strategies to work with other organisations in ways that can be coherent, while at the same time, challenging and opening up communication about those very ways of working is opportunity for unique contribution.

### External Factors

As already stated the context of aid delivery is harmonised and aligned in PC-A therefore cross boundary learning and knowledge sharing is essential. This is increasingly a context of loose boundaries for ‘organisation’ and ‘sector’ that can also have a maximising effect on team development. Team learning (about itself and its task) shared with partners in the external context can generate a changed learning ecology. Team members participate regularly with Donor Partner Groups, Sectoral and Working Groups – donor and government hosted (*See Figure 16 below*). This is a setting where learning best practice as horizontal coordination or collaboration becomes essential. In an increasingly harmonised environment the notion of ‘boundaries’ will become more and more complex. The CSP principle of aid effectiveness implies ‘multilateral aid effectiveness’, in other words for the Team to be effective, its partners also need to be effective, the ecology matters. Working towards greater capacity among partners within the local context forms part of the CSP<sup>34</sup>, but a useful question from a team approach that can link learning and action is ‘How can the team best transfer what it has learnt about team-work beyond its boundaries?’ Can learning from the team approach itself be transferred to the external context?

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<sup>34</sup> Supporting PC-A’s Development – CSP 2007-2010, No.s 5.10(p.18), 6.3(p.22) for example



*Figure 0-16 – One Cluster Group External Meetings*

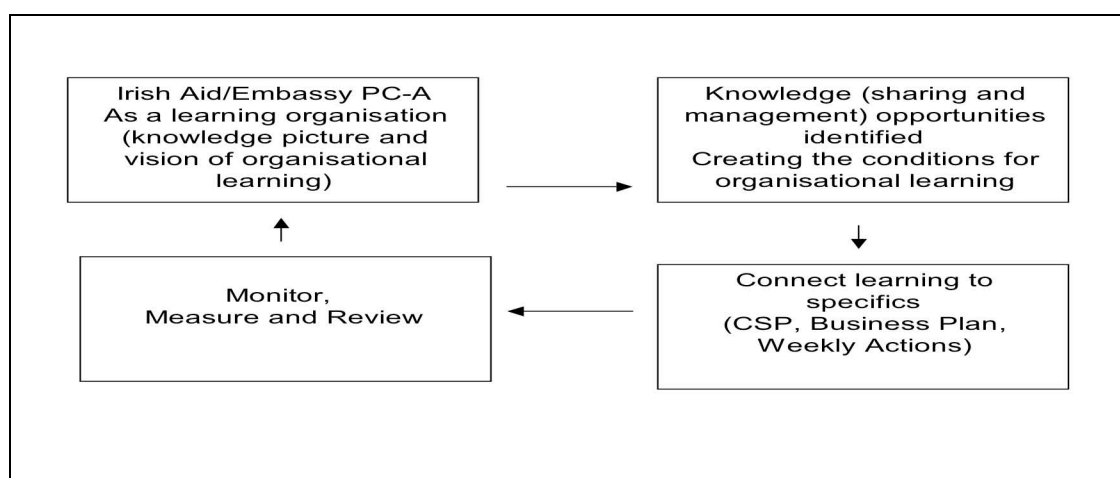
For maintaining the links with the ground – ‘reality check’ visits create different forms of connectedness. In the past when Area Based Programmes (ABPs) were more prevalent this connection was easier to maintain. Working side-by-side with civil society organisations is now relatively remote. Learning to maintain connectedness in forms that are not solely based on monitoring, reporting and evaluation is a challenge that requires new relating patterns. Some Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) funded by Irish Aid may have particular skills or networks that can contribute upwards to the CSP principles. Creating and gathering communities of practice around specific tasks or strategies might also offer new forms of connectedness and linkage.

In a broad Irish Aid context the knowledge sharing challenges identified in the *CSP Review Workshop Report* are relevant. The issues of communication identified in that Report (Irish Aid, 2007a) were interpreted in PC-A as a lack of clarity and understanding of the role of the Desk at Headquarters in relation to the programme, questions about the relevance and practical uses of annual and other reports submitted to Head Office, and occasionally the lack of availability of support from the Technical Section due to volumes of work. In general the challenge was to identify, use and manage organisationally as many channels for upward and horizontal learning as possible thereby improving understanding and skills with using the processes for making, sharing and managing knowledge.



### *Story 8: Concluding the Organisational Learning Project for PC-A as Part of the Research Cycle*

A ‘report’<sup>35</sup> outlining the framework and findings generated was prepared and sent to the contact person in PC-A one month after the Field-visit. This report constituted a ‘knowledge picture and vision of organisational learning’ to be used as a baseline or sounding board from which initial pilot work could begin, either with one of the cluster groups or focussed with a particular organisational task such as the GBS Review. A cumulative approach had been suggested by the Team for which learning-to-learn for their organisation would be linked to their business planning process. The envisaged cycle for specific organisational learning work was mapped out according to Figure 17 below.



*Figure 0-17 - Proposed Cycle for Organisational Learning PC-A*

What happened in fact was that the process came to an end within a short period of time as an explicit project in collaboration with the researcher. The reasons for this were briefly outlined some time later by the contact person in PC-A in response to a contact made by the researcher,

[You must be] wondering if we have been blown away in a freak ... wind! Sorry for the silence, but we have been having a staggeringly busy time - the lead role of the health group has been MUCH busier than I had expected plus we are now gearing up for a high level visit in January, so all is on hold at the moment. That said we have had two quarterly meetings as a programme team since you came - one on reflecting how we have been implementing our principles across the clusters and another where we did a SWOT analysis of how things are going in each cluster. So some learning going on! I think realistically we will get back looking at this in February once everything calms down. *(Email communication to researcher)*

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<sup>35</sup> Narrative sections of which make up the content of Story 7, thus characterising its ‘recommendational voice’ in places.

The plan to 'get back to looking at this' did not happen as envisaged. The response received from the report was general and did not refer to any of the substantive descriptions or themes described with the knowledge-audit. The learning focus was clearly on 'know-how' knowledge as perceived in the report, and linked to the business planning process as suggested, but it seems that this work remained in the realm of 'something extra to do' and therefore became deprioritised. The task of chairing the Health SWAp group had greatly increased the workload of the key contact person and the planned high-level visit were putting 'all on hold'. Despite the fact that a similar experience (a State Visit) had been judged during the knowledge-audit as a strong learning and team-building experience, it is perceived as a barrier in some way. No doubt of relevance also here is the fact that the focus of the research practice itself shifted towards overall analysis and therefore this learning cycle ceased to function according to the original terms of reference.

It seems that one of the challenges for groups, teams and sections to establish deuterio-learning processes is critically a question of imagined 'location', 'position' or 'space'. If the task is considered extrinsic to normal work it will therefore become marginalised, continually generating in double-bind mode the patterns that this sort of learning is ordered to address. If, on the other hand deuterio-learning can be threaded into the very practices of normal work (a question of how the talk, tools and the topics in hand are used, and as a second-order sphere the relational processes that *function* their use) then a learning organisation might be marked by such a learning ecology.

One organisational member in PC-A commented that 'organisational learning was like mainstreaming', thereby making the connection between these two second-order organisational processes. Unlike mainstreaming though learning seems to be understood very much as a first-order function for Irish Aid, generating propositional texts of 'lessons learnt' to be documented and fed into planning and decision-making as substantive knowledge. Nonetheless, learning seems also to be practically understood as a feature of other processes such as quality assurance and CSP production; which in many senses is a helpful, practical situation. While there may seem to be a contradiction here this is not so – first-order learning as *part* of an organisational process (i.e. identifying 'lessons learnt') is different to second-order learning as a metapractice that is functional with all organisational processes. Particular resourcing of the learning function is rooted through PMDS which locates the learning function with the individual sphere. Furthermore, as noted elsewhere, the only learning strategy specifically articulated is that of the Knowledge Management Working Group where the focus is clearly on knowledge management, a support function to deuterio-learning. Thus, although learning for Irish Aid seems to be

propositional and practical – the metalearning function of reflexive attending, what we might call deutero-learning, seems less apparent as common learning practice.

*'Another' Story - Reflexive Critique of Organisational Learning Project Method of 'External Audit'*

It seems the exploratory and descriptive rationale used for the knowledge-audit was unsuccessful in generating accessible knowledge and ways forward for Irish Aid PC-A. While there is no formal response to the 'report' and its support documents available, I have interpreted that the categories used were not focussed clearly enough to make them accessible and that the relations between them could have been better established. A succinct and accessible picture of knowledge making, sharing and management processes on which basis the team in PC-A might have been able to take concrete steps seems not to have been accomplished. The connections made and the organising patterns (or structures) formalised for action such as the Cluster Groups, through which the three CSP Principles were rooted and managed; or the capacity building with practical learning experiences (such as responsibility sharing) enacted with the 'team approach' seemed to offer a ready terrain for new learning practices.

Nonetheless, the results-based philosophy driving this team and its processes seems to have made the local discovery of these connections difficult. The answers to these questions are of course the work of 'another conversation'. Translating the knowledge picture emerging from the 'audit' into the living language of Team members is important. Given the dual-purpose of the exercise (research and organisational learning project) it was a challenge to respond to local needs for clear, concise 'recommendations' given the qualitative nature of the research design from which a relatively disordered and 'noisy' body of data was generated. Many of these points suggesting that as a model for growing organisational learning activities, the relating processes or pattern of 'external review for report and recommendation' is seriously limited.

A basic principle for relational constructionism is that all learning is contextual, local, historical etc., the experience with PC-A further confirms my view that such indeed is the case. It seemed the Team had developed a healthy learning ethic and practice through the process of developing the CSP, including significant re-design as text and practice; and yet generating a common conversation with those features of their organising practice that could be enhanced and further developed seems not to have taken place. On reflection I wonder if the basic premises or orientations to learning forming my perspective were considerably different to those of the Team members? This may be an indication of the challenge of linking highly 'technical', 'propositional' and 'skills-based' understandings and expectations for learning with more 'relational', 'figurative' or contextual appreciations of the same.

The practical learning from this initiative as a whole, and as third-order topic emerging is how to engage ‘results’ or ‘solution’ oriented teams with the lateral perspectives of organisational learning? These lateral perspectives are labelled here on a dialectical frame as ecological-pragmatic and topical-dialogic dynamics<sup>36</sup>. A praxis suggests itself in which the predicaments of the relational practitioner become the same as those of the development-aid practitioner – how to learn *how* when the critical focus remains with *what*? The fine distinction to be made seems to be with understanding the difference at play with ‘how’ formulations or constructions. ‘How’ is a functional relating process at different orders of abstraction. It is a question of instrumentality (technique and technology), but ‘how’ is also an ecology made with other knowledges – epistemic, poetic, phronetic and praxial – to take up Aristotle’s other categories (1976) – which function as deuterio forces. These distinctions are explored with Chapter Six. For now, the conundrum of a common conversation with whats/howes remains. It is a type of ghost-story since as you look directly at *what* you think you have seen, the sight disappears.

To conclude, Figure 18 below shows the values PC-A team members placed on some of the different exercises that made-up the ‘Field-Visit’ and ‘Organisational Learning Project’ on the basis of a numerically-graded evaluation (1-5) of how ‘energising’ and ‘useful’ these activities had been. As a final interesting comment, one Team member remarked that the visit had given them, ‘reflective space’. Although the project formally came to an end, this remark suggests that in deuterio-fashion some contribution had been made.

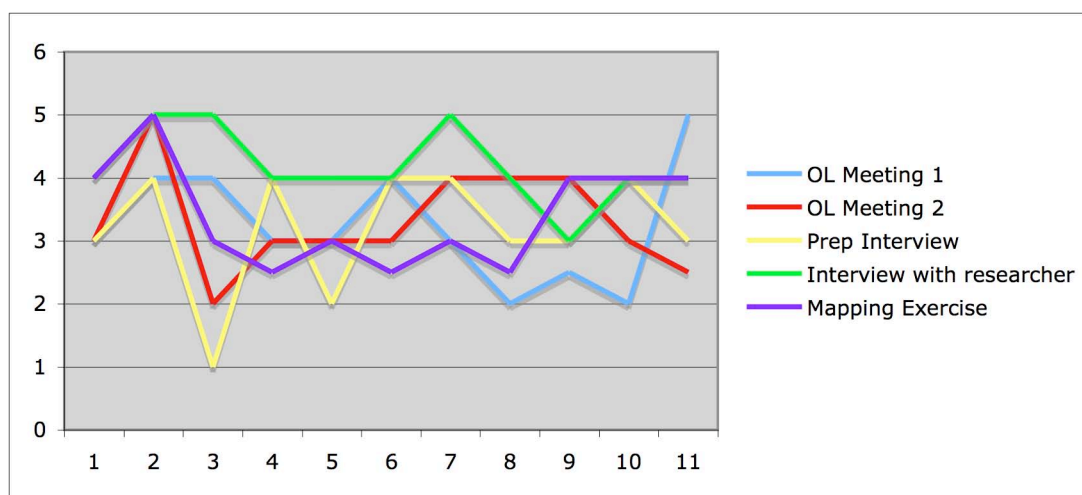


Figure 0-18 – Evaluation of Organisational Learning Project Activities by PC-A Team Members

## Conclusions – Towards the Pragmatics of Practical Learning

By way of brief conclusion to this Chapter some of the landscape explored is noted. Irish Aid generated a series of responses to the context of the new aid architecture as organisational

<sup>36</sup> The *Figure of Practical Learning*

developments or institutionalisation, but also as practical learning with and for complex situations. As an imagined 'Coherence' the Organisation-wide work of drafting new policies, redesigning many organising systems and developing guidelines for key organisational processes was a formal response to environmental (and therefore 'internal') change. Framed here as a series of 'planning to plan' stories these initiatives to re-define the learning ecology of Irish Aid, although not imagined on such terms by members, seem to be 'mixed blessings'. Every relating process or pattern generates vulnerabilities and benefits (Oliver, 2005) thus making any change neither objectively 'good' nor 'bad', just different. For PC-A the challenges of the new architecture generated a response to the CSP process that resulted in a rationalisation of three principles that gave shape to how the CSP was to be 'implemented' – the significant shift becoming a 'team approach' that worked its way into the CSP Guidelines when formally textualised (Irish Aid, 2008a).

Nonetheless with these organisational actions for 'Coherence', 'Linkage' and 'team approaches' certain disconnecting practices continue to pattern. Although abstract processes such as learning are linked to concrete actions, much of the pragmatically talked and re-structuring work described with this Chapter de-couples this link in effect with the discursive practices going-on. In other words, as 'matters to hand' and topics are *talked* as 'Coherence', as the 'CSP Review Workshop' or as 'Organisational Learning for PC-A' many of the complex predicaments of organising continue to play with the talk and textualisation going-on. Basic organising challenges such as complexity, inclusive communication and ambiguity with relative goals function with discursive practices as ways of going-on with an established organising and learning ecology. It is towards some of these complex-talking practices that this exploration of practical learning and learning ecology now turns.



## Chapter Five: Exploring the Pragmatics of Practical Learning

‘Within language in use, there is no fixed division of labour.  
Rather, through an unending ‘labour of division’ there is constant creation  
and reproduction of each dualism’

*Rolland Munro*

*(1998: 146)*

‘The notion of variability must be taken so seriously that the range of possible  
choices cannot be seen as anything static or stable. It is not fixed once and for all;  
rather, it is constantly changing.’

*Jef Verschueren*

*(1999: 59)*

‘The making of the thing, the generation of the syntax, creates its own truth’

*Sebastian Barry*

*on ‘The View Presents’, RTE 1 – 28th April 2008*

### Coordinates – Chapter Five

- This chapter describes how an *orientation* was developed in order to explore *pragmatically* the language-used for Irish Aid strategic planning. It describes how relating processes of ‘contingency/exigency’ (figuring as Irish Aid, as research practice) generate ways to go-on *as* the complex relating process of ‘position/purpose-practice’, and how this connecting pattern generates what features as ‘topic’ or ‘determination’.
- If we are pragmatic – How do we generate praxis?

## General Introduction – Pragmatics with Talked-Text

### *A Relational Approach to Pragmatics 'Analysis'*

A relational approach to empirical work is significantly different to the more objectifying methodologies of scientific practice – natural and social. When exploring the world *relationally* the 'researcher' takes particular account of the ways in which the research-text emerging becomes another force for the weave contextualising that world going-on. The point becomes knowing 'how to' as 'going-along'. In this sense any relational constructionism approach is radically future-facing as practice. As a research task, such as making a PhD text, this situation of orientation presents a number of challenges<sup>1</sup>. For a start, the text is always dead (or fixed) unless 'taken-up' for another contextualisation. What matters is the trace it projects towards the next contextualisation that comes to matter; the shape and shaping of which is as yet unknown. The goal too is problematic with the con/text of 'scientific' discourse<sup>2</sup>. The goal of practice or *praxis*, is more praxis (Groome, 1980b). This means that what can be reported is essentially what has been learnt so far about how to go-on as the 'result' that matters.

This text is therefore a 'report' of methodological learning first and foremost – an exploration of language-used, as practical learning. The exploration is reflexive by reflecting its own processing from time to time. The reason this praxis of textual-consciousness is worthy of report is that telling the story or describing the detail of practice renders knowledge about how the processing functions – useful knowledge for the on-going work of establishing contexts of learning and organising practice principled with expanding rationales – 'relational' rationales required as the challenges we face globally change in dimension and pattern. In this way, this text becomes a practical report – a description of the learning so far that will continue to unfold as and when *used* for some *how* else.

An interpretation *is* made of objectified determinations *about* language-used as Irish Aid practice. A series of 'labels' and some examples lifted from the Segment Analyses<sup>3</sup> carried out is presented. An interpretation is also made of these practices according to a dialectical frame which classes them as language-uses generating *position* and *purpose* as second-order phenomena. Related dialectically position/purpose as *used* relating processes, render *practice* and *pattern* as organisation,

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<sup>1</sup> As it does for any (con)textualising practice.

<sup>2</sup> The broad paradigmatic con/text of this research and of organising practice – including many constructions of organisational learning.

<sup>3</sup> These descriptions of segments of transcribed talk using a pragmatics approach to language-use are included in the appendices section.



as well as *a view*<sup>4</sup> of the same. This is a frame for making-sense and presenting the data as ‘analysed’ or described using methods of ‘Pragmatics’ as language-use. This frame of ‘reading’ was chosen as a way of engaging with the recorded, transcribed and segmented texts from a relational perspective. There have been limitations with this task. As well as the formal difficulties mentioned above, for a relational approach<sup>5</sup> ‘re-search’ in the more traditional sense becomes somewhat suspect. A relational approach circumscribes its role to a great extent, suggesting that research ‘results’ or ‘claims’ are most *useful* when *placed* or *positioned* as new conversations between ‘researchers’ and ‘practitioners’.

Writing this text generates a continuing difficulty with synthesis. How to transfer pragmatic descriptions of each segment of talk as summary determinations *about* those complex and no-longer living texts (as *themselves*), especially from the researcher’s ‘panoptic’ power of ‘over’ and ‘after’ the moment?<sup>6</sup> Does this mean that generalisation is not possible with a relational approach? This question generates several pointers for going-on. Firstly, noticing the frame of ‘seeking generalisations’ is useful since the tendency towards ‘metaperspectives’ is a praxis of deuterio-learning with which learners must be attentive and critical as to how this movement generates power, and for whom. Secondly, that ‘results’ generated using a relational approach are *pragmatic*, meaning they are *useful*, generated for *use* first and foremost. In other words, they are methodological resources; ways to go-on. Understanding this principle means clearly bracketing all propositional statements or determinations *about* the practices of others (in this case of Irish Aid ‘practitioners’ or ‘members’) as ‘resources’ or ‘exploratory texts’ to be taken-up as grounds for possible other practical contextualising. Whatever determinations are made with the processing of this text – they are conjectures *thrown* on and out towards organising practice in the hope of disturbing the current situation in some fashion and generating new forms of language-use, discursive practice or practical conversation.

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<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to depart from the common prevalence of using the ‘eye’ as the primary sensory mode that terms or languages our descriptive abstractions of interpretation – we might creatively explore how our knowing could change if we spoke of ‘a *smell* of the same’ for example, recognising that our sense of smell is highly evocative of emotional trace and thus interesting for epistemological exploration (Haldane, 1940). Hosking has also explored the fixedness on ‘seeing’ as ‘knowing’ expanding epistemology towards many bodily functions, or embodiments as knowing echoing Merleau-Ponty (Hosking, 2007, Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

<sup>5</sup> Which understands knowledge as contextual, that is, known with/as its processing.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. (Bentham, 1995)

### Managing Textualisation

Managing (this) text is challenging. The quantity of data becomes overwhelming for the time and energy frame available. So also with the detailed nature of each analysing/describing cycle as a 'Segment Description/Analysis'. Much of the task has been learning Pragmatics with the process – a trajectory that continues. Turning this situation towards a virtue, these limitations (due to the nature of the task taken-on) are relevant to the challenges of learning with exigent and complex practical situations. Often what *can* be reported becomes the 'matter to hand' that matters. In other words practical learning (as con/text) becomes that which is generating the 'matter' of textual life.

Nonetheless, as *relational* knowing such practical action goes-on attending to many relating processes, continually creating the weaving of the text. The scoping of the lens is broad. Therefore, in order to be *practical* for this text, those processes that have made *it* are reported reflexively; as processes of interpretation for formal text. The emerging and chosen frame of interpretation *of, as* and *for* organisational learning is of 'dialectic-relating'. Explorations, *going on* as the pragmatics description of segmented talked-text was underway, in order to understand how relating processes are indeed 'dialectic' are presented with Chapter Six. This is why these two Chapters (Five & Six) are understood as intrinsically connecting – exploring each 'other' in a sense. With the terms of this Chapter itself, the dialectic understanding of how learning happens, of how organising practice goes-on, makes this description of the data as research practice, dialectic in turn. This text is a *response* to the data, a dialectic read for which the data acts as the relevant interface that 'pushes back' with its own force, telos or praxis<sup>7</sup> at the theoretical/methodological approach taken. This Chapter is an account of those expansions – that are still in train.

### Figuring Relating Processes

From a relational perspective the most generalisable statement is a figurative statement. Determinations made and gathered together as a 'text' could be described as an evocative painting, talking (as abstracting) from and to the contexts/communities of the research enquiry. A description as a phenomenology of textualisation – how the text is made –becomes a praxis of *working-out* and considering the relating processes of that process. As a guide for organisational learning this is an important insight because research/learning done on these terms becomes quite relatable or resonant with the conditions of organising practice. The second-look or 'double-description' (to use Bateson's term) that constitutes deutero-learning is, according to

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<sup>7</sup> Insofar as I 'take the data-as-text up' for 'another' hermeneutic-cycle that generates a new living enquiry.

much organisational learning literature, critical for 'learning to learn'. From a relational perspective the most critical as well as possible statement to emerge from learning – whether called research or practice – is a statement/text to inform how to go-on. How any ecology is framing and informing becomes a question of *generative* contribution if the learning is to continually become vital or attuned.

### *Outline of the Chapter*

The practical life of organising practice, its pragmatics as language-used – abstrated to some degree as a metapractice of 'learning' – is explored in three parts for this Chapter. As Part I the goal of the Chapter and the terms of reference that circumscribe its focus are explored. This includes the definition of key concepts, an exposition of the functionality of pragmatics/dialectics by way of analysis of a simple utterance, and a reflexive review of the process of making-methods for a pragmatics-read of practical learning as language-use using talked-texts.

As Part II a description of features of talking practice as read from segment analyses, and organised with the functional term 'position/purpose – practice' is framed as 'practical learning'. Determinations are made *about* differentiating patterns that *connect* or generate a *sense* of the research organisation as a named id-entity, i.e. as 'Irish Aid'. These determinations are presented as practical resources for going-on with learning – as research, as organising practice. It is important to point out from the outset that these particular 'determinations' enjoy a status less than that of 'research-*claim*'. Insofar as their substance is established by means of rigorous and ethical attention to the data and research methods-in-use, the propositions-made (determinations *about* the data) are *grounded*, *reasonable* and therefore *useful*. But in order to be congruent with an understanding that textualisation is an organising process of choosing a position, framed with purpose, by and for going-on practice; the interpretive and contingent nature of determinations-made is acknowledged.

What is claimed with this work are second-order conclusions about contextualising/relating processes as relational, discursive, historical, embodied, contingent, exigent, organising and ultimately *practical* phenomena of 'knowledge-making' and 'organisational learning'. It is also held that such practical processes generate the connecting patterns that can be fleetingly, but essentially, counted (as research, as organising practice) for going-on cycles of reflexive enquiry. In particular the claim is made that reflexive-learning cycles are uncommon in many forms of public, and other, organising life, and that therefore a potential learning space is *unacknowledged*, and 'un-practiced'<sup>8</sup>. As 'Irish Aid' the claim is made that these patterns of connection are

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<sup>8</sup> One could play-with this term in order to show how reflexive enquiry becomes *difficult* as organising practice by introducing terms such as 'un-practicing' or 'impractical' in relation to what does or does-not

insufficiently differentiated<sup>9</sup> for the 'learning of context' that is deutero-learning (Bateson, 2002: 126). This situation limits learning-practice as proto-learning. It is not a 'reading of lack'<sup>10</sup> which by nature is un-contingent<sup>11</sup>, but a reading of practicing-extant – present or *used* – (insofar as this is possible with talked-texts) as *that which matters*, i.e., as that which is continually becoming the 'matter to hand'.

The features of organising practice that con/textualise or designate 'what matters' are thus of concern here. It is this very conundrum of practice – how the nature of organising practices generate their 'matters' in the 'first' instance; and carry-along with such practicing paradoxes or complexities *becoming* that make 'positionality' *unseen*, as second instance<sup>12</sup> – which requires the making of contexts for reflexive enquiry so necessary. In other words, finding paths to new topics and 'matters to hand' as organising practice will be generative for that practice.

As Part III the named features generated (as determinations) with Part II, are formalised using a topographical approach to learning practice. In the first instance this means the features of talking-practice figuring are ordered according to their nature as 'analogue-surrounding' (going-on) and digital signalling (interpreting). These 'axes' stand as variables of discursive practice and are figured using the *Figure of Practical Learning*<sup>13</sup>. This *Figure* takes account of the textual-pragmatics and social life of experience that creates the functionality of contextualisation. It is a new frame for 'the learning of context' (Bateson, 2002: 126) – which is deutero-learning. This

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become the 'matter to hand' when reflexive processes are considered ancillary or a luxury for busy people. This would best be explored with the practitioners for whom any particular reflexive enquiry matters most. The role of a relational practitioner in this sense might be that of the gad-fly or jester who can disturb and distort in order to cast light on the particular organising principles in play, while all the while holding a 'safe' space for exploration – as with any facilitated enquiry.

<sup>9</sup> By 'differentiation' a context of knowledge-making and/or particular claims generated with that context are brought into view and available for discursive exploration – i.e., recontextualisation.

<sup>10</sup> Such as the interpreting practices with 'learning' for Irish Aid as described with Chapter Three.

<sup>11</sup> Or has no 'materiality' or 'body' as such, but makes the 'lack' a 'thing' that 'obtains ontology' (Dachler and Hosking, 1995: 1). A discourse of lack thus displaces agency away from the interpreter and posits responsibility for practice-change elsewhere – typically with 'leadership' or some other abstracted symbol, structure, group or condition. In this sense the tendency to entify abstractions (interpretations made of complex, overwhelming or unassailable situations) with language-use, practicing or ordering is deeply disempowering of all participants.

<sup>12</sup> Bourdieu describes this phenomenon as the 'projection into the object of a non-objectified objectifying relation' (1990: 35-36).

<sup>13</sup> A fruit emerging from the research practice, explained with Chapter Six, although introduced at the beginning of Chapter One.

‘topographical approach’ (using the *Figure of Practical Learning* as a kind of process-map) is made according to the principles of practical learning emerging from the research practice as dialectic-logic for learning-in-organising (Gherardi, 1999) or practical learning.

Here, the action of ‘topicalising’ the analysed data shows how the logic of textualisation ‘goes-on’ with practice as a matter of exigency, concern, choice, perspective and, as an overarching concept, functional teleology. ‘Teleology’ – interpreting phenomena according to ‘ends’ or ‘last’ purposes – is constructed here as a complex-teleology. The *telos* (or purpose) is a useful name for imminent and always emerging force or ‘dunamis’<sup>14</sup> generating the on-goingness of process; which at times we notice as pattern, character or consistency. The power or *forcing* generating ‘ongoingness’ enjoys no *objective* or *propositional* status, and no *one* unit (person, group, organisation) has or obtains ‘full’ view or control – ‘view’ or ‘control’ are *constructed* and limited resources. *Telos* is therefore constructed here as a property of con/textualisation, a complex purpose-ing that goes-on with text/con/text dynamics as *becoming*. In this way the use might be likened to Heidegger’s notion of *Dasein*, the Being-there that unfolds as being-there, or ‘itself’ (1973)<sup>15</sup>.

With the final Chapter of the thesis (Seven), the ‘information’ or ‘difference’ emerging from the pragmatics/dialectics read of data as practical learning is ‘gathered-in’ in order to make remarks about how *contingency* is key to the ‘learning of context’, how *use* frames and projects the meaning-making process, and how *what matters* is drawn-out as analogue/digital becoming without losing (but as *instance* infinitely varying) ‘identity’<sup>16</sup> or characterising-practice (analogue/digital dynamics as *somehow* – at best – *received*). It is not that there is some transcendent intelligence<sup>17</sup> (‘transcendence’ of some type is a processual and practical necessity for learning); but rather that *practicing* human-beings, organisations, or other sense-making situations as ecologies, ‘discover’ or ‘appear’ as useful patterns that *become*, as attractive, habitual, redundant, even excellent, or on other terms. Reflexive enquiry, which Chapter Seven briefly explores, is for connecting with the patterning of these patterns, in so far as this might be possible, according to a choice for justice and right-relationships as much as for efficiency and resourcefulness.

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<sup>14</sup> δύνᾰμις – ‘strength, might, power, ability’ and ‘force of a word’ (Liddell and Scott, 1891) is the etymological root of the word, ‘dynamic’ thus relating ‘power’ with ‘movement’ etc.

<sup>15</sup> Explored with Chapter Six.

<sup>16</sup> A term to be suspect about due to its entifying history – ‘textual-coherence’ probably does the job better for a relational approach remembering that no group have full view or control of the same – it is imminent and on occasion experienced as ‘received’ or ‘gift’.

<sup>17</sup> A feature of the history of the word ‘teleology’ with Ancient Greek Philosophers and Scholastics of the Christian Tradition, with contemporary expressions.

## Part I: Pragmatics Description as Practical Learning

### *A Pragmatics Orientation for Textualising Practice*

Pragmatics is ‘a general functional perspective on (any aspect of) language ... which takes into account the full complexity of its cognitive, social and cultural functioning’ (Verschueren, 1999: 16). Common topics explored are deixis (‘anchoring’ language with an embodied/material world by way of discursive ‘pointing’), speech acts (performing words), implicit meaning (conditions/complexities of indirectness, force, politeness etc.) and conversation (turn-taking, organisation, sequencing, register, genre etc.) with a phenomenological orientation. ‘Pragmatic’, for this research project, means that which is *used* – particular discursive actions for making-meaning as the contextual condition or ecology for learning based on the root of the word as *πρᾶγμα* (pragma) meaning, ‘that which has been done, a deed’ (Liddell and Scott, 1891). Discursive processes are functional according to their *used* conditions for which their features are embodiments of second and third-order phenomena such as organisational *style, character, identity*, or interpretations of a common and therefore *connecting pattern*. This discursive/situational frame is constructed as a particular context of organising practice (as Irish Aid) by using the notion of a connecting pattern<sup>18</sup> as a construct for making-meaning<sup>19</sup>. Creating a topographical description of meaningful functioning – *as* organising practice, *as* Irish Aid – and *characterising* that practice as the context or ecology of practical learning from some position of empirical groundedness, is a feature of the challenge at hand.

### Describing Strategy

To differentiate the framing device used here from the ‘stories’ of previous sections the label of ‘topograph’ is taken up. The topograph offers a way of describing that foregrounds different practical ‘features’ making-meaning and organising practice as relating process. Constructed here for a pragmatics describing exercise as ‘reference/sense-making’ that *does*, or becomes as *functional*, relating processes are understood as going-on dialectic movements. They are figured below on two axes of different perceptive/recursive modalities or functional dimensions. These have been labelled here as the ecological-pragmatic axis and the topical-dialogic axis – terms explored in detail with Chapter Six (see Figure 1 below – reproduced also for Chapters One and Four).

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<sup>18</sup> Languaged, for example, by Blanter and Anderson-Wallace as ‘patternality not personality’ (2006b: 78)

<sup>19</sup> For research and organising practice.

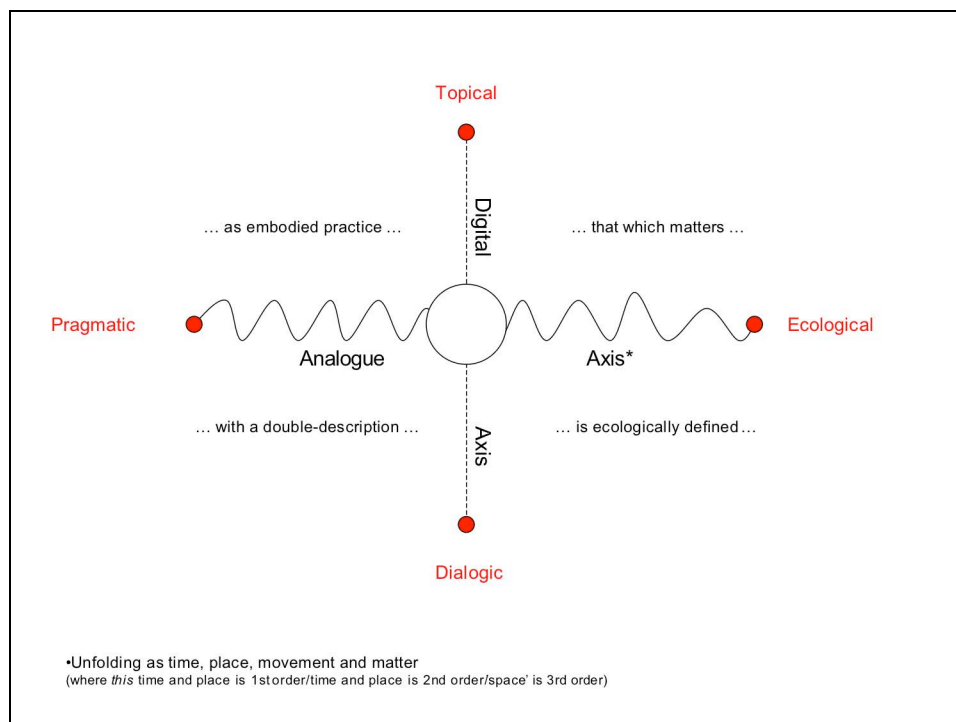


Figure 0-1 - The Figure of Practical Learning

The challenge of *reducing* a series of detailed pragmatics descriptions of segments of talked-text has been met with the unfolding staged process of doing that ‘analysis’ or ‘describing’. Initially by changing from a certain ‘mechanical’<sup>20</sup> approach to language-used to a pragmatics *orientation* as a *hermeneutic* – a way of describing talked-text with purpose<sup>21</sup> for a phenomenological task generated a way to go-on with the practicality. I discovered that a pragmatics *orientation* enables the choice of a few coherent *points*, or to stay with topographical language, a few *places* as ‘visiting’ or ‘viewing-points’<sup>22</sup> to establish a way of organising the textualising of a ‘report’ of the detailed descriptions made as explorations with particular segment analyses<sup>23</sup>. These viewing-places from which to scan the learning landscape for a pragmatics description are labelled as ‘position’ (marking spatiality/relationality) ‘purpose’ (marking complex-teleological force) and ‘practice’

<sup>20</sup> A light use of the term since pragmatics understands language-use as contextualising, by means of interaction/rhetorical force etc., and not in any mechanical sense although using ready (often habitual) resources.

<sup>21</sup> In which of course the *text reads (as) me* (cf. Ricoeur, 1981, Jeanrond, 1988)

<sup>22</sup> Imagined also as ‘vantage-points’ as from a hill, mountain or tall building.

<sup>23</sup> Three ways of describing, corresponding to the functional topics of position, purpose and practice as second-order features were developed.

(marking the praxial<sup>24</sup> dialectic-generation of the first two). Using these ‘viewing’ or ‘vantage’ points the ecology of practical learning is *coloured-in*<sup>25</sup> with pragmatic detail.

With the move towards describing ‘viewing-places’ in order to synthesise exploration, the functionality of ‘logical-typing’ or ‘orders of abstraction’ (Bateson, 1972, 2002) is taken-up. Logical-typing offers a frame for generating sense as dialectical relating and is figured below (Figure 2) using the cybernetic notions of analogue and digital signalling.

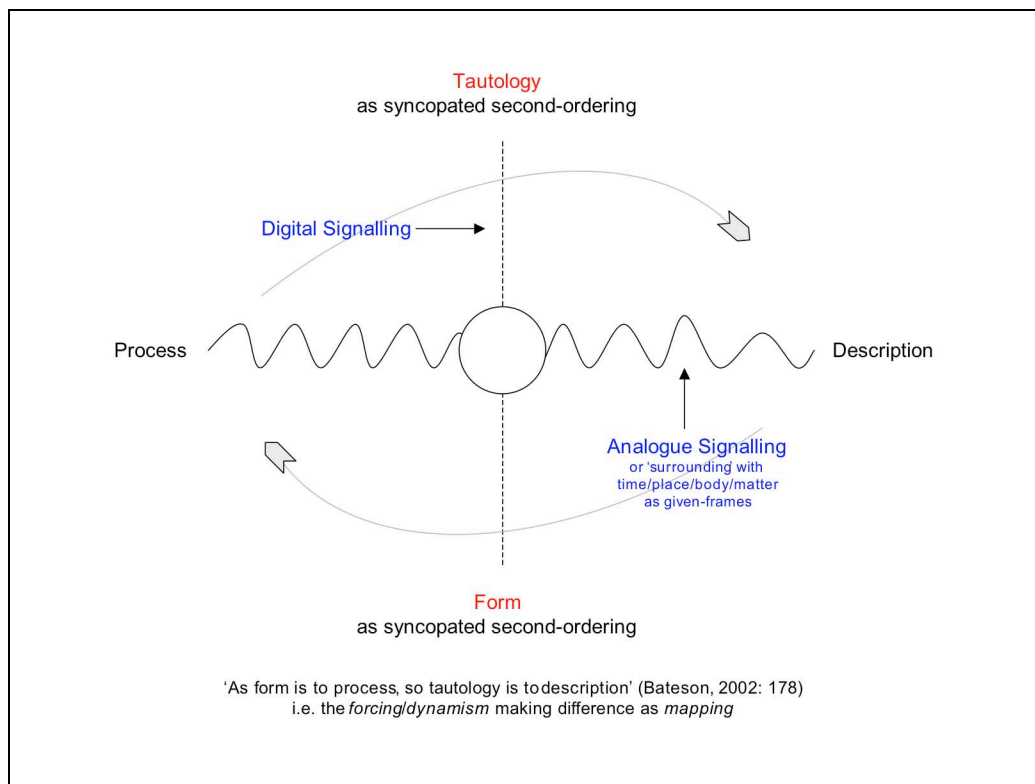


Figure 0-2 - A Dialectic-Dimensional Mapping of Analogue/Digital Signalling

This figure of dialectic-practicing offers the basis on which the exploration of pragmatic language-use as Irish Aid from the *viewing-places* of ‘position/purpose – practice’ is presented. This second approach to the data<sup>26</sup> is undertaken in order to begin generating a view of some of the simple or practical (as in ‘commonly practiced’) ways in which the frequently (legitimised and often dominant) *used texts* (that contextualise greater spheres of influence as ‘discourses’) are

<sup>24</sup> When *praxis* is a pragmatic discipline or ‘exegesis’ that attends to its own terms of making.

<sup>25</sup> Or ‘thickened’, to use Geertz’ metaphor (1975).

<sup>26</sup> I.e. Double-description as research practice.



made. From this position there is a possibility of creating the conditions for *flexing* these texts in order to attend to desires for a learning organisation approach<sup>27</sup>.

The ‘vantage’ points around which particular features or ‘colours’ of language-used are gathered are of course relating processes themselves; thus ‘position’ generates ‘purpose’ and vice-versa, while as a second-order phenomenon, ‘practice’ *becomes* (is constructed) with relating position/purpose. This describing strategy generates a view of dialogic formation or the *making* of Irish Aid interpreting as ‘position/purpose – practice’ as a complex, double-description with what might be called a ‘rhematic’<sup>28</sup> frame of con/text.

A pragmatics *orientation* thus offers the means for a second-order textualisation of un-aligned, complex or ‘chaotic’ processes as generating organising practice con/texts. This is done by *showing* (with *a* sense) some of the phenomena of *language-used* that follow and don’t follow<sup>29</sup>. In this case as movements towards the explicit expression of an official text, the CSP Country Strategy Guidelines (Irish Aid, 2008a), standing for what has been defined here as ‘presentational talk’. On these terms this Chapter is a critique of the narrative view of Chapter Four. ‘Critical’ with the relational constructionism sense of ‘another’ construction, i.e. framed differently. It becomes an exploration of the fragmented, contingent and heuristic details of practical learning manifesting as a need to not only ‘go-on’ but ‘get-on’ with the ‘matters to hand’ for a presentation of, and *as*, ‘coherent organisation’. As Weinberg has noted, ‘coping is phenomenologically prior to theorizing’ (2008: 31).

The task is to explore topographically – naming or topicalising features of note – thus generating *some* description of practical learning practices as patterned-interpretations or language-used to *characterise* Irish Aid. This describing practice thereby generates *another* context for learning. A con/text that locates, places or *positions* orders commonly functional (and therefore often

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<sup>27</sup> The notion of ‘flex’ will be used here to denote an action by which a context of address for a topic is created. It is distinguished from contexts where topics are ‘fixed’ – as when they are assumed or untouchable with the talk, and ‘unfixed’ – where topics are present in some fashion (latent or tentatively introduced) but unacknowledged with any significant degree of force so that they become contextualised.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Rhemes’ are those features of a term or utterance that draw significance from the immediate context-of-use. A theme cannot be generated without the use of rhemes that ‘anchor’ the meaning, or make it possible (Austin, 1962) so that we can talk of a theme-rheme structure (Jeanrond, 1988) as that which enables a sort of continual hermeneutics of interpretation as practice. This rhematic character of contextualisation is explored with Chapter Six.

<sup>29</sup> Derrida on ἀνακυλιθόν (anacoluthon) or ‘not-following’ based on the Greek verb ‘to follow’ – i.e. theory (or knowing by textualisation) elides much that the text is not, that which does not-follow as it were. I liken this notion to the complex processes of choosing, letting go, forgetting that are inherent for the production of texts of position, policy, guidelines etc. (Derrida in Payne and Schad, 2003)

undescribed, unexplored, unacknowledged for learning) as the ordering of organisation that matters. All such interpreting actions have moral intention. Here exploration is *for* potential ‘flexing’ or ‘loosening’ of what seem relatively fixed formal-interpreting patterns currently *used* for organising practice. The purpose is to contribute towards generating organisational contexts that can soften or flex S/O differentiating patterns when appropriate for vital or generative contingency. From such flexible contexts for knowledge-making differing ranges of response can be continually generated with reflexive enquiry.

### Relating Pragmatics/Dialectics – an example with verbs-used

To show how a pragmatics orientation functions a simple example of an utterance, used recently during a television programme,<sup>30</sup> is explored here. The presenter of the show asked the speaker to tell the story of a local legend to which in response the following utterance was used to begin the account:

‘The story that gets told’

Our interest with this simple term, and more specifically with the use of verbs, is with how they can give some insight about the practice of making-meaning in/by/with/for contextual and customised uses of language. The two verbs, ‘gets told’ are placed together in a modal relation of different logical types so that the item ‘told’ is formulated in a second order of abstraction mode (in past tense as a completed action) which is thereby ‘received’ into the present as a *figure*. The other verb-use of the utterance, ‘gets’ is formulated with first order of abstraction mode (as a continuing present for unending action) which thereby ‘projects’ the action towards the future as a sort of *ground*. With this formulated use a *message* gets generated – we the listeners can imagine some ‘collective’ who (as on-going fashion) tell a tale. There is a paradox functioning with this common related-use of verbs, the *figure* (told) which is the primary action, is drawn out into analogous being without losing its identity since, although pragmatically worked-out as a complete action, it is placed as context for *going-on*. By the same instance of use, the *ground* of the action (‘gets’) is backgrounded or blended, also without losing its identity, as the figure of speech (a felicitous term<sup>31</sup>) so that its action, is *placed* for context as something *done*, a complete action or *figure*.

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<sup>30</sup> *Nationwide*, RTE 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2009, Speaker: Canon David Williams of the Church of Ireland, Kinsale, Co. Cork

<sup>31</sup> To use another classic pragmatics term to denote ‘successful’ communicative intention and interpretation, (Austin, 1962), (Grice, 1975)

As yet we have not analysed ‘the story’ term, functioning here as the ‘absent figure’ or ‘imagination’ of the utterance (not the ‘tale’ about to be told but the composite item of this utterance itself, which is its subject). This is the subject with(in) the subject, or the topic we begin to place now as a con/text of ecological-pragmatic/topical-dialogic epistemological relating. That which is being talked *about* is as yet absent so that an item is used to enable our perception to ‘go out to meet it’, to extend towards that text which is about to take place as a ‘story told’. This is talking *with* an item, that as itself is only that; a device of reference that signals with imagination, as *used* it is ‘no-thing’<sup>32</sup>. But it is necessarily present and is therefore already *functional*, which means the item is *active* not *passive* as creating the meaning-making process. In this way the importance of the *imagining* function of knowing becomes apparent. This imagining function is embodied with describing practices (from poetics to phenomenology, including practical-skill or technical ability) as language-uses that function with the formulation, *as if* (Shotter, 2008). The *use* of a word as discursive contextualisation ‘stands-for’ an imagined situation, event, process etc. The use *projects* meaning as well as *framing* it. Talking *with* an item or term is always a *characterising* process of a reflexive nature generating a message of *identity* in the first instance (albeit indirectly), as distinguished from talking *about* an item or term, which is a marked objective, second-order formulation process (Shotter, 2008).

Also apparent with this use is how the speaker *as speaker* by implication displaces the tellers alluded to. There is a presence of story-tellers that is elided where they are simultaneously present/de-presented at once. This language-use reveals and constructs as its action the *receptive* nature of the experience of meaning-making as a practice of recounting, accounting-for, discounting<sup>33</sup>. Since analogue surrounding or spiralling is *extensive* it is fundamentally quantitative – the *counting* nature of its function attuned to with these particular language-uses. But this utterance-used also shows the *projective* or rhetorical nature of meaning-making as a practice of purpose or desire. Since the digital dimension (which has no location) is, to use a word, *intensive* (or syncopated) it is fundamentally qualitative and is therefore only to be apprehended or discerned as/with discursive practice. Indeed, often imagined as some sort of ‘fullness’ or fulfillment, ‘ground’ or even ‘ideal form’, the ‘source’ of digital signalling is always beyond any knowing – whatever ‘it’ is, it always remains unknown<sup>34</sup>. With Chapters Six and Seven some

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<sup>32</sup> It is a ‘map’ – and the map is not the ‘thing itself’ (Bateson, 2002)

<sup>33</sup> Which can be noted as a purely rhemal phenomena since there is no themal reference to this action – there is a presencing of the re-counter implicated obviously, but significant nonetheless as a positioning of voice, engagement or power.

<sup>34</sup> Poets indicate this ‘knowing unknown’ curiousness with expressions such as, ‘We see through a glass, darkly’ (1 Corinthians 13:12) or ‘We shall not cease from exploration; And the end of all our exploring;

further features of how digital signalling *becomes* intrinsically with analogue-surrounding are explored. It is sufficient to note here that the process of *becoming*, as analogue and digital modes, is understood as immanent-function – although never as ‘necessary’ nor ‘closed’ – creativity is the intrinsic feature generating life.

Finally, the item ‘that’ with the utterance, ‘the story that gets told’ indicates an imagined location of telling (of the story) whether *that* be understood as a particular place (a pub for example) or a more notional ‘location’ as a second instance (among friends for example), while as the first the item marks the story itself, ‘*that* [which] gets told’. So, even with the contextualised use of this pronoun a dialectic reading is possible whereby ‘that’ functions with relational fashion to its imagined subject (the noun, ‘story’) as well as with the context of the utterance itself for which an imagined ‘place of telling’ is constructed implicitly without direct reference at all. This is the social life of experience (of knowing *anything* or *anyhow* at all) that generates the functional dynamics of language-used and creates the topographical details of knowing and learning in/by/with/for very practical learning moments, events and situations.

We might take another topical example that shows the critical feature of dialectic generation of meaning being explored here. With one of his articulations of a definition of deuterio-learning Bateson says, ‘deuterio-learning (i.e., learning to learn) is, in fact, the acquiring of information about the contingency patterns of the contexts in which proto-learning occurs’ (1972: 364). Apart from the concise and precise nature of this written text, we can expand its contextual features of use by attending to the pragmatic-use of the items. With the used textual relation of ‘contingency patterns’ (and to add clarity let us graphically foreground the relating features of this term with the mark “/” – as ‘contingency/patterns’) we can explore how the term accounts semantically and syntactically for all its features – in a sense its ‘topography’. We will assume semantic play and sufficient clarity.

With the syntactical pragmatic function we note how the *projective* features of learning context (i.e. practical learning) as well as the *receptive* features become apparent with a little exploration. ‘Contingency’ is located with the present-use as ways (and a way) to ‘go-on’, echoing *somehow* of Garfinkel’s idea that ordinary experts use contingent practices to orientate action that makes the talk ‘on-going’ according to an embedded sense or reason with a ‘grammar of rhetoric’ (1967). Deconstructing this notion a little suggests that the ‘grammar’ (or syntax) used embodies a common or ‘documentary’ purpose, as well as somehow as a rhetorical or interpreting purpose

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Will be to arrive where we started; And know the place for the first time’ (T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* – *Little Gidding*, Part V)

understood here as an organising phenomenon of telos – or teleological determination<sup>35</sup>. This complex construction of ‘rhetoric’ attempts to account for the con-, as well as inter and trans-, textualising nature of meanings-made as organising practice for which the text ‘made-to-matter’ is a processual phenomenon of which no *one* agent or unit has a complete view or control (purpose); *becoming* as phenomenon simply *goes-on*.

The ‘connecting patterns’ located with presented texts ‘made to matter’ with documentary fashion, are ways (and a way) that ‘have come’ in some sense from established uses or practices. The curious feature here is that these items might be re-categorised dialectically so that ‘contingency’ is tracked as past actions and ‘patterns’ are traced as future orientations. Thus the relational process enacted depends on the choices of interpretation made; either and both-ways the relation of the two items is *functional*, generating *message* and thereby is of pivotal importance for change-processes.

### *Methodological Contingencies for Describing Living Texts*

It is necessary to imagine (with this text) what the typograph cannot convey as the dialectic relating process continually and contingently functioning as/with discursive practice. Hence the nature of relating making the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of any process as graphically figured with Figure 3 – reproduced from Chapter 4<sup>36</sup>. This representation seeks to show more clearly than the typed formulation ‘what/how’ can, *how* ‘whatever’ is dialectically related to ‘however’ as going-on functionality.

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<sup>35</sup> From the Greek, τέλος (telos) meaning ‘an end accomplished, completion or fulfilment, to be finished or ready’ (Liddell and Scott, 1891). To be distinguished from some philosophical and theological approaches to ‘teleology’ which denote ‘divine intelligence’ or ‘material necessity’ at work within or as the universe – or beyond, or as extrinsically ordering the actions of sentient beings. The teleology imagined here is nothing more than the emerging and evolving processes of *becoming* – inherent to their own functionality. In this sense whatever ‘purpose’ there may be, that force or energy (δύναμις – dunamis, i.e. dynamic/active/responsive/power) is immanent as process; and is linked here with *characterising practices* as third-order phenomena.

<sup>36</sup> Under the heading, ‘Some Textual Practices for Practical Learning’

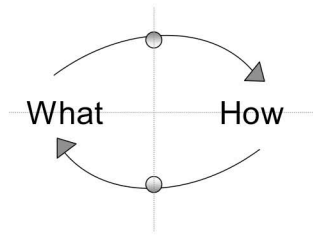


Figure 0-3 - The Dialectic Dynamic of What/How

With this principle at hand and to further address as a focussing question for this Chapter, ‘What/How is the connecting pattern of Irish Aid?’ as read from an ‘organisational learning perspective’ the Segment Analyses or Descriptions made sought to figure what were termed, ‘teleological (in)determinants’. This places the research practice as a constructionism enquiry with ‘How/What’ as phenomena, rather than as enquiry with either ‘how’ or ‘what’ (Gubrium and Holstein, 2008). There is functional focus with this strategy that seeks to topicalise by some fashion what might be called *fixing functions* as characterising Irish Aid organising practice. By generating a sense of processes *characterising* Irish Aid the description attends to a notion of ‘identity’ or character as a third order abstraction. As an example of how to make this a very pragmatic question for Irish Aid, the topic of ‘comparative advantage’ for the harmonising of development-aid can be taken up.

### Where is Irish Aid Character Generating?

During the preparation phase for the CSP Review Workshop it was noted that when designing the process the facilitator suggested beginning with an exploration of ‘comparative advantage’ as that which Irish Aid is ‘good at’. Discussing this idea it became clear that for Irish Aid practitioners this notion is understood with a technical rationale, i.e. Irish Aid needs to decide on which sectoral engagements to continue/take-up for the harmonising environment. This processing of the term is an ‘incomplete’ praxis for deuterio-learning, understandable when the need to make decisions is paramount. Nonetheless, this is a pattern ultimately disconnecting organisation from that which (what) is mattering for a changing environment. The actualised exercise for the CSP Review Workshop can be understood as a timely (although limited to Irish Aid voices) exploration of what ‘was good’ about Irish Aid. As a form of reflexive attending this was an exercise with more potential than was generated as formulaic responses were shared, and critical enquiry as to if and how these views were valid did not make it to the forum of public-

talk<sup>37</sup>. Additionally, this sort of reflexive-review is isolated and was in fact somewhat unusual or alien for practitioners<sup>38</sup>.

Nonetheless, this question of ‘comparative advantage’ did have a formulation embedded within an everyday context outside that of the CSP Review Workshop. The notion was linked to awareness of a particular organisational nature when one member talked about ‘a discrete identity for Irish Aid in an increased opaqueness ... there is a comparative advantage that we have, its different in different programme countries, but [we must be] careful not to lose these ways of working [and our] focus’<sup>39</sup>. From ‘comparative advantage’ we move to ‘discrete identity’ as ‘ways of working and focus’ that Irish Aid ‘must be careful not to lose’. Across the differences of programme countries, policies of means and ends, and even national government changes (in Ireland) there seems to be a valuation of ‘ways of working’ that endure. The position here is that this enduring identity or character is lived by/with/in/for connecting patterns as ordinary, organising practices that make its order or functionality.

The initial goal is therefore to describe ‘these ways of working’ in order to understand some *how* their functionality as connecting patterns (with the *indirect goal* of turning to them for participatory practicing<sup>40</sup>). The nature of this contextualising knowledge-type (‘knowing-how’ so that we can ‘know-for’) is complex which has meant describing/analysing talked-texts as a series of segment analyses that required the forging of a method of ‘reviewing and responding’ that attuned to the nature of such phenomena. This dynamic has marked all the phases of recording, transcribing and segmenting, but the most pressing difficulty has been generating a language with which to appropriately topicalise and manage the ‘difference’<sup>41</sup> inherent and generating the phenomena being researched. These phenomena are *how-functions*, while we work with a language ordered (with its subject/object structuring or syntax) to *what-markers* (i.e. the function of *placing* names,

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<sup>37</sup> As noted by participating with the group to plenary session for this topic.

<sup>38</sup> A sort of reflexive oasis that Irish Aid practitioners do not commonly generate for themselves, ‘The way we work internally is not interactive nor participative, facilitators do that for us’ (member comment – participant research-practice notes, Field Visit PC-A)

<sup>39</sup> CSP Review Workshop Preparation Week, Head Office – comment recorded with participant research-practice notes.

<sup>40</sup> Where the ‘indirect’ is considered essential and not ‘ancillary’ or ‘occasional’ in any way – this indirect function requires practical constitution as essential to the ‘matters to hand’. Also, as stated elsewhere, ‘participatory’ for this work is the characterising description of what ‘better’ might mean, i.e. ‘better practice’ or ‘more learning’. The ‘indirect function’ is what Derrida refers to when saying, ‘We always say something other than what we say’ (in Payne and Schad, 2003: 44), which makes a clear link to the pragmatics attention to how we ‘do things with words’ (Austin, 1962).

<sup>41</sup> This is the ‘difference that makes a difference’, i.e. context/frame

labels, propositions – and for this research work a category of ‘topics’ – for context). Bateson noted this conundrum using the label (with some humour<sup>42</sup>) of the  $\mu$ -function (1972: 372) in order to mark the functionality or *relational* nature of communicative practice as un-grammatical.

### A Reflexive Description of Contingency – Position/Purpose Makes Practice

A reflexive description of methods-used follows in order to mark the practical learning going-on with operationalisation as contingent practice. Segments were described using two distinct composite methods. With the first method attempts were made to isolate a functional language for relating processes (as a pragmatics orientation was being learnt), with the second, attempts were made at describing (or characterising) a category of teleological (in)determinants. A sub-group of this second method of description explored with ways of dealing with larger data-segments in order to better manage the large body of data with a limited time-frame. This last approach also helped towards focussing the overall goal of the research practice<sup>43</sup> and to generate some tangible traction. These three methods are understood as unfinished practical learning that offer initial resources for a phenomenology of textualising practices – by developing and understanding their force, usefulness-for-task and limitations. The contribution is understood as exploring *a possible path* for empirical study of relating processes as organising practice, rather than setting out a definitive series of substantive conclusions as a result of that path taken.

### Method One

The challenge of topicalising relating processes with pragmatics was initially met by trying to map out patterns using matrices that showed *some-hows* of the actions being accomplished with the turns<sup>44</sup>, from which an ‘utterance pattern’ was constructed leading to an identification of ‘action themes’ or ‘rhemes’ (Austin, 1962)<sup>45</sup>. Nonetheless, this approach seemed insufficient for describing relating processes as ‘topics’. Although marking the talked-text for fragmentation, and aware that it was necessary also to ‘mark for cohesion’<sup>46</sup>, the approach seemed too *thematic*. From here a more ‘pragmatic focus’ was sought by building on a ‘thematic focus’ and attending to

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<sup>42</sup> By aligning the sound of  $\mu$ -uttered (mu or mew) with that of the *mewing* of his cat communicating *relationally, figuratively* for milk by hugging-up to his legs with a non-linguistic signalling of ‘dependency’.

<sup>43</sup> Textual analysis is inevitably detailed and slow – a labyrinthian experience and most commonly carried out using short fragments in order to explore patterns according to ‘types’ or ‘activities’ such as institutional talk etc. i.e. (Levinson, 1979)

<sup>44</sup> For example, see CD[1/2/16-22]SA/M1 in Appendices

<sup>45</sup> Link to CD[1/2/39-42]SA/M1 in Appendices for relevant notes

<sup>46</sup> CD[1/2/32-38]SA/M1



‘context details’ as well as ‘content meaning’ using the pragmatics frame of ‘interacted meaning’ in order to define the interacted meaning in this case as the relating of ‘communicative intention’, ‘interpretive action’, ‘social context’ and ‘meaning potential’ (Thomas, 1995) (figured below and reproduced from Chapter Two).

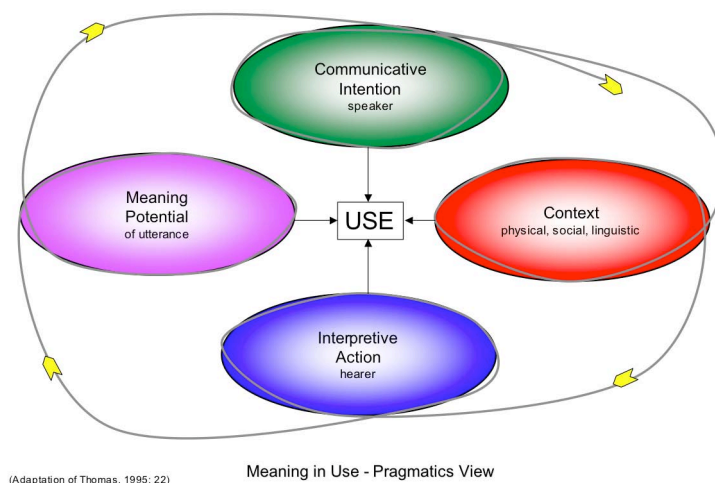


Figure 0-4 - Meaning in Interaction as Described by Thomas (1995)

With a shift from a more or less *intentional* orientation towards a more or less *phenomenological* one<sup>47</sup> I realised that rather than asking (ala Austin), ‘What is being done with these words as used?’ it would be better to explore, ‘What is happening with these words as used?’ Using the ‘interacted meaning’ frame further difficulties emerged since it holds in place an implicit separation between ‘speakers’ and ‘hearers’ *across* which (in a sense) meaning is made-in-use. Illocutionary<sup>48</sup> forces generated with actions such as ‘questioning’ or ‘exhorting’ are *interacted* as ‘felicitous’ if ‘taken up’ with perlocutionary responses, as an explanation of the functionality of ‘interacted meaning’ (Thomas, 1995). When the process is imagined as locutions (words uttered) generating illocutionary forces (the intentional communications of speakers) to which perlocutionary responses are made (the interpretive actions of hearers) (Austin, 1962, Thomas, 1995), albeit as deeply interactive fashion, the frame does not go far enough, or is not sufficiently useful for purpose here; it generates a latent linearity or subjective isolation for a communication *between* individuals as units. Since the ‘matter to hand’ or topic of this project is the contextualising ecology of learning, then a hermeneutic of strong textuality is required. A

<sup>47</sup> For example CD[/1/2/39-42]SA/M1 in Appendices

<sup>48</sup> The implicit feature or function generated with language-use when ‘locutionary’ is the lexical features of an utterance (the words used) and ‘perlocutionary’ is the effect or interpreted feature of an utterance made.

constructing frame that enables a description of textualising processes<sup>49</sup> for which there are no ‘gaps’ to ‘jump across’. A further difficulty, although of lesser importance, was the manageability of describing segments with this frame. They became long and expansive, possibly generating more complexity than was helpful.

With these initial series of pragmatic explorations, the ‘topics’ sought or  $\mu$ -functions were labelled with searching terms such as ‘rhemes’ and ‘action themes’. They were generated by following a basic interpreting strategy of describing/defining and reflexively reviewing the work in order to note the learning going-on with the exercise, and thereby reinforcing *that learning* as a practice towards learning (to learn). Several different approaches were used for this first series of segment descriptions including analysing for pattern by marking the talking actions guided by the approach to language as performative, i.e. actions are *enacted* with words (Austin, 1962). For this actions such as ‘setting up a turn’ with different styles, the ‘exposition of information’ and the ‘summing up to finish’ were noted. As a second approach, exchange-patterns were defined, thematic and pragmatic focuses identified, and a judgement made with each segment as to the ‘interacted meaning’ contextualised<sup>50</sup>; albeit as a *probable knowledge* with a realm of pragmatics as ‘probabilistic rather than ... precise science’ (Thomas, 1995: 208).

A third approach using *deixis* (those word-uses that generate reference and *position* in talk by anchoring the speaker and the topics talked through discursive *pointing*) was taken by highlighting (with colour-coding) the uses of temporal, spatial, social and discourse indexicals or ‘indexical expressions’ (Verschueren, 1999)<sup>51</sup>. From this descriptive strategy a distinction between ‘propositional’ and ‘discursive’ contexts was used to highlight a ‘thematic focus’ emerging from a ‘discursive pattern’ noted. Finally, the ‘interacted meaning’ was *judged* with descriptive bullet points. The segment was then *fixed* with the use of two questions, ‘What elements of reflexive understanding of the organisation are evident in this exchange through a reading of the indexicals?’ (With a secondary question, ‘What elements of reflexive understanding are evident but not interpreted in context?’ also being explored).

These were attempts to figure-out with the talked-texts what ‘counted’ (Levinson, 1992), as meanings getting strongly formalised with on-going insitutional intertextual processes for

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<sup>49</sup> Or ‘knitted’. I find the Spanish verb for knitting, ‘tejer’, useful here since there is resonance with the sound of the word, ‘text’.

<sup>50</sup> For example, CD[1/2/43-50]SA/M1 in Appendices

<sup>51</sup> For example CD[1/2/71-73]SA/M1 in Appendices

making-order by being contextualised with sufficient interacted force<sup>52</sup> and noted with such phenomena as explicit discourse referring to the same (Thomas, 1995). The second question asked, ‘Are there indications of reflexive elements that remain uninterpreted?’ shows how the unfolding analytic attention was seeking to explore and *re-contextualise* features of *telos* (a functional diversity of positions and voices) that were not ‘counting’, to use Levinson’s term. Ultimately this approach was abandoned as generating too strongly objectifying interpretations on the basis that it is not possible to *state* extrinsically what was not ‘counting’. Exploring what might count or not is a task for reflexive enquiry with members of a given context. As a strategy for the learning of context those positions or voices that were judged as ‘suggested’ or ‘possible’ texts with the contextualising of the talk going-on still stand as resources for new cycles of organisational learning.

There was some attempt to include a category of ‘reflexive indexicals’ at one point in order to note how a degree of reflexive attention was functioning with the talk as an attempt to see how Irish Aid relates to (or is seeing) as itself. Reflexive talk, when produced about and with the question of ‘What Irish Aid is Good At?’ and for which members talked on the topic of ‘Irish Aid’ as ‘itself’ was limited on several counts. The exercise tended towards generating a repetition of documentary-recipes of Irish Aid identity – ‘flexible’, ‘no-agenda’, ‘untied’ etc.<sup>53</sup>, views that members affirmed were held by others and recipients from the field of work<sup>54</sup>. These labels are not truly ‘reflexive’, although the occasion of talking about them did give rise to some genuinely reflexive enquiry,

T11-16

11. MM: No agenda
12. ZZ: untied
13. MM: yes, untied
14. LL: yes
15. ZZ: *No agenda whatsoever?*
16. LL: huh huh huh<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Taking up the relational constructionism notion that texts ‘obtain ontology’; are made-real/become-functional in so far as such *texts* are in fact *contextualised* – there is no ‘text’ outside of ‘con/text’ (Dachler and Hosking, 1995: 1)

<sup>53</sup> CD[/1/3/2-23]SA/M1 in Appendices

<sup>54</sup> CD[/1/3/35-38]AP in Appendices (AP stands for: ‘Analysis Preparation’ with which sessions transcribed were anonymised and turns numbered)

<sup>55</sup> CD[/1/3/11-16]AP in Appendices

And again,

T23

23. ZZ: ehh? Decentralisation to Limerick, that comes to mind ehh?... *it's always struck me that we are extremely comfortable with our own perception of our own goodness ...* can't do this on a card, go away, go away

These are utterances that do not find their way to the plenary discussion that follows from this group exercise. As the design of the exercise was limited to Irish Aid voices, the critique that ZZ attempts to generate is limited since those 'voices' cannot speak for themselves. This limitation is understandable given the nature of the Review Workshop, but the tendency to eliminate or unacknowledge a context of reflexive enquiry is not insignificant. At a later stage in this passage of talk (in plenary mode) the meaning is generated that Irish Aid is not good at 'institutional frameworks', a topic of continual reference throughout the Workshop under various titles,

T155<sup>56</sup>

- 155.D: No actually my point is more related to VV's points about you know building up institutional framework to focus on specific sectors, and I I think we need to be clear that when we say that HIV/AIDS, we are building up institutional aims and objectives, its not just about using up the money, you say HIV/AIDS but there is only one HIV/AIDS advisor in HQ, there's a lot more money going into it but what do we really mean when we are talking about building up that framework and objectives? ...Well I mean the first thing is is capacity.

Of relevance here is the claim that reflexive enquiry is not common as organising practice – as D notes, 'we are building up institutional aims and objectives, its not just about using up the money' but also about such resources as 'capacity'. The fact that public organisations often *state* policies before worrying about the resources that can make those policies matter, or are slow to commit such resources, is not unusual – what is noted here is that contexts of talk whereby such functional matters can be addressed are 'held at bay', ignored or simply not generated. Beyond this power-oriented or political analysis of the situation, we will return with Part II of this Chapter to an analysis of how these rhemal or indirect functions of organising practice are uncontextualised with practices of language and discourse use apparent with the talked-texts.

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<sup>56</sup> [CD/1/3/146-155]SA/M1

## Method Two

With the second series of segment analyses, ‘fixed relations’ made with the talked-texts were identified as ‘teleological determinants’, as were those relations considered relatively ‘unfixed’<sup>57</sup> in the talked texts and categorised as ‘teleological indeterminants’. The move to Method Two constitutes a more interpretive strategy towards the talked-texts as a way to go-on. Focussing strategies were brought to bear on the describing phase of each analyses – a process of ‘amplification’, by which most turns of a segment were described with detail noting features such as ‘recontextualisation’ of terms, causal markers and metaphors. A second strategy of ‘distortion’, for which the basic logic is that by distorting the form by some fashion, the common way of interpreting for the context is foregrounded as difference<sup>58</sup>. This critical devise foreshadows a strategy for reflexive work with particular learning contexts whereby meaning is played-with somewhat; flexed *about* and *with*. For the research context this is purely a tool of exploration and hypothesis, thus becoming an *a priori* practice for generating knowledge<sup>59</sup>. From here, a global category of (in)determinants was established. For this Chapter these *fixed and unfixed relations* (*fixing and unfixing context*) are gathered as a presentation and synthesis for which a few examples of the voices themselves are chosen to ‘speak’ or count, while the segment descriptions/analyses themselves are included as appendices to the whole and therefore accessible.

## The Third-Life of Talked-Texts

The context of meaning for these talked-texts is already changed of course. The utterances made as the Review Workshop are now recorded, transcribed, anonymised; segmented as themes of talk, amplified and distorted according to a rationale of intertextuality and relational processing as research practice; and finally are reproduced for this Chapter. From their ‘living/uttering’ they were first *ordered* or processed according to the insitutional needs of Irish Aid – making a set of guidelines (that went through several institutional drafts) to streamline, communicate and equip subsequent users with a path for practice, and manifested as an official document (Irish Aid, 2008a). This presentation as research practice is therefore a ‘third life’ for these utterances and turns that were the CSP Review Workshop *itself* (first life - undescribed) used as interactive conversation and review of ‘issues’ to generate formal texts for Irish Aid (second life), and now generating as a ‘third life’ as new text; a life with another, although not disconnected, purpose.

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<sup>57</sup> Distinguish the ‘unfixed’ from the ‘flexed’ as the difference between relations suggested in talk but not explored or con/textualised, and relations that are reflexively con/textualised and thus *become* a feature of the organising process.

<sup>58</sup> In line with Blanter and Anderson-Wallace’s ‘disturbing patterns of engagement’ strategy (2006a).

<sup>59</sup> As organisational practice and consultancy, Oliver’s work with reflexive enquiry shows how tools and processes can be designed to carry out this function as practice. (2005)

They are a collection or cluster of talked (and evidently still ‘talking’) texts embodying the variability, fixed and possible, of organisational process.

Gathered together these variables generate some sense of the *embodied telos* of Irish Aid – that is the pattern that connects; understood also as that which endures on a more slowly turning cycle of change than other, less embedded practices<sup>60</sup>. In some ways the identity of the organisation is located and lived with the particulars and details of how such relations are continually and contingently (re)made as practice. Although this research practice generates a glimpse of that practical processing, its *logic* is formally unavailable to our view (Bourdieu, 1990). We do generate some resources for going-on with that very practice which are reflexive and therefore offer more than ‘guesses’ or adhoc theories (Cyert and March, 1963, Argyris and Schön, 1996) as a form of tentative *a priori* knowledge that can guide next steps. In this sense the knowledge generated here offers itself as a practical resource for learning new ways to go-on (primarily, but not exclusively with Irish Aid practitioners and their CSP processes).

By exploring the patterning of position (as deixis) and purpose (as teleological determinations made) with talked-text as segment descriptions or analyses, a topograph of *practice* is made in order to explore possible fixing *patterns* as Irish Aid. While accepting that each instance, event or situation – moment to moment – is ‘another first time’ (Shotter, 2008), there is also a sense in which a pattern repeats some of its features until either random or figured shifts with environment matter sufficiently to generate new responses as new (contextualising) practice. Somewhere between these positions a notion of pattern that holds-in-place *enough* heuristic telos<sup>61</sup> to *distinguish* and *characterise* is discerned and gathered with Part III of this paper.

To put this in simple terms, there is a functionality embodied with the talked-texts which characterises *somehow* the relational processing of dynamic ‘what/how’ practicing as Irish Aid practically learning. Giving some topical names (as useful resources for organisational learning) to these characteristics is the purpose of this Chapter. This topograph of practice functions as a second order of abstraction within the range of *negotiability* as language-use on Verschueren’s

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<sup>60</sup> What might be called the ‘artfulness of stabilized effects’, which are also *stabilizing*, characterised with hard subject/object differentiations in hierarchical organisations; for example, of ‘roles’, or policy that is made ‘for’ rather than ‘with’ clients or members. Cf. (Hosking, 2007) And also, in another language-frame, suggested with the lines, ‘In a dim light: neither daylight; Investing form with lucid stillness; Turning shadow into transient beauty; With *slow rotation suggesting permanence*’ from, T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets – Burnt Norton, Part III* – emphasis added.

<sup>61</sup> A notion akin to William James’ ‘feelings of tendency’ (1890) as noted by Shotter in 1995 and later explored as ‘poise’ in 2008. Cf. (1995, 2008).

terms (1999). This is the how-functioning of *principles and strategies*. By working towards a topographical reading of these talked-texts (ecological-pragmatic/topical-dialogic) under the rubric of the functionality of practice some contextualising topics for practical learning can be generated.

The general rationale is set out with Figure 5 below.

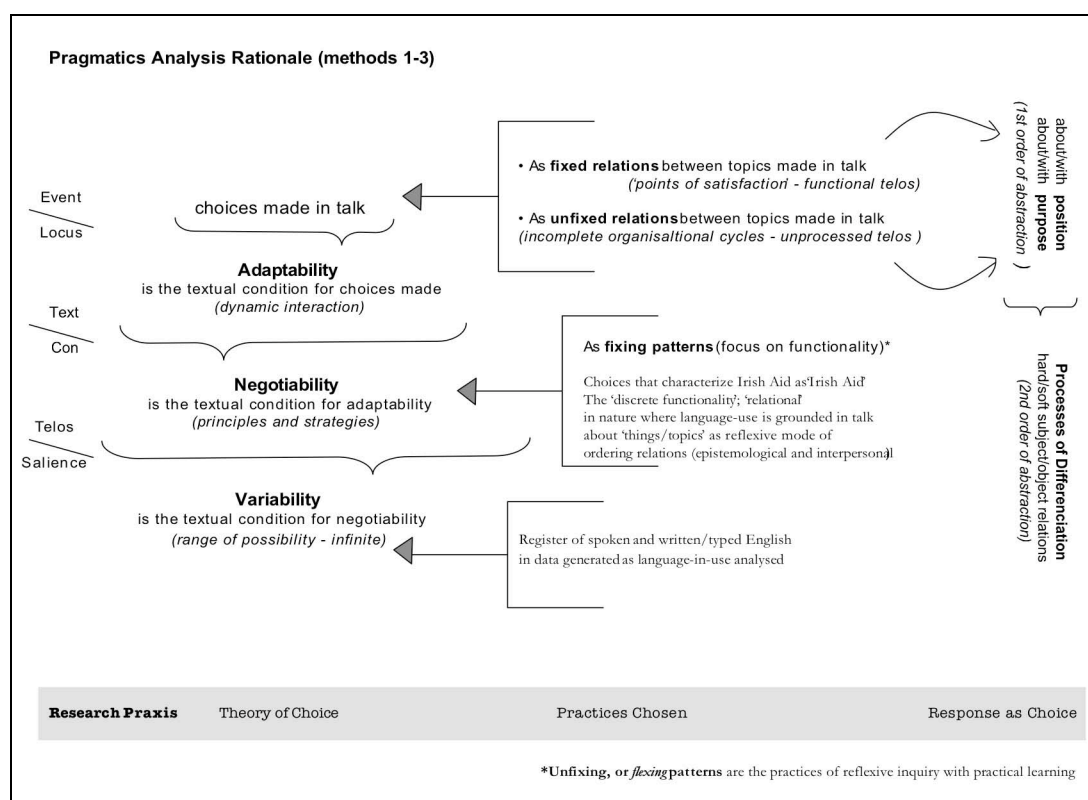


Figure 0-5 - A General Rationale for a Pragmatics Description of Talked-Texts

## Part II: Describing Features of Practical Learning as Language-Used

### *Public-talk'*

The corpus of talk I have labelled 'core data' for pragmatics description, from the organising perspective of members or participants generating these talked-texts they can be categorised as forms of public-talk as organising practice. In/by/with/for public-talk practitioners embody their most empowered positions of engagement and potential with the intertextualising dynamic of organising practice, it is with public-talk that the official texts or presentational-talk of the organisation is generated. This notion of public-talk has been defined as that form of talk where

‘that which comes to mattter’ is officially embodied and interacted. While recognising the roles of ‘private’ and ‘presentational’ talk as organising practice, they are understood as intertextualising public-talk as the central locus of engagement. It is with the con/texts of public-talk that the placing or locating of dialogic-learning – as formalisation, formation or organising policy – *becomes* most prominently. Public-talk followed for this research project is constituted with the Coherence Meetings Cycle and the CSP Review Process.

With the organising category of public-talk we can, from a pragmatics perspective, also categorise core data as a composite form of talk that is neither wholly ‘institutional’ nor ‘conversational’. The public-talk of Irish Aid formalises such talking practices as turn-taking and sequencing of topics according to established protocols of chaired-organisation and topic-management, agenda setting and continuation, timed opening and closing etc. All practices that boundary or bracket organising practice. Nonetheless, with those boundaries there is what might be called a ‘free-enough’ or ‘interactive-organisation’ of talk less circumscribed than forms of talk classically termed ‘institutional’ such as a standard service-request or an emergency-call. The body of data can be categorised according to a rationale of speech genres as ‘relatively stable types’ developed in ‘each sphere in which language is used’ (Bakhtin, 2006: 98) but which is not ‘conversational’ in the fullest sense of ‘chatting among friends’ (eg. Traverso, 2009). Relating processes mark what Bakhtin called, ‘compositional structure’ (Bakhtin, 2006), what I am calling the practical syntax-in-use.

As Programme Coherence Meetings talk is commonly organised with patterns of ‘opening’ with which an agenda-item/topic is set for discussion by a ‘chairperson’, usually by ways of framing remarks which place the topic for the institutional setting, followed by ‘invitation’ to speak – sometimes pointed towards an individual, sometimes with a general gesture indicating a time of expansion. The talk is then ‘open’ and practitioners freely engage in interaction, often without intervention or ‘permission-granting’ from the chairperson, although the talk-with-a-topic-in-hand is ‘closed’ by the chairperson after a time that is judged sufficient, or when some ‘point of satisfaction’ has been gained (Verschuere, 1999). The genre might therefore be classified as ordering-talk as a strategy for managing a range of topics within a bounded frame of time for which a member is charged with the task of managing this order, usually a role institutionally sanctioned with the hierarchical ordering of decision-making.

The critical difference with the Review Workshop was that this ordering role was given to an ‘external facilitator’ who was therefore less institutionally defined, and whose role was to facilitate interaction as well as generate a context by which direction could be formulated for strategic-planning processing. The facilitator had a deciding role (and a perspective), but one that was



relatively extrinsic to common or normative organising practice as Irish Aid<sup>62</sup>. All of these contextualising features generated a form of talk interactive according to common Irish Aid ordering practice as described for ‘Coherence Meetings’ (turn-taking, sequencing, topical boundarying). As a mode of how-talk and as a site of possibility the composition of the group included all formal specialist roles and hierarchical grades to the level of contracted consultant.

The activities identified with this corpus of core data as public-talk and as ordering-talk, formal and interactive by design as the ‘Review Workshop’, are classified primarily as sequences of presenting, positioning (in plenary and small group modes), questioning, clarifying, requesting and positing. Such activities correspond at a fairly superficial level to the phases of each session, and the overall projection of themes through the whole Review Workshop towards an appreciation of the Logical Model Approach (OECD and Worldbank, 2005) with discourses of quality assurance, Results Based Management and Managing for Development Results; and the identification of ‘Steps Forward’ including the assignation of responsibilities in relation to those ‘Steps’ to particular individuals. The two activities taken up as focus for this description are the relating processes for positioning and positing – as textualisations of purpose.

#### *The General Themes and Process (Design/Procedure) of the CSP Review Workshop*

The overall process-design of the CSP Review Workshop can be seen with Figure 6 below. It emerged from the preparation work at Irish Aid Headquarters as an ordering pattern for the topics gathered together with the Issues Paper (Irish Aid, 2007b) drafted for the Review. This image was taken up enthusiastically and functioned well as a pattern for generating the links between sessions and the issues for discussion.

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<sup>62</sup> Nonetheless this facilitator could be read at the time as increasingly ‘becoming’ *with* Irish Aid since this contract followed from several processes of facilitation of CSP stages in programme countries; especially those essential for ‘framing’ or sense-making and sharing such as the ‘Launch Workshops’ at which teams developed ownership and understanding of a completed CSP text.

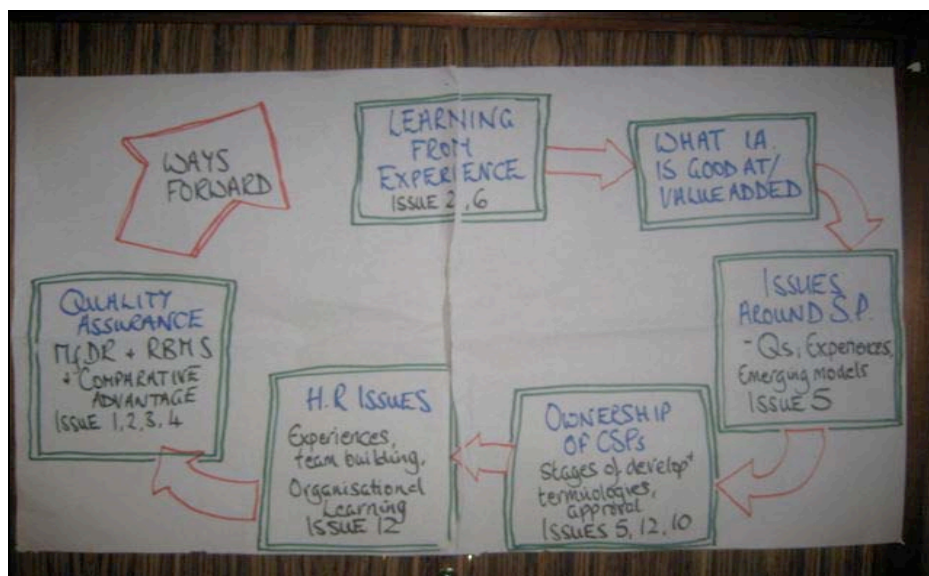


Figure 0-6 - Process Design for the CSP Review Workshop

These issues or topics talked *about* with the CSP Review Workshop come under three broad categories; the strategic planning-in-use for CSPs, with sessions titled, 'Evaluation of Current Practice' and 'Stengths and Weaknesses of the CSP Process' which contextualised a short exploration of 'comparative advantage', interpreted for this Workshop as 'What Irish Aid is Good At'. From this first iteration of review, the topics became more detailed with a second category of description that might be called a description of 'strategic planning' from model to practice. This became a mapping or 'logging-out' of the CSP process with cards stuck on a wall that marked stages and critical decision-making points (see Figure 7 below) as the basis for a shared discussion, and for which some particular topics had been chosen as relevant for further exploration such as 'human resources', 'terminology', 'appraisal and approval processes' and 'organisational learning' as an almost third-order of abstraction topic for the context of this whole. The final category of the Review Workshop process was a forwards-orientating stage which embodied the introduction of the topics of 'Results Based Management' and 'Management for Development Results'. These were presented as the prioritised frame for on-going strategic planning of CSPs. This stage of the Review Workshop included a second look at 'comparative advantage' as 'What are Quality CSPs?'



‘purpose’, and as a second-order phenomenon, ‘practice’ – which generates a certain ‘coherence’ or ‘connecting pattern’.

This practical-syntax is not, as noted with the outlining of the methodological stages above, a question of some ‘in-between’, across which words or practitioners *reach* as if there were some sort of ‘gap’ to be bridged; it is rather, a view of the textuality-in-practice as analogue phenomena – *textuality* as what *is*<sup>66</sup>, or from a relational constructionism reading, that which continually *becomes*. Just as with the research process itself there is an *urgency* towards text-making or textualisation, so too for this group of practitioners there is an urgency or *exigency* of expectation<sup>67</sup> that conditions, ‘restrains’ (to use a word from cybernetics), frames or drives that which *becomes*. In this sense, there is only the textualising itself. To detail or describe features of that textualising process, asking particularly what we can learn about and for practices characterising (as) ‘Irish Aid’, some examples of talked-texts as contextualising phenomena are identified, labelled and set out below<sup>68</sup>.

#### *A Topograph of Position – accomplishing ‘position’ with deixis and other language-choices*

‘Position’ is an accomplishment of intertextualising practices generated with reference-making choices as language-use whereby (with dialectical fashion) sense is generated. Some of the particular reference-making language-uses or choices that characterise the talk of the Review Workshop include the making of agency with several pointing-activities<sup>69</sup>; the relational positioning of a variety of ‘texts’ (including the text of ‘personal position’) by way of deixis or deictic-choice; shifts of register-choice, including at times the apparent censure of some registers or language games; and finally the patterning and styling of turn-construction. Some examples of these uses are described with the paragraphs that follow by way of a selective illustration of talked-texts explored as segment descriptions or analyses.

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<sup>66</sup> The abstracted presence of ‘gaps’ with the meaning-making process, talked as ‘lacks’ of *some* quality, i.e. communication, are ‘presences’ of a digital nature (and therefore different to analogic-surrounding). This kind of embodiment with talk becomes as ‘imagined world’, which in no way lessens its importance for the process.

<sup>67</sup> Inherent to their situation (with the relational processing of their positions, jobs, organisational tasks, aptness of process etc.)

<sup>68</sup> A second stage of enquiry may be with the form of alignment or influence that is the relating process of models *used* and the communicating practices that enact them.

<sup>69</sup> Temporal, spatial, social and discourse indexicals used with the talk.

This group of activities is defined using a pragmatics method of deixis that marks discursive actions that ‘point’ and thereby ‘position’ the speaker, utterer or ‘teller’. Deixis is ‘the positioning of an utterance in a surrounding reality (which it may at the same time be **about**)’, it is the ‘anchoring’ of language in a real world, achieved by ‘pointing’ at variables along some of its dimensions’ for which ‘the ‘pointers’ are **indexical expressions** or **indexicals**. There are essentially four *dimensions* involved: time, space, society (in particular the interlocutors), and discourse (the ongoing linguistic activity)’ (Verschueren, 1999: 18). Of interest here with a ‘less intentional’ and ‘more textual’ read of discursive practices are the positioning actions taking place with certain resources for organising practice such as agency, ‘texts of matter’, lexical or register-choice and the patterning or styling of turn-construction.

### The Activity of Making-Agency

The first language-choices for the patterning of agency-making and location addressed show how this discursive resource is predominantly attributed or located to the Field. In the following segment we can see, by way of analysis of the deictic or ‘pointing’ choices made, and in which a centre or focal-point of position is generated, how ‘Field’ is constructed as agent with Head Office cast in a more passive role, or even *place* of relevant experience and authority on the topic in question. The thematic context of this segment is exploration of the relevance of a CSP in a programme country where a JAS process is underway, and the implications of this situation for the process of making an Irish Aid CSP in the first place, when a harmonising and aligning logic is operational. The immediate context of this turn is formed with some general remarks by the Workshop Facilitator on the various aspects of the CSP process that need to be linked (speaker-identities are highlighted in light-blue):

T69

F: we’re going to spend some time specifically this afternoon on content of PAEG, of of CSPs, uh the question actually was the link between that and PAEG, and links between approval, the links between CSPs annual plans etc. ... mm<sup>70</sup>

The following speaker takes up the turn after a momentary pause with a view of the particular context of concern in the programme country where s/he is working:

T70

CC: I mean for that eh the eh relevance of CSP, whether a CSP in the sense that we know it, is still relevant where a Joint Assistance Strategy is there, and I know for

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<sup>70</sup> CD[1/2/69-70]SA/M1

example we called our early, our our, our attempt a cover-note in that Joint Assistance Strategy, though I know that changed later on, but that was the kind of approach, eh you know, that that we thought might be required em because while we were encouraging other missions, at the same time em, while indicating specific country strategies em, but we had a joint strategy, eh but I mean eh, there's some things that are perhaps unrealistic about that aswell, and teasing through that, how we how we go on ...<sup>71</sup>

As in all these segments temporal, spatial and discourse indexicals were analysed<sup>72</sup>, but particular note is taken here of the social-indexical choices made. To give a view of these choices the following analysis is reproduced including the utterance breakdown that was made. The social indexicals are marked with yellow-highlighting and are coupled with the verbs that follow them in order to explore agency-making.

- U6. CC: I mean for that eh the eh relevance of CSP
- U7. whether a CSP in the sense that we know it is still relevant where a Joint Assistance Strategy is there
- U8. and I know for example we called our early our our our attempt a cover note in that Joint Assistance Strategy
- U9. though I know that changed later on
- U10. but that was the kind of approach eh you know that that we thought might be required
- ptm.* em
- U11. because while we were encouraging other missions at the same time
- ptm.* em
- U12. while indicating specific country strategies
- ptm.* em
- U13. but we had a joint strategy eh
- U14. but I mean eh there's some things that are perhaps unrealistic about that as well
- U15. and teasing through that how we how we go on

In an analysis of these uses or choices we can see the shifting deictic-centre in social positioning terms, as the speaker, CC, references her/himself as the originator of this meaning being made; a more general 'we' along the lines of this group and Irish Aid – 'a CSP in the sense that we know

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<sup>71</sup> CD[1/2/69-70]SA/M1

<sup>72</sup> Eg. [CD/1/2/82-83]SA/M1

it' (U7), a further self-reference to personal knowledge leading to a changed 'we' which now stands for the group or team supposedly in a programme country that 'called *our* ... attempt a cover note in *that* Joint Assistance Strategy.' (U8)

The social indexicals continue to shift reference but the most interesting in this segment from the perspective of positioning or locating the making-agency activity is that of U11, 'we' in this case 'were encouraging other missions at the same time'. I note the indication that this utterance gives of a contingent practical learning practice in which the exigency of the moment requires not only some practical response (the designation of a 'cover note' in this case) but also the sharing of that learning, the 'encouragement of other missions', just as the originators are in their first phase of learning to manage the new context. Apart from this insight; in pragmatic terms this language-use, the choosing in discursive practice of particular social and other indexicals, situates the source of encouragement, designation (the *calling* of the *cover note*), indication and even the question of 'how we go on' with the Field in the binary-relation continually constructed *between* 'Field' and 'Head Office' in the organising practice as Irish Aid.

In a previous segment the nature of the relational-flow *between* these foregrounded places or locations is more clearly discoursed. The thematic context of this series of utterances (as part of one turn) was the question of what to do when all the additional forms of funding coming into a programme country from Head Office (beyond the scope of the CSP) needed to be accounted for. Here we see that the development team in country made some pragmatic choices in order to manage the task, but nonetheless imagine that 'it'd be good to have clarity around that' (U15).

T67

U7. Z: I think there's one aspect of what's the purpose of actually bringing that all in together

U8. because actually what is the link and where is the coherence between all of those

U9. that different funding coming in different ways em

a. or or whether to

U10. and I think this is what we ended up doing

U11. was to kind of select specific things which were being funded by Head Office but that were specifically linked to our area of focus

U12. and actually try and em link up with those specific things so to make strategic choices

U13. and say these are the things that come from Head Office that we think are relevant and we can benefit from linking up with in terms of the our own country programme

b. and then to

U14. but actually make the strategic decision to say **we're not going to cover** every single thing that runs in the this funding side

U15. **I think** it'd be good to have clarity around em around that<sup>73</sup>

The making-agency activity is more complex here as there are several *flows* constructed; of funds from Head Office, and of 'specific' selections and 'strategic decisions' from the Field. What is not deictically designated is where the looked for 'clarity' is located or might be made (U15). A possible implication is that this clarity can emerge in the process of reviewing CSP practice and drafting new guidelines, but it might also be read as a request from Field to Head Office for a clarity that in the context of the global discussion of the Review Workshop and its preparatory phases, was evidently absent.

At a more general level the insight coming with the preparation week that 'how-talking' becomes a site of powerful agency-making activity when generated or sanctioned institutionally, is borne out to some extent with this last utterance. Whether the hoped-for clarity is imagined as emerging with the CSP Review Process or directly emanating from Head Office, the fact that it is left open here generates 'possibility'<sup>74</sup> by this kind of talk – an instance of what I have called, 'how-talking'. The fact of the matter was that during the preparation phase for this Workshop, everyone wanted to talk, to participate, to get their view into the mix. This fact was noted by the Facilitator and myself independently with the dynamics of that week as well as with the importance that was accorded to each of its moments institutionally. This was the context of the insight that 'how-talking' was a practical site of possible change and was practically recognised by practitioners with their actions.

Tosey noted a similar dynamic during a change-process in the academic department where he was working, and the accordant transformative power generated in the transition (2005). This dynamic was also evident during the research field-visit made to PC-A in which the team were clearly open and enthusiastic about the new ways of working they had generated through the re-design of their CSP process and around which there was plenty of evidence of team cohesion. Wherever and however agency, capacity, power-to-do are positioned, these language-uses construct and generate position as an experience of ability. The agency-making activities in discursive practice indicates features of that power or energy characterising the organising of order.

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<sup>73</sup> CD[1/2/67-68]SA/M1

<sup>74</sup> As an abstracted or textual activity in the going-on context of organising practice.



### The relational positioning of a variety of texts including personal position

Analysing deixis offers insight into the language-choices that are generating the context of reference, in other words the *points* or *markers* (in documents, in experiences, in concrete places or times, in imagined states) that *anchor* the talk. This anchoring communicates features of the teleological determination of the emerging text in this con/text. In this sense the relational positioning functional in the talk shows how that intertextualising meaning is getting made in practice. In a very clear and explicit example the following turn shows how the language or lexicon of ‘corporate’ business is prioritised, but also the complexity of such a ‘corporate’ role in the current architecture of aid as presenting in practical dilemmas and questions of organisational performance and identity for practitioners.

The previous speaker (NN) has outlined in detail the various stages and layers of an accountable system<sup>75</sup> from which context RR here takes up the turn and references this description of systematised accountability to a ‘dilemma’ (U2) of the ‘harmonised environment’ (U3), and a question, ‘What is the P in the CSP?’ (U9). This question stands-for an as yet unclear inquiry (implied here) about what kind of qualities, or how might Irish Aid ‘perform ... as an organisational entity’ (U7) in which the goal may not be so focussed on a ‘paper’ but on some other (not defined) process in a harmonising environment.

T74<sup>76</sup>

- U1. RR: I'd like to highlight what you were going to what you've what you've said 'NN'
- U2. and I think it is an issue that helps explain this sort of issue which I think to a lot of us is possibly a dilemma
- U3. where we have a role in a harmonised environment as a corporate entity
- U4. and I think the empha the point is we are a corporate entity as Irish Aid
- U5. if you look at issue 3 and 4 in the paper it deals with re you know managing for results and results based management systems
- U6. and its this is being adopted and there are signs that this will be you know taken on board and revised somehow
- U7. then it has implications around performing and performing as an organisational entity
- U8. and that then has implications as well for the CSP
- U9. what is the P in the CSP?
- U10. is it a paper as it currently is or is it something else

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<sup>75</sup> CD[1/2/71-73]SA/M1

<sup>76</sup> The colour marking here isolates uses of social (yellow), temporal (red) and discourse (purple) deixis.

*U11.* and *its* to *go beyond* *what* *certain colleagues* are saying *its* beyond the parotting process at the planning stage<sup>77</sup>

RR generates these varied meanings and questions – that Irish Aid is a corporate entity, that the harmonised context is complex and unclear, that managing for results is ‘being adopted’, that ‘there are signs’ of this – whereby Senior Management is implied as ‘another context’ (and RR is personally positioned as reading these ‘signs’) all of which builds to the semantic point that ‘it’s to go beyond ... the parotting process at the planning stage’ (U11). This metaphor-use offers some insight into the ‘best’ of what an approach of Results Based Management is seeking to establish – an ability to move beyond simply doing the task because it is organisationally required, to a level of analysis and understanding that features the critical steps or actions that will actually make a difference to the context in question. By means of deictic-choice, by situating or positioning many features of the turn RR generates a complex message.

To take just one example (the most obvious) by attending to lexical-choice there are two reiterations or repeats of the term ‘corporate entity’; discursively referenced or indexed as ‘role’ (U3), as ‘Irish Aid’ (U4) and recontextualised as ‘organisational entity’ (U7) thus clarifying RR’s understanding of the term by use of this co-text<sup>78</sup>. These uses are ‘re-making’<sup>79</sup> a discourse of ‘corporate’ functioning – which for the remainder of this turn RR relates to best practice as other organisations. These discursive choices establish the legitimacy of this language in the talk, bringing with it a certain image of a well functioning organisation. This ‘corporate’ legitimacy is also generated by way of the implied reference to the adoption of Results Based Management by Senior Management (U6), referenced in the context of the Review Workshop by means of the ‘paper’ (U5) which is the ‘Working Paper’ prepared before this meeting (Irish Aid, 2007b), and later in the turn with a positive appraisal of this approach as practiced by two other development-aid organisations:

T74

*U16.* *RR*: if *we take* two agencies which are held in reasonably high regard ‘XXXXX’ and ‘YYYYY’

*U17.* particularly *the lateral* which has a reputation for results based management in *its* systems<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> CD[1/2/74]SA/M1

<sup>78</sup> An item used that marks a previous meaning-generated or metaphor-used, but with a changed lexical choice.

<sup>79</sup> Recontextualising or holding as context.

<sup>80</sup> CD[1/2/74]SA/M1

The critical question generating here is how Irish Aid can in some fashion be a ‘corporate entity’ (in RR’s language), a distinct identity within a complex environment of collaboration that is beyond the generalised description of systematic accountability generated by NN in the previous turn. The response made here by RR is already set up within the ‘corporate’ context itself referenced by RR; Results Based Management as the legitimising language of functional organisation. This may be a perfectly reasonable conclusion, but does show how in certain fashion the referencing process at work in the talked text is relatively fixed within a dominant (and already functioning) discourse that is setting the frame of practice to which Irish Aid is responding.

To take one more example of how deictic-choices (social and discursive) establish the con/texts of meaning that matter, the following sequence of utterances show us an implied relationship (or relational processing) of ‘Irish Aid’ – as an imagined agent – with intended ‘aid recipients’. This relation is imagined in functional terms by reference to the sectoral engagements that Irish Aid is associated or not-associated with ‘for the donor focus’ (U2).

T161-166

1. WW: I I think we would have the reputation
2. for the donor focus
3. of basic services
4. social services
- ptm. eh*
5. and also a reputation for not being involved in a lot of what you could call economic sectors
6. so we’ve
7. we actually in terms of pro-poor focus
8. which we claim for ourselves
9. I think we actually have a very partial and incomplete approach
10. EE: [yeah]
11. WW: to poverty reduction
12. a serious response is lacking
13. YY: something that we haven’t mentioned is that we do give a lot of attention to civil society
14. our, the portion of our share to NGOs is very high compared to a lot of other ?? (*unclear*)
15. F: I think that’s a really important one
16. it does come

- 17. in my experience
- 18. it does come up a lot
- 19. especially in connection with your capacity not to be Dfid
- 20. you guys are
- 21. I mean Irish Aid
- 22. it seems to me
- 23. recruits from people with civil society experience a lot more strongly than some other agencies who recruit much more strongly from people with a kind of academic background in development
- 24. YY: a high share of the budget goes as well<sup>81</sup>

In the first instance this relation is imagined as ‘reputation’ (U1, U5) among the donor community, in the second, as a focus that ‘we claim for ourselves’ (U8). From the analysis made, this speaker offers a judgement, ‘I think we actually have a very partial and incomplete approach’ (U9). This is a strong iteration, made so with the uses of the items ‘actually’ and ‘very’, which mark or emphasise the meaning being made. A ‘lack’ is generated here once again, in this case ‘a serious response’ to the question of poverty reduction (U12) – which WW has already marked with a measure of irony it seems (U7-8). In a further turn in this segment the relation is made to another sector, ‘civil society’ (U13). The implicit shift here is towards funding as that which marks the relationship of Irish Aid to aid recipients (which becomes discursively explicit with U24) – a reasonable understanding, but one which clearly places the relations that matter in the aid-chain being constructed as funding channelled through sectoral engagements to ‘aid recipients’ that are not ‘poor people’.

Although this may seem obvious and non-important, what is highlighted in this reading is that the relationship that matters for Irish Aid practice is not ‘Irish Aid\poor people’, but rather ‘Irish Aid/other donors’ or ‘Irish Aid/NGOs’, or even ‘Irish Aid/sectors’, as a second-order of abstraction relation. Overall in this segment Irish Aid’s action is constructed semantically as ‘not-doing’ rather than ‘doing’ – a reading recontextualised by F as, ‘not being Dfid’ (U19) rather than *being* in some description of ‘itself’. The difference marked is counted as the recruiting policy of Irish Aid as noted by F (U21-23). The meaning not so clearly marked is that the ‘aid recipients’ are not in fact ‘poor people’ but a category of ‘sectors’, ‘civil society NGOs’, and although not referenced here directly, the implied ‘donors’ and programme country governments that manage those sectoral funds.

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<sup>81</sup> CD[1/3/161-166]SA/M2

### Choices in Register-Use or Direct Reference

The prevalent register-in-use might be characterised as ‘public’ in the sense that protocols are followed in which talk does not become personalised or overly judgemental. Nonetheless at times practioners reference the situation under discussion or the group gathered, or indeed their own experiences directly. In the following sequence the speaker is reacting to the graphic representation and listing of the strengths and weaknesses identified in existant CSP processes and in so doing generates a judgement, in this case about ‘DCD’ – an item-choice that explicitly references the ‘Departmental’ locale of Irish Aid, i.e. ‘Head Office’;

T32

- U3.* H: this is a problem we have been talking about now  
*U4.* well in my life three or four years  
*U5.* other people may have been talking about it for longer  
*ptm.* and actually  
*U6.* it (it it) goes to the heart of a kind of a resistance within DCD<sup>82</sup> to (eh) management processes and strategic planning processes  
*ptm.* and  
*U7.* that’s what this this workshop has to acknowledge  
*U8.* that that’s there<sup>83</sup>

And direct response to individuals within the group;

T33-37

- U14.* YY: But what about the upcoming review?  
*U15.* H: What upcoming review?  
*U16.* YY: The management review  
*U17.* H: And what about the last two or three that we’ve had  
*U18.* is my answer to you  
*U19.* YY: Why? <sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Development Cooperation Division – a localised name for Irish Aid resonant of a previous appellation, DCI, Development Cooperation Ireland

<sup>83</sup> CD[1/2/32-38]SA/M1 – T32

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*

This direct form of talk generates a response of ‘repair’ in a discursive move to a more technical appraisal of the situation;

T39

- U5. WW: the guidelines that are there are a bit summary
- U6. they’re not good on methodologies  
*ptm.* and
- U7. they don’t explain exactly (eh) what should happen
- U8. but they do come a bit out of practical experience and out of what did happen in terms of ... use (? *unclear*)  
*ptm.* and
- U9. if there was kind of broad agreement on the necessity for strategic planning and the will to do it
- U10. they would actually be quite useful
- U11. the fact of the matter is that the ownership of them is weak  
*ptm.* eh and
- U12. although they exist people continue to do what they have always done  
*ptm.* eh and
- U13. that’s the risk kind of (of) this exercise we’re in at the moment
- U14. that we go through (go through) a process of developing and coming up with some (eh some) good guidelines  
*ptm.* but then
- U15. how to actually operate
- U16. how to ensure their consumption (? *unclear*) throughout the organisation  
*ptm.* and particularly as em you know
- U17. there’s a lot of change going on in the organisation with decentralisation and other processes  
*ptm.* and
- U18. how to make that
- U19. how to establish the kind of insitutional ownership  
*ptm.* or
- U20. as well as being a kind of individual set of guidelines<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> CD[1/2/39-42]SA/M1

This turn does much to repair the difficulty of H's turn. A difficulty suggested by way of how it is interacted with the talk, the perlocutionary effect, which is to evoke this explaining response. The terming of T32 includes a direct reference to 'DCD' (T32, U6) that carries a negative judgement (and for which the lexical choice as a name-marker is not insignificant), and the direct response to YY (T36 as U17), which is enforced with a strong discourse indexical (U18). The group is charged directly with what 'this workshop has to acknowledge' (U7), that 'there is a sort of resistance' to strategic and management processes (U6). The use is of an 'imperative' register, a statement of what 'has to' take place. The demand of the utterance, generated as a form of crisis for this group, is repaired with T39. The situation referred to as a 'resistance' is acknowledged (U9-11) but softened with explanation. The problem is read as methodological (U6-7), that these 'Guidelines' – and notice the shift to a depersonalised referent – 'come out of practical experience' (U8), but that 'ownership' is weak (U11). The interpretation is then developed by pointing out that what is needed for 'institutional ownership' (U19) is an awareness of the risk that good guidelines are not enough to ensure good practice. The complexity of decentralisation, and 'other processes'<sup>86</sup> is also appraised in the turn (U17).

Other register-type referent differences are understood as choices-made in order to underpin or establish basis or contexts for the propositions being constructed. At times the lexical register is shifted, there are also changes in the level or thickness of social engagement generated with the talk, and finally different meaningful referents are used in the sense of metaphors that are made to matter as context.

### Turn Patterning

The turning of talk, as an embodiment of intertextuality and a shared-syntax in practice, is another form of activity with which the context is generated and thickened as a meaningful space. Pragmaticists and conversational analysts have identified many patterns in turn-construction or turn-management for which the notion of sequencing is central as a resource for making, reading and managing the social situation (Schegloff, 1990, 1999, 2007). Phenomena of practice in talk such as the adjacency-pair (i.e. question-answer, request-response etc.) are explored as patterns that generate a form of cohesion or contingency in talking practice. Whilst cohesion may be approached as a thematic phenomenon, the rhematic features of practical-syntax are of equal importance in enabling the generation of contextualised meaning, or meaning-in-interaction. This sense of 'connecting patterning' can be likened to Garfinkel's 'documentary method' whereby members reference, use and re-use habituating situations, by way of the markers that *mean* them, using an indexing method that tells them – 'this' is '*that*' or 'that' is '*this*'

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<sup>86</sup> The general situation of organisational growth, development and change noted with Chapter Four.

(Garfinkel, 1967, Liddicoat, 2007). Some such patterns have been noted in the talked texts – while recognising that this talk is not clearly defined as ‘conversational’, but rather embodies a composite and more formalised interaction, called here ‘public-talk’. The first activity reported is not placed as a purely textual phenomenon since what is noted is a pattern of articulation and response between two particular speakers. Nonetheless, as a textualising pattern carried with this activity it is relevant to wonder about the possible effects on discursive choices in the context of such a pattern of connection.

### Dyadic Supporting – as an intertextualising activity

As a corollary to the above analysis<sup>87</sup> the idea that some discursive practices can become a form of habitual dyadic-patterning, in the sense that two participants repeatedly correspond to each other across the talked texts, occurred. This means that when H takes up a turn, WW follows-on with a supportive or recontextualising turn as noted in the above analysis. This happens frequently enough that it was noted, and generated questions about the outcomes of this interacting pattern for the group, within the context of the Review Workshop and in other contexts where this pattern may repeat. In some fashion this can be read as a discursive habit that reduces participation, closing-down the dialogic landscape somewhat since a common or habitual textualising pattern is generating a fixing experience of text-making in the context.

A second instance of this sort of ‘pairing’ in talk is between F and RR. This is a logical link since F is the facilitator of the whole process and RR is the person from Irish Aid responsible for bringing it to conclusion. Sharing the responsibility of completion, each according to their roles, they generate a critical conversation for the success of the CSP Review. Running all through the process of the CSP Review, in contextualisations that extend from and towards this one, the dyadic interaction plays here in the midst of the public-talk – a context within a context. There are many examples where RR’s role is acknowledged by F *contextually*, that is, by /offering opportunities for summarising, framing or explanatory turns as in the example below.

T47- 48<sup>88</sup>

**U13.** do you want to say anything more about what you’re you’re thinking in in terms of that?

*ptm.* RR: well I’d like I could well yes

**U14.** I mean a couple of points

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<sup>87</sup> CD[1/2/32-38]SA/M1, CD[1/2/39-42]SA/M1

<sup>88</sup> CD[1/2/43-50]SA/M1



### Thematic Links without Discursive Connecting

There are instances in the talked texts where topics are built-up in what might be called a cumulative pattern that is non-dialogic in the sense that differing logics are presented and exhibited but not talked through in the truly dialogic (i.e. *through logics*) sense. This form of intertextualising discursive activity might be labelled, ‘talking in parallel’ and is an embodiment in practice of the stories told in the data generation phase in which the image of organisation reflected by informants was of fragmentation, lacks of communication and isolation – all orders judged to result in deuterio-level lacks such as an inability to learn as an organisation and a lack of capacity for in-depth or incisive analysis.

In the following segment the thematic context is an exploration as to how many component-documents of the CSP should be prepared and presented to PAEG at one instance. The non-dialogic feature of the discursive activity is marked explicitly in context with the Facilitator’s exclamation of T70. Although the paraverbal action is implicit here, F gives us discursive access (after the fact) with this exclamatory turn (T70). The discursive contextualisation of these and subsequent turns can be considered an expansion of held or unchanging views. Note for example that MM ‘continues’ a discourse already in flow, rather than taking up EE’s description as the context of continuation (T71).

T69-72

69. EE: I mean the, the, the sort of opposite as as to what used to happen before was that the CSP was approved and people would spend the next year I think preparing PEAG documents to back up the CSP whereas if you do it the way that is being proposed now and you do the whole thing as a package, you can get on with implementation and focus on implementation straight away
70. F: Do do tell ‘MM’ what you are saying, not just me ... *with a little laugh*
71. MM: [eh] I think that the other point that occurred to us, because we have just finished our CSP a month behind PC-C was that, you know, we, we have five documents altogether, four of which have now been approved, even though it seems, the scheme was only approved in March, two more were approved in April, so two in March, two in April and the last one will be July, so its not like we are planning to be writing PAEG documents for the next year its more that by allowing PAEG to take the CSP and maybe one, or possibly two component documents you do get a chance then to feed in the critique and the responses to your CSP and your strategy when you are formulating your component documents and it’s a big assumption I think as well to make that by taking

everything at the one PAEG, everything hinges then on your CSP, if there's a big serious, usually there isn't, but if there was a fundamental problem with your CSP you've got all the other documents there well everything falls then ...

72. ZZ: it's just one big rollercoaster<sup>89</sup>

In one sense this organising discourse might be the same as that manifest in the connecting concern of PC-A with 'linkages', as the framing-sense used for the research visit as an 'organisational learning project' and as the genuine conundrum that members of the embassy team had modelled their CSP about, designed to create the logical connections and practical conditions for linking-up and shared conversations. When we understand learning in the relational constructionism frame of making new connections within the scope of symmetrical being, the notion of making 'linkages' becomes a useful way of imagining insightful analysis and knowing-how in practical ways.

### Style

Some of the discursive activities noted under the label of style include tentative positioning in relation to the opinions, analysis or conclusions being presented with a turn. There is a discursive practice of 'careful' or hedged talking that protects against possible face-threats (Brown and Levinson, 1987) within a context where it seems technical proficiency and 'Field' experience warrant the force of an opinion or view. This 'careful' styling of a turn in phatic terms is reinforced with devices such as apologetic openings to turns and/or deference.

T68

AA: Just a quick question, it might be slightly off topic ...<sup>90</sup>

T14

YY: I was just going to say ...<sup>91</sup>

T38

U: Yeah, no, it was just to pick up on the point ...<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> [CD/1/2/51-59]SA/M1

<sup>90</sup> CD[1/2/67-68]SA/M1

<sup>91</sup> CD[1/4/14]AP

<sup>92</sup> CD[2/3/38]AP

In first-turns of engagement-with-talk in the context this form of styling is practiced generally by those participants who are new to the organisation and so is not unusual. Neither is such face-saving work out of place when time is short at the close of a session and it is clear that the facilitator is seeking to complete. But there is also evidence of such tentative activity by those who are well established in the context of talk – proficient users who nonetheless style their contributions, albeit with logical patterns of openings (flagging message), expansion, summary and close, taking care according to expected discourses of technical appraisal or institutional identity.

In more complex fashion<sup>93</sup> some textualisation was judged to re-embodiment the processes of fragmentation talked about with three language-use activities: halting style, shifting deictic reference, and a suggested ambiguous social meaning that seems to personalise what could be considered an operational failure. As a discursive marker for this possible interacted meaning, in the following example F seems to seek ‘repair’ of the potentially fragmenting criticism that RR generates by reporting on a ‘test’ that s/he had set for colleagues – this is done by relating to the second substantial point of this turn alone. RR’s utterances here about the 2004 Guidelines recontextualise and refute some points with reference to a question raised earlier in the interaction by NN about the existence of ‘Guidelines’ since ‘it may be that there is actually a document called the CSP Guidelines, if there is, I don’t have it, that of itself is a major weakness’<sup>94</sup>.

48. RR: well I’d like I could well yes I mean a couple of points, one is to answer ‘NN’s point and eh the working paper when I distributed it in Dublin I had annexes of all these documents eh then I took it out deliberately in the final version eh wanted to see if anyone would ask me eh if they had sighted the absence and nobody did but there are Guidelines in place since 2004 and and eh notice they were all dated they have been all dated, but but eh I mean the issue around the 2004 Guidelines that they they were never formally approved is separately a factor (*slightly unclear*), but that it’s the reverse of that that now, we want to deal with we have to get senior management buy-in that is an issue going forward, and I think I would agree with ‘WW’ around the relay because its to give guidance, its to operationalise that, and its to support capacity building, that is a provision in this revision process in simple terms of the blocks going forward so its not just about producing a set of guidelines
49. F: No em so it it shouldn’t be part of the process of guideline overload overload because it should be backed by training .. em ok then just to wrap up this little session

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<sup>93</sup> Returning to CD[1/2/43-50]SA/M1

<sup>94</sup> CD[1/2/23-30]SA/M1 – T25

There are some turns taking up a more forceful style of positioning for which activities such as stating, boundarying and closing-off certain discourse topics are enacted.

### *A Topograph of Purpose - accomplishing 'purpose' with talked-text*

Having described some phenomena of reference-characterising language-uses and noting some of their detailed textualisation we now turn to the accomplishment of sense-making as a somewhat more abstracted but not unrelated category of interpreting-practice. The focus inevitably becomes more semantic with this exercise of attending to such phenomena as metaphor-choice; the descriptions-made of process including the forms these 'imaginings' take (especially as movement – through time, place and referent to body); the instances noted of differentiated interpretation, including when there seems to be a 'thin'-textualisation of matters arising that (in some seemingly remote sense) matter 'more' than the attention they receive here<sup>96</sup>; and finally what might be termed the 'propositional process itself' with which what comes to matter is decided. This propositional process happens as two modes, as first-order practice with which meanings are stated with explicit form as, 'it is the case that', and as second-order practice by which functional meanings are embodied implicitly and are therefore generally unacknowledged, and as such are 'redundant' (Bateson, 1972: 412) with a sense of remaining *indifferent* or undifferentiated for the context. With the following paragraphs these sense-making practices of talk are shown with examples of their instancing or placing for the discourse becoming.

### Metaphors-in-use

The range of metaphors-in-use is circumscribed sufficiently as to be classed according to the dominant discourses of current management science, technical appraisal and Irish Civil Service usage – which carries some very particularised lexical items, for example the word 'prayers' that has been used to mark the morning meetings of senior management members<sup>97</sup>. The common usages are nonetheless framed within the discourses of what I am calling 'scientific management' (including such typical practices as PMDS and matrixed business planning) and technical

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<sup>95</sup> CD[1/2/43-50]SA/M1

<sup>96</sup> I.e. some of the functional difficulties described by members during the data generation phases and described here with Chapter Three.

<sup>97</sup> As described by an organisational member during a data generation phase and recorded for relational practice notes.

development-aid. Classic terms such as ‘corporate identity’, or the metaphor-of-motion, ‘building-up’ used in conjunction with the item, ‘framework’ which stands for a set of principles and operational instruments and strategies in the phrase, ‘building-up institutional framework’<sup>98</sup>. A set of different metaphors were introduced in the presentation of NN on strategic planning (B52s, Humpty Dumpty, Einstein)<sup>99</sup> but if we track the metaphors in use across many of the presentations, these uses can be noted as isolated.

### Descriptions-Made

This set of uses follows on from the category of metaphors in that the descriptions made can be understood as a composite form of metaphor in which the exploration and explanation of identity (in the cases reviewed here) are set out. In the Session in which participants reflected on the notion of ‘What Irish Aid is Good At’ as a form of talking about comparative advantage – the descriptive terms chosen range from very particularised items, ‘the school in XXXXXX’, to somewhat more abstracted items such as ‘your flexible friend’, which carry resonances of other textualisations. In sum the judgement is made in the context of this exploration that, ‘it’s very clear that you are more process people than content people’<sup>100</sup> which is interesting given the difficulties noted with other moments of discursive activity where an organisational struggle with process-topics such as mainstreaming is evident<sup>101</sup>.

For the context, given the comparisons made with this talk by way of negative construction of what Irish Aid is not, i.e. DFID, described as somehow more ‘academic’, Irish Aid’s recruitment policy of employing people with field experience marked as characteristic tells us something of the meaning interacted here with this description of Irish Aid as ‘more process people’, with other words ‘process’ here is constructed as akin to flexible, pro-poor, responsive, no agenda etc. which images the intuitive, less regulated approach of a project-paradigm of development-aid. The difficulty here is the changing context of development-aid where such forms of organising practice are insufficient to the complexity of task with harmonising and aligning development situations. This is in a sense the organisational drama being played out with these talked-texts, as embodied instances of the transitioning process of Irish Aid at the time of data generation, the character/identity of Irish Aid seems under threat and there is a practical challenge to ‘find place’ (as another iteration of ‘comparative advantage’) with this shifting environment/ecology.

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<sup>98</sup> CD[1/3/146-155]SA/M2 – T155, U15 cf. U17, 22

<sup>99</sup> CD[1/4]AP

<sup>100</sup> CD[1/3/]AP - T132

<sup>101</sup> CD[1/3/133-143]SA/M2

An interesting description of Irish Aid links the label of ‘corporate identity’ with the quality assurance work, under which the whole CSP Review can be understood. The connections are made in use between Irish Aid as ‘corporate identity’, ‘Results Based Management systems’ ‘performing as an organisational entity’, ‘being able to demonstrate’, along with the comment that another reputable agency that ‘says it can’t demonstrate that it’s going to count management results or contribute to development’, and how this leads back to ‘corporate responsibility’ are all noted<sup>102</sup>. Without reconstructing the particular argument being made with this turn, the language, although not very descriptive in a figurative or metaphoric sense, embodies the imagined processes, including the rationale of logic which drives that formulation, of the business world. This set of items or markers is not strange for the context, but it does show that with the results-based management and imagining of development-aid, a *business* model and language is the perspective clearly becoming the measure or legitimate discourse of development-aid.

### Imagined Processes

The category of imagined processes is also generated from the deictic analysis carried out with a series of segment analyses, since deixis or discursive pointing enables users to establish a discursive ‘anchor’ or ‘centre’ of their talk and thereby position themselves and the meanings-made in relation to a number of variable features of the discursive and physical environment. In this way flows or movements as organising processes are imagined in distributed time and place fashion across critical boundaries.

Obviously, the most critical time boundaries imagined here were the frames of *time* for producing a CSP, as well as its various stages. In explicit fashion the main change taking place with the six CSPs prepared in and about the year of the CSP Review (2007) were shifting from three to five-year cycles. The critical *place* boundaries were between ‘Headquarters’ or ‘Head Office’ and the various programme countries, sometimes itemised as the ‘Field’, as the ‘Mission’ or ‘Embassy’. Also relevant within these contexts are the imagined boundaries of more abstracted categories of action such as ‘sectors’, ‘cross-cutting issues’; and particular organising-processes such as ‘mainstreaming’ or ‘project appraisal and evaluation’. Embedded with these uses are senses of how the flow of communication is functional, where this flows ‘from’ and ‘to’ – mostly these flows are imagined unidirectionally from the ‘centre’, however lexicalised, towards the ‘periphery’ – which is congruent with the hierarchical forming of order as Irish Aid<sup>103</sup>.

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<sup>102</sup> CD[1/2/74]SA/M1

<sup>103</sup> See Chapter Six, *Practical Functioning as Irish Aid: Relating Processes as HQ/Field*, Graph No. 25

Some issues of organisational agency, such as ‘commitment’ and ‘results’ are also imagined in particular ways so that commitments work themselves through, or are organisationally embodied in a ladder progression from processes to procedures to legal obligations<sup>104</sup>; and ‘results’ are re-itemised as ‘outcomes’ but also within the discourses of Results Based Management and quality assurance. The contextualisation of ‘questions about procedures’ is also at times problematic. Inconsistencies and lacks of clarity with some procedures, when pointed out, are managed for the context with some level of defensiveness, irony or inconclusion<sup>105</sup> - this an instance of the dialogic functioning of talked texts that intertextualise a range of messages and meanings-made.

### Differentiated Interpretation

The phenomena of differentiated interpretation in the talked texts has a variety of forms in the activities and devices used. As discursive practices these might be understood as different ways of working with words, syntax and turn construction as noted for the paragraphs on style. Some of the particular texts interacted to a lesser or greater degree are the difficulties in interpretation or making-meaning for new members to the talk (i.e. new members to Irish Aid), the sited or positioned perspectives of interpretation from either ‘Field’ or ‘HQ’, the role of the Facilitator in choosing or setting the talk-style and interpretive-frames – including those pre-ordered by means of the Issues Paper circulated. Reading the talked texts as the relating of embodied topics (as was done with Method 3) some interesting ‘relations’ can be noted as patterns of interpretation that are generated or interacted in the context, such as the direct linking of the CSP to the JAS to ‘Political Influence’<sup>106</sup> which gives an interesting platform from which to explore reflexive questions for learning. In the context of the talk some reflexive questions do find explicit expression although some are accomplished in the sense that they are *taken-up*<sup>107</sup>, while some others are not<sup>108</sup>.

### Matters ‘Thinly’ Contextualised<sup>109</sup>

There are also interpretive actions that are infelicitous in a sense, i.e., that do not find contextualisation in any interacted or ‘thick’ sense and therefore can be placed in that category of discursive actions that are present but unfixed – not marked in their context of use. Some

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<sup>104</sup> CD[1/2/71-73]SA/M1

<sup>105</sup> CD[1/2/64-66]SA/M1

<sup>106</sup> CD[1/4/95-127]SA/M3

<sup>107</sup> CD[1/4/128]SA/M3

<sup>108</sup> CD[1/4/128-134]SA/M3

<sup>109</sup> Working with Geertz’ useful metaphor (1975)

examples of those actions embody the complexity of detail that members are struggling with for their practice; organisational processes that are hard to grasp such as ‘mainstreaming’ that remain, after topicalisation in this talk, with dubious status<sup>110</sup> – the group is unable to process this topic meaningfully. Other very practical and explicit concerns such as ‘human resources’ are branched off and possibly subverted. When dealing with this topic some activity of thin contextualisation seems evident as two separate conversations. As public-talk forum the topic is talked as a division of labour and the local advisors’ situation, which is objective and appropriate to the general discussion of CSP management issues. Nonetheless, concerns about human resources relating to the status of many members of the group gathered are elided. This discussion had been flagged before the Review Workshop as a topic that would be ‘difficult’ due to the already underway process of decentralisation of Irish Aid Head Office to Limerick, and the issues that development specialists were addressing relating to their contract status with an industrial relations process<sup>111</sup> among other matters. In fact these issues were not talked for the Review Workshop context but were boundaried to a Union Meeting held at the end of the day. Some comments made after that meeting by members and the Facilitator clearly suggested that the ‘public’ HR discussion had been side-tracked from the critical ‘matters to hand’<sup>112</sup>. Regardless of the appropriateness of this embodied and textualising choice; the fact is understood as a fragmenting activity for organising practice.

Also pertinent were the difficulties evident with coming to some interpretations that were sufficiently shared about ‘results-questions’. Their status remains ambivalent as ways that embody well the on-going predicament of these practitioners for their various working contexts as Irish Aid – the exigency for identifiable results with a global context where a ‘result’ will always be a contested site of attribution, ownership, boundary, sufficiency etc. In other words, the ‘result’ is always an imaginable and imagined status of position/purpose generating continually shifting practices. For this context of constant ambiguity and contestation, reflexive questions that address this state of affairs are difficult, and are therefore at times censored, unacknowledged or abandoned since there is no real context of communication as organising practice for dealing or flexing their seemingly counter-point messaging.

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<sup>110</sup> CD[1/3/133-143]SA/M2

<sup>111</sup> Cf. ‘Tensions over decentralisation’ Letters to the Editor, *Irish Times*, 13<sup>th</sup> January 2006 – An open letter signed by six Irish Aid development specialists as Union Representatives, written in response to comments made on RTE Radio1 on the 11<sup>th</sup> January 2006 by then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dermot Ahern T.D. This exchange placed the Industrial Relations Issues for these IMPACT (Public and Services Trade Union) members within the public realm.

<sup>112</sup> Participant research-practice notes, CSP Review Workshop.



### Propositional Meanings Made

As propositions these meanings are those that are interacted explicitly in that there is evidence of reflexive awareness since the textualisation is self-referenced with discourse markers that signal or co-text the meanings-made. Some of these explicit meanings in the form of propositions held in the talk are that Irish Aid takes its place in the international context by being coherent and efficient, a conclusion that can be directly linked to the DAC Peer Review Process. It is also stated that a functional organisation is a ‘corporate entity with quality procedures’<sup>113</sup>, that an organisation fixes itself before engaging with the external world, that quality assurance is the way of working as a ‘corporate identity’ and that Irish Aid is indeed an ‘agent’ in the international aid context<sup>114</sup>. It is also affirmed that Irish Aid ‘uses up the money’, possibly as a marker of efficiency, that programme choices are institutional choices, that policies are made but the resources required to deliver on these policies are not in place. Finally, the meaning made explicitly and in less marked ways in the text is that the ‘quality’ of Irish Aid is the field-work<sup>115</sup>.

In a second-order mode meanings are functionally accomplished in the talking practice by the use of a technical register which includes and excludes certain members – this is a way of managing diversity. Once again in noting the relating of certain topics-in-talk such as CSP/JAS/Who Scored?<sup>116</sup> – which is a question that pragmatically contextualises the question of local advisors’ ability to be impartial in a sector reducing exercise, is interacted as a technical issue, i.e. how was this done. Decision-making is interacted as ‘communication’ and ‘real dialogue’ between programme countries and Headquarters. The question of the division of labour exercises are interacted as ‘sectoral reductions’ either with engagements or partners<sup>117</sup>, while the notion of ‘comparative advantage’ is understood in this talk as ‘relations with a ministry’ – a marker for the purposeful or rhetorical sense that such relations offer opportunity to influence.

### *Position/Purpose*

Some details of how the embodiment of *position*, by way of referencing-choices, and *purpose*, by way of sensing-choices have been described. For this description there are difficulties for managing textualisation as ‘report’. On the one hand there is the *particular* and contextualising function of each utterance and turn (including the pragmatics insight that all meaning is not only made, but also meaningful with context). Equally cumbersome on the other hand is how the

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<sup>113</sup> CD[1/2/74]SA/M1

<sup>114</sup> CD[1/2/69-70]SA/M1

<sup>115</sup> CD[1/3/167-169]SA/M2

<sup>116</sup> CD[1/4/112-124]SA/M3

<sup>117</sup> CD[1/4/135-137]SA/M3

descriptive nature of each segment description/analysis as *worked through* does not easily lend itself to synthesis. It is the process of describing that gives force to the knowledge rendered, the topographical journey, rather than determinations that can be made *about* a certain meaning made for context. This text is therefore ‘another context’ of research practice for which the teleological process has become increasingly a modal practice for developing *a determination about* Irish Aid organising practice. From this perspective there is need to take further abstracting steps from the segments described as another stage of deuterio-learning practice. To do this the notions of position and purpose are read dialectically as generating ‘the accomplishment of practice’ as another order of abstraction. The reading of ‘practice-accomplished’ is made with the double-describing modes of noting the analogue-surrounding (as what members are doing) and digital-signalling (as how those actions are interpreted for the context of organisation) that make the contextualising of practice. From here we begin to generate some knowledge as characterising and identity generating phenomema as Irish Aid; albeit as captured at a particular place, with a particular task, of a certain group, at a moment of time.

The aim is towards some generalising statements, always carrying with them the caveats that the particular is unique and that any text (especially a transcribed text) is now ‘living’ as something else, with a changed nature, to what it was at it’s moment of making. By identifying some characterising practices we generate grounds, or at least the beginnings of a new context for a different, although very practical learning style as Irish Aid. The contention is that this new con/text is potentially a fresh resource for learning practice. The ‘statements’ made here are offered not as ‘statements of fact’ but more ‘of conjecture’<sup>118</sup> – of gesturing towards a difference to make a difference on the basis of incomplete, although not unsubstantiated information – the kind of ‘metaslash’ that Bateson talks about as an aggregate form of guessing ‘from what is on one side of the slash, something of what is on the other side’ (1972: 415). The ‘completion’ of this new information entering the organising mix as a potential other con/text is only available as the localising practices of learning and doing with particular groups using their methods, media and ‘matters to hand’ as the ways to go-on – as ‘Irish Aid’ or with other organising names and labels. It is important to note that using ‘what is to hand’ does not suggest a closed circle – indeed with such a grounded, although reflexive, way of progressing there is continually a danger of complacency (Oliver, 2005: 121), as well as a danger of what Bateson called ‘the dog eating its own tail’ i.e. unbalanced self-absorption.

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<sup>118</sup> From ‘con’ (with) ‘jacere’ (to throw) – meaning to work ‘with-throwing’, a sort of darning-action in which contingency is accomplished as economy of knowledge and practical learning.

### Part III: Topicalising Features of Language-Use as Practical Learning

#### *A Topograph of Practice – a dialectic of position/purpose as analogue/digital modes-relating*

Some of the practices emerging from this dialectic description can be noted with analogic mode as the production or accomplishment of ambiguity and ambivalence as a way of managing predicaments with responsibility and accountability; and the technicalising of talk in order to draw-back from some of the contextually censured but always present and necessary features of communication and practice such as phatic-exposure or bafflement in the face of overwhelming complexity. The result is an impoverishment of discursive resources and therefore a circumscription of language/knowledge.

Practices oriented with figures of sense-making according to digital mode and topicalised for this description, return us to the stories told during the data generation period<sup>119</sup> (attesting to the power of local knowledge whereby people generally can *tell* their truth). We find here practices that tend towards interpretations of fragmentation, and a confusion or lack of confidence with identity that practitioners were unable to generate a con/text of address and exploration for. What people, or ‘members’ – to use the language of ethnomethodology – can often not do when telling their truth is simply find a *context of difference* that can enable the breaking of their double-bind, which brings us back to the learning paradox (Bateson, 1972). This ‘double-bind’ might be described as a ‘prolonged undecidability’ which is bourne of the censure of a context of communication, what Bateson has called ‘threshold’ (2002: 189). For organisation it seems certain ‘thresholds’ continually become what Argyris and Schön called an ‘undiscussable’ feature of organising life (1996). Unlike Argyris and Schön, undiscussability is framed here not as interpersonal or psycho-social dynamics alone, but as a feature of what might be called, ‘discursive blindness with organising practice as exigency’ – which makes for a con/textual predicament.

In the face of such predicament and irreducible difficulties the *Figure of Practical Learning* emerging from the research practice seeks to generate, each time afresh, some *contextualisation of difference* as a path of deuterio-learning and as common practice. The phenomena of relational processing described above are potential topics for pragmatic-talk as reflexive enquiry, paths for possible softening of fixed S/O differentiations that seem to continually and contingently *become* as ‘problematic’ ways. That is, ways that exclude, silence or reduce participation with and as organising practice; causing members to talk *of, about* and *with* powerful entified-abstractions that are imagined *as* ‘gaps’ and ‘lacks’ – by which means such figures or interpretations are continually becoming and holding (in) place.

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<sup>119</sup> Described with Chapters Three and Four

Therefore, the ‘threshold’ that seems to matter as contextualising the organising practice, and thus making *the difference* (that makes a difference) is the patterning of myriad imagined ‘gaps’, ‘lacks’ and ‘problems’ discursively practiced and intertextualised towards discourse. This pattern is particularly the case with the discourse of learning that figured as *showing* and *telling* during the data generation period and is described with the opening chapters of this thesis. The ‘problem’ for learning is a practical matter of imagination as dialectically expanding/contracting with all the practical embodiments of organising practice – language-used, ‘tools’ and ‘instruments’ designed, personal and locational relationships and connections made; and as second-order abstractions – notions of order, exigency, accountability, ‘bestness’, ideology and the like.

### *As ‘Practices that Fragment’*

These practices of ambivalence and ambiguity are accomplished with the talk for the purpose of avoiding or eliding those topics (propositional and functional) that do not find contextualisation, that are not enabled as any meaningful or forceful way with the patterning of talk. Moving beyond Argyris and Schön’s analysis (1996) that implicitly places purpose and responsibility with individuals – even read as group interaction – and their cognitive processes as the social context from which ‘blind spots’ are generated, the pragmatics read generates a view of organisational learning with embodied contexts that are made with the *use* of discursive resources. The import of this perspective is that *learning* and therefore *changing* with those discursive contexts is a process of imagination (and imagining new forms or ways of imagination) using the resources to hand (including topics, media, methods and organising contexts). This is essentially a practical, although reflexive, a-priori strategy that builds on a-posteriori knowledge as the setting of context for new topics and contexts of talk. What this means for practice is that just as the identification of ambivalence and ambiguity is a second-order form of knowledge, generated using many of the activities and devices noted above, so too must the adequate response become new reflexive practices of a necessary second-order. Learning to be unambivalent and unambiguous requires a non-direct, contextualised form of attending practice so that starting again with the phenomena of language-use as simple terms is a grounding place to begin.

### As analogue mode – what ‘goes-on’ (what participants are doing)

Summarising the activities and devices noted above with Part II; as analogue mode ambivalence and ambiguity are accomplished or produced with/for this talk by way of the elision of verbs, subjects and objects<sup>120</sup>, insufficient descriptions and definitions of the differentiated capacities and concerns of Field and Head Office – meaning that those differences of place, concern, focus,

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<sup>120</sup> CD[1/3/174-176]SA/M2

language (including at times major codes such as ‘English’, ‘French’, ‘Vietnamese’ etc.) are not sufficiently counted. There is awareness of the diversity of context from programme country to programme country as terms of Irish Aid history, relationships with donor partners and partner governments, local expertise and capacity with the harmonising and aligning situation – but the analysed data here is framed as Irish Aid organising practice from a metaperspective of ‘across-the-organisation’.

Reflexive questions are generally unmarked or thinly contextualised with the talk, as well as utterances being unsupplemented – this is accomplished by questions getting ‘lost’ with the talk, turns are lightly contextualised so that they are not intertextualised organisationally, i.e., certain topics do not become the matters to hand that matter. Shifting registers (of language-use and evidential-bases) are used, while these shifts are also unacknowledged as relevant. Part of this process of acknowledging other topics or functionalities is the censure of a phatic register as legitimate for the con/text. Another form of practice with analogue-mode is the use of ‘agency/making or locating’ to generate capacity/authority/voice, especially for contexts where access to such discursive and meaningful resources is limited or boundaried – as with hierarchical ordering process, particularly for a context where that ordering process is being used to not only define responsibility, but also to control the allocation and management of responsibility for a confusing and fast-changing context, as was the situation of Irish Aid during the period of data generation.

All of these activities enable the predominance of propositional-talk to generate practice and order, because such talk is considered to do so. In fact, talking ‘about’ any topic is a non-contingent practice that displaces experience as ‘agency’ and distances the organising practice (the talking, the ordering, the organising ... *whatever*) from the context that matters for coherence, talking ‘about’ a topic empowers with the forcefulness of articulation more than experience. Contingency is empowering and generates new experience/knowledge – this is why all practical learning is experiential, and why the way forward with any learning paradox or double-bind is gained with the enactment of some contingent action of communication – taking *any* step forwards reflexively. How-processes (as second-order organisational texts) such as ‘mainstreaming’, ‘organisational learning’, even ‘harmonisation and alignment’ (as the process most pressingly to hand for this context) are *problematised* with the practice of ambiguity, and the preference for propositional knowledge, as generated with the variety of talking activities explored here. With this thesis there is exploration and analysis as to why how-functions are difficult as talk/practice, nonetheless it is still useful to note how this difficulty is managed for the organising context. It seems that ‘how-functions’ are either downgraded, considered complicated and remote, technicalised, or are ‘farmed-out’ to contracted consultants, i.e. considered tasks that others can ‘do-for’ Irish Aid.

The Mainstreaming Policy was prepared by external consultants (Irish Aid, 2006b), as was the Induction function outsourced. The understanding that external facilitators do ‘interaction for us’<sup>121</sup> might also be described as this practice. It is also possible to interpret much of the relating of Irish Aid practitioners to this organisational learning research project according a rationale of ‘farming-out’ functional capacity, understood then as something that can be ‘poured into’ the organisation – an imagined process much like that of the early philosophies of adult and other education discussed with Chapter Three. More pointedly, the intertextualisation of this organisational learning project with the Organisation – which to date has been difficult since no obvious context has emerged for going-on with a functional approach to organisational learning practice – reinforces this insight<sup>122</sup>. This may be a somewhat crude description of the dynamic, which could also be interpreted as generating a better mix and flow of ideas when external consultants are continually working with Irish Aid practitioners. Nonetheless, the point still holds that the practice of ‘farming-out’ functional tasks will reduce capacity for learning to learn *functionally* as ‘Irish Aid’ since the critical skills and knowledge are continually constructed remotely.

The somewhat decadent usefulness of generating ambiguous positionality by way of the language-choices made, which enables the elision or practiced inattention to difficult contexts of communication or linkage, also in turn enables the pragmatic-elision of ‘positioning responsibility’. The embodiment and intertextualisation of responsibility is publically ordered with the allocation of hierarchically-arranged positions. Nonetheless, one of the central talked themes of the Review Workshop was the confusion, complication and, at times bad feeling/faith generated with the failures and inabilities continually becoming with CSP Processes. The CSP is a truly integral organising process since this ‘instrument’ connects the principles, strategies and tasking of Irish Aid, as well as people across many grades and locations, and all around core goals. The relating processes of practitioners along the critical continuum of ‘Field/Head Office’ is lived most forcefully with the CSP Process since the question – ‘What are we doing?’ is actively explored and brings sharply to focus those relating processes. All along, the CSP is the focus of relations between Head Office and Field, but the time of its preparation is a useful liminal period

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<sup>121</sup> Paraphrase of a member comment, ‘The way we work internally is not interactive nor participative, facilitators do that for us’ – participant research-practice notes, Field Visit PC-A

<sup>122</sup> Difficulties with intertextualisation of organisational learning are apparent at every stage and instancing of the research project, captured poignantly with the repeated phrase from Irish Aid representatives liaising with the LEARN Project, ‘What will it look like?’ and evident with the repeated reading of ‘learning’ from a knowledge management frame.

of transition and possibility (i.e. empowerment) when many functional needs and desires can be explored.

It seems though that such transitional spaces were destabilising to degrees where anxiety and inertia (as defensive response) were continually becoming with talking-practice. This experience was articulated, for the Review Workshop under the Session on 'Organisational Learning', as a 'lack of confidence' *in* the Organisation. This 'lack' can also be read as a lack of leadership, clarity and direction which contextualises the stories of frustration, unlearning and fragmentation that characterised the exploration phase of data generation. Equally some of the concerns talked in the Review Workshop as inadequate accountability procedures and protocols indicate levels of an anxiety among practitioners that was explicitly referenced as such on occasion<sup>123</sup>. The struggle to clearly position responsibility for a fast changing, exigent and disorienting transitional space (as was the time of data generation) is not a simple matter of assigning someone to a post or defining a role – the contextualisation of the responsibility inherent to participation and task is essential and requires the organisational capacity (context) to generate talk with experiences of responsibility *as* difficulty, confusion, overload, inertia etc. The underlying assumption here is that 'responsibility' is a relating process that all practitioners need to participate with, as a functional and discursive resource for organisation.

Additional to the practices of generating ambiguity and ambivalence with such resources as position, agency, functionality and responsibility, the practice of technicalising talk as a language-use familiar and safe as a context of topicalisation and talk is noted with the following activities and devices. When sectoral competence is valued over organisational competence, or 'process' itself is judged difficult (institutional arrangements/mainstreaming/organisational learning) which means that intertextualisation of such functional topics remains marginal. When 'harmonisation' is solely interpreted as a question of 'sectoral reductions' and no process is described for 'choosing' a sector or when talk is 'cumulative' or 'layered' but not discursive/interactive with ways that differentiate to an explicit degree the dialogic nature of that talk. Even though for the Review Workshop the talk was facilitated in order to generate participation and interaction, and this way of managing this organisational need is common to Irish Aid practice, the tendencies towards technicalising practice with talk in order to manage what are essentially functional challenges are strongly presenced. Another language-use that technicalises talk as a term of imagining organisation is a form of 'levels-talk' which organisationally references, while also locating and boundarying, such functional and discursive resources as agency, proficiency, legitimacy and authority.

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<sup>123</sup> CD[1/2/82-83]SA/M1 – T82/U4, 'I mean the question, 'Are we confident we are covered in the decision-making processes that we have got?'

Although at times less technical language-use<sup>124</sup> is generated or exploration of common themes as a discursive strategy is presented by the facilitator<sup>125</sup> thus potentialising relatively unfixed relating for softening S/O differentiation and suggesting the possibility of more inclusive practice, the more common pattern of practice is for use of a technical register, sanctioned in context and therefore safe and manageable, that tends towards silencing or depotentialising other necessary discourses with the context; the phatic, the reflexive and the multiloging of diversity, all of which are functionally present and key to the meaning-making processes of imagining and deciding.

As digital mode – how participants understand this situation (interpretations made as fixing practices and hard S/O differentiation)

The difference with describing the digital mode of talking practice is that unlike the descriptions of activities and devices of language-use, digital figures are judgements, senses-accomplished and therefore making, framing, as well as circumscribing going-on practice. Inevitably therefore to comment with the digital figuring of Irish Aid practice as ‘topicalised’ is to make judgements *about* (a shift of logical-type) practices, to label them *as* X, and to compare such determinations with the judgements made by Irish Aid practitioners about their own organising practices. Having clarified that the status of the descriptions made of practices is second-order as ‘claims’ or ‘determinations’ – presented as materials or topics to go-on with for new learning practices – their fragmenting nature is noted. Digital practices thus judged are patterns that order assumptions and expectations about and with practice; they are formalising with a sense of being the rationale driving organising and learning practice.

Early on for the research practice (as a contingent strategy), and now by means of the deep-cycles of detailed description and response, judgement is made that the common discursive practices intertextualising and generating (meaningful) body as Irish Aid, are also generating (as a form of double-description) interpretations of ‘fragmentation’ that with many ways tend towards what Oliver – following Cronen, Johnson and Lannamann (1982) – has called ‘strange loops’. These are subsequently developed as patterns of ‘hexed loops’ that generate ‘a vicious circle that shows poor reflexivity’ (2005: 116). Importantly, the hexed loop, unlike the pattern of a ‘charmed loop’ that ‘works to hold complexity’, ‘fragments and splits off experience so it only allows connection to the pessimistic and a story of threat, but stays in that reality of mistrust and *paranoia*; hope doesn’t surface’ (Oliver, 2005: 116). These loop-patterns are reproduced below with Figures 8, 9,

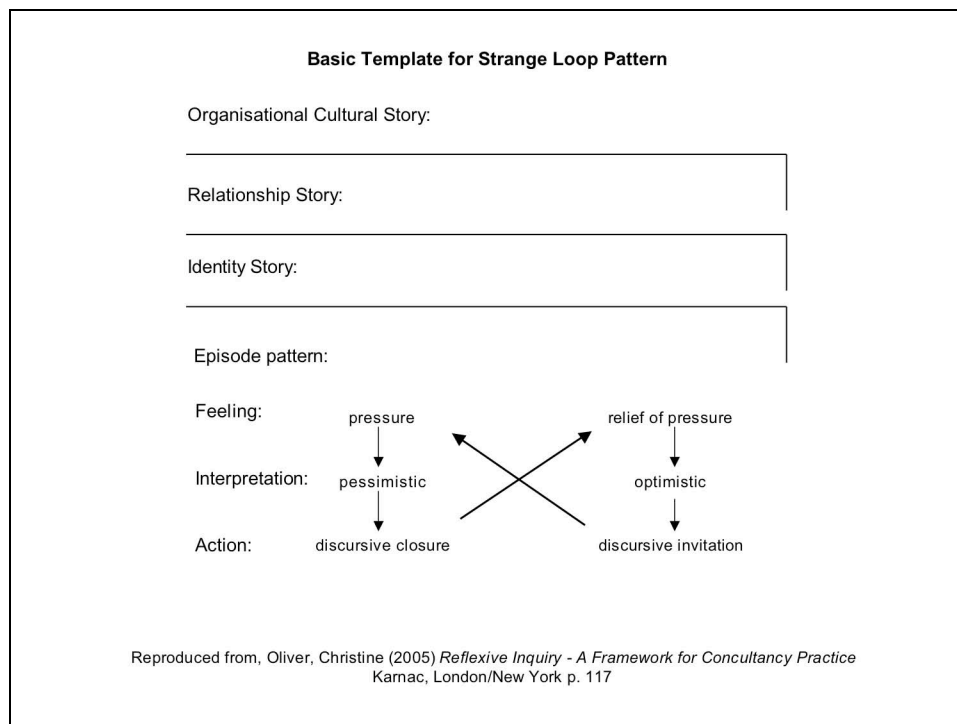
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<sup>124</sup> Eg. CD[1/3/143-145] – T144, co-texting of items: ‘sector’ to ‘places’ to ‘areas’

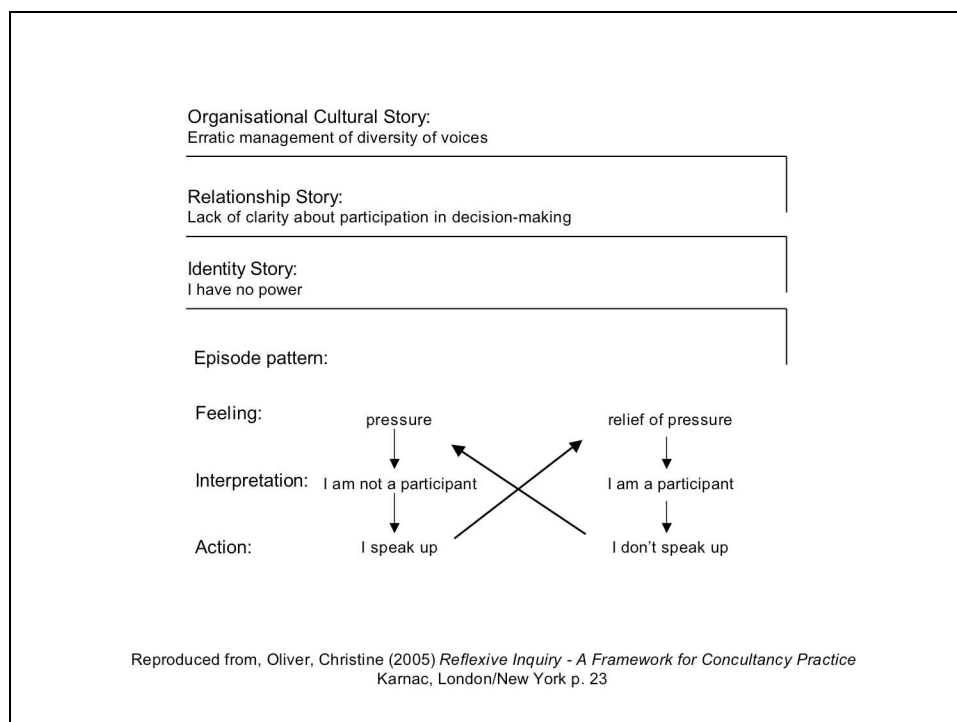
<sup>125</sup> CD[1/3/177]SA/M2



10 and 11 in order to show their functionality and contextualise the following discussion of the fragmenting practices characterising as Irish Aid.



*Figure 0-8 - The Basic Strange Loop Pattern*



*Figure 0-9 - An Example of Discursive Action with the Strange Loop Pattern*

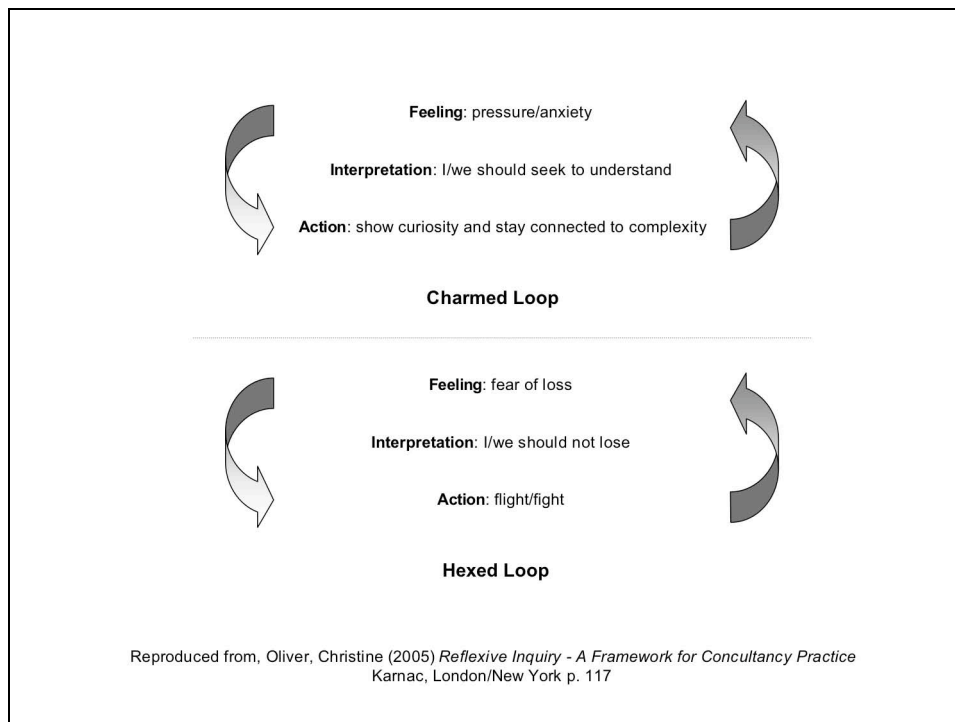


Figure 0-10 - Hexed and Charmed Loop Patterns

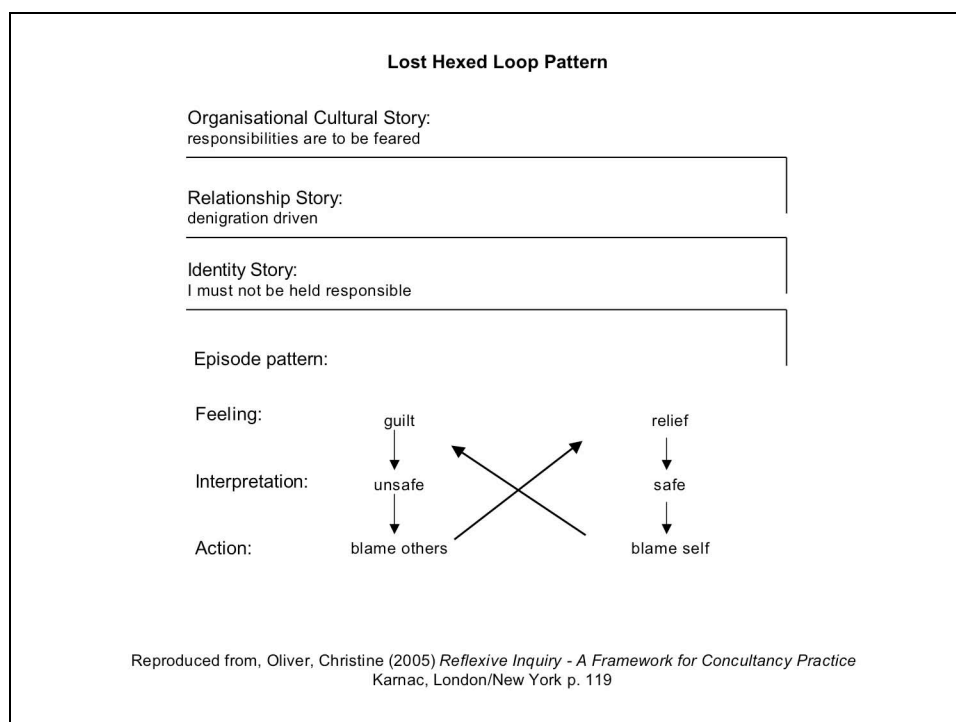


Figure 0-11 - Example of a Lost Hexed Loop Pattern

The pragmatic focus on practical learning renders a view of the organising practice as the context (or ecology) for learning – rather than as ‘learning’ per se – which cannot be *seen* as it *is*. This

distinction is made since all of the phenomena being explored here are contextualising actions chosen for the purpose of ‘going’ or ‘getting-on’. Members have not marked this explicitly *as* a ‘learning’ situation for context. The contextual or deuterio perspective taken when exploring learning as ‘practical learning’ – the learning going-on as normalising practice – necessarily generates a view or a perspective about the *environment* of practice – the conditionality or ‘ground of practice’ where learning is taking place. The pragmatics of practical learning is a description of the context wherein or with which knowledge-making actions, processes and patterns are formed and embodied.

Much of what has been suggested here rests on the claim that the *contextualising going-on* is often not figured or imagined as the organisational learning context that matters most for practice. With all these practices of organising (designing instruments of strategic planning in this case) organisational identity is being constructed. The claim is that identity as a characterising pattern of the third order is largely latent and generated without a learning con/text described. This is accomplished by way of a series of language-uses (including lexicalisation, register-choice and syntax). These uses or ‘choices’ as Verschuere holds (1999), when read from a digital perspective on practice can be described as single-loop processes whereby the variables of procedure and process are attended to and changed, but the concomitant identity generated with those actions are unattended to. The failure to generate some features of the reflexive conversation that inevitably must arise in order to ‘[stay] connected to the complexity’ as Oliver describes, means that critical feedback is getting processed with/as other contextualising processes<sup>126</sup> to that of the organising practice that comes to matter (i.e., the public-talk as formal organisation) and thus generating a third order of decadence and discontinuity that people seem to feel they have no power to change.

Anxieties expressed about ‘lacks of confidence’, failures of care and respect<sup>127</sup> among members, and the lack of even a language for public-talking with such issues all point to difficulties with contextualising conversations that inevitably bring members to the ‘matters to hand’ that are mattering for the present moment. During the CSP Review Workshop Process, with an out of meeting comment, the Workshop Facilitator reflected to me, ‘I am more tired than normally and usually I have more of a workshop report written by now’<sup>128</sup>; the implication being that the dynamic and process of the group was difficult and tiring to ‘hold’ from a facilitation perspective

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<sup>126</sup> Myriad forms of formally disconnecting talk that I have labelled ‘private talk’ for this project. Always understood as constructing, relating-with (inter and transtextualising) forms of ‘public’ and ‘presentational’ talk.

<sup>127</sup> Ancillary interviews and participant research-practice notes – CSP Review Workshop

<sup>128</sup> Participant research-practice notes – CSP Review Workshop

suggesting that unacknowledged difficulties were generating a sense of 'heaviness' for this group. 'Staying connected to the complexity' with this case may have meant seeking paths for dialogue about the different 'epistemologies'<sup>129</sup> that many members at an earlier stage of the research talked about as problematic, and exploring how and why such diversity and source of creative differentiation was rather it seems generating patterns of isolation and fragmentation, somewhat according to the strange and hexed patterns described by Oliver (2005).

These difficulties are not irrelevant to the job of designing CSP Guidelines. During the CSP Review Workshop most 'flash-points' – when tension became apparent – occurred as the talk regenerated failures with support, communication and understanding between members with different roles; especially when referenced with the frame of Field/Headquarters interactions or relations. These relations-made *felt difficult* partly because they seemed to come 'suddenly', and partly because they seemed/*felt* censured from further exploration. It seems this type of contextualising reflexive talk is difficult to generate (Argyris and Schön, 1996).

Linked with patterns of strange and hexed loops (as avoidance of reflexive enquiry) the interpreted (and interpreting) abstractions talked *as* inertia, lethargy and resistance to change during the formal organisational learning session of the Workshop only work towards further hardening the S/O differentiation typical of dichotomising and fragmenting practices. Inertia, lethargy and resistance are defensive abstracting patterns that close off paths to communication and flexing dialogue/dialogics. Some of the language-uses described thereby *position* members (as) using non-exploratory ways. This situation becoming, when related dialectically with discursive *purpose* as 'unfolding', tends towards practices that isolate and fragment.

Understanding as some 'image of organisation' embodying this talk is described therein as organisation for quality assurance, aligned processes, forms of idealised coherence that can be built with systems-development etc. The route imagined to such 'idealised states' is procedural, not discursive. *Utopia* is to be gained with the *right* formula worked out. But of course, u-topia is no-place and will therefore always generate absence or lack if the unknowing that comes with imagining remains unacknowledged as contextualising our contingency. This imag(in)ing (with a hard fixing S/O pattern) explains the repeated request made during data generation as to what an 'organisational learning system' would look like – a clear entification or objectifying discursive practice. It also generates context for understanding an experience of 'incongruence' I had during preparation for the Workshop. I asked the organisers how they understood my role for the process; quite simply they did not answer me, nor seemed aware of this failure to respond. I can only summarise that they had no form of an answer. On the closing day while still at the Workshop

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<sup>129</sup> The sense-making practices of the different employee types that constitute Irish Aid.

location I was asked to forward my ‘report’ within four days at the latest. This request showed me something of the propositionally-driven expectations ordering practice.

For these situating practices it seems that deciding and acting are the ‘things’ that matter, that come to count<sup>130</sup>. Interestingly, it is precisely decidability that is talked thematically as a key-node of complexity and difficulty for Irish Aid with CSP strategic planning, and was described by members throughout the data generation phases with such fashion. Where decidability is considered of optimum value, but at the same instance is interpreted as somehow ‘extrinsic’ or ‘lacking’ for organising practice, then a situation of double-bind is generating and patterning an on-going series of frustrating experiences by ways of teleological and textualising process.

Thus an impoverishment of imagination and a disempowering of learning process is generating whereby *the* view or horizon is limited with con/textualisation. The messages and signals generating *about* Irish Aid as ‘organisation’ (identity) repeat and reinforce – digital patterning that did not change over the period of data generation. Indeed, during interviews after the fact with members who participated for the CSP Review Workshop, comments were made about the lack of communication and the measure of intransigence that went-on. At the time, I was surprised by these comments, indicating that mine was an outsider’s view. As noted above, the defining or closing moment of the discussion about ‘What Irish Aid is Good At’, was an affirmation of what Irish Aid is not, i.e., ‘not DFID’. Even though the DAC Peer Review process contextualises another view of the organisation extrinsic to members – it is nevertheless not a reflexive view generated with the talk of those for whom the details of relating processes matter most. To cite but one set of contextualisations unacknowledged for learning *with/as themselves* and referenced here with a short few utterances during a groupwork session that did not reach the plenary, are those conversations or talk embodying and characterising the relation: Irish Aid/Recipients of that aid. In particular such talk becomes with government officials from programme countries – an exchange that the organisational learning for aid literature has already noted as of unequal parity (Chambers et al., 2001, Groves and Hinton, 2004)

T32-38<sup>131</sup>

- 32. MM: the no agenda thing I think the fact that African leaders always go on about this colonial, colonials telling us how to operate, we’ve been colonised ourselves which makes us really different from most of the other donors
- 33. ZZ: yeah
- 34. MM: so if you are looking for something distinct about Irish Aid

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<sup>130</sup> CD[1/4/138-147]SA/M3

<sup>131</sup> CD[1/3]AP – T32-38

35. ZZ: Is that something that we acknowledge as one of our experiences more than I do? Is that something that the partner governments are actually aware of, actually think about on a day to day basis? If we show up at the door, if DFID shows up at the door?
36. LL: yes, yes
37. ZZ: yeah?
38. LL: yep

The horizon seems also ‘limited’ by the fact that the members who participate use forms of talk contextualising a particular set of experiences, this is obvious. But it foregrounds the need to generate conversations with many different groups of people. A small example from the Workshop suggests a ‘thin’ contextualisation of comments from those members coming from programme countries not in Africa, where Irish Aid has worked out most of its experience and practice. Irish Aid in fact has designated two non-African programme countries, Timor-Leste and Vietnam, and therefore must be generating a steep learning curve with these unfamiliar contexts – finding ways to include new voices for the conversations that matter is one way of learning to learn with these new contexts.

It seems that the pragmatic rationale con/textualising the CSP Review Workshop (as described here) is a use/action dialectic as the functional definition of idealised identity, and the marker (or map) legitimated as *voice* and *authority* as and for this context. The telos operating becomes ‘being able to’; embodying answerability/operationability with/as discursive practice. This positivist preference, to the seeming exclusion of other, softer differentiating talking patterns – such as the reflexive – elides or silences the inherent presence of the experiences (in *this* immediate context) of ‘not knowing’ or ‘not being able to’ – inherent since by definition (regardless of the particular nature of the pattern) learning is a process of moving from not knowing to knowing *somehow* else.

These phenomena decided *about* as practices of a digital nature are therefore judged as fixed or fixing patterns characterising as ‘Irish Aid’ – at least with the instances of this Review Workshop talk – but corresponding significantly enough with the descriptions made by Organisational members (including Workshop members) throughout the data generation phases.

### *Taking a Topographical View to Soften S/O Differentiation (Loosen the Weave)*

When talking or discursive practice for organisation tends towards hard objectification as a way to manage and control on-going tasks and exigencies, when ODA discourse increasingly seems to idealise abilities to identify and demonstrate ‘effective aid’ by means of articulating

predetermined ‘results’, and with uncritical constructions of ‘best practice’, ‘coherence’ ‘quality assurance’ etc. as the measures of ‘quality development’, then not only are participative and empowering constructions of particular *good* practices not contextualised, implicit understandings of and for ‘development’ are necessarily serving donor needs. When the language-uses with which these goals or imagined states of ‘coherence’, ‘quality assurance’ and ‘results management’ are imagined or constructed also generate enduring/recurring interpretations of ‘fragmentation’ and ‘lack’ as organisational life, then we can also understand that the pursuance of objectified ‘perfection’ without reflexive enquiry, given the complexity that such a project generates, continually becomes a situation of dissatisfaction for the officials of development-aid organisations also.

It is important to remember that this description of organising practice is generated with an approach to organisational learning that is relatively distinct to that constructed in the main by the original community that defined the term, and its expression as development-aid organising practice<sup>132</sup>. There is no suggestion here that results-based management, initiatives for coherent linking of policies and actions, or quality assurance are incorrect or unnecessary – the only claim being made is that with the many forms of constructing practice by/for which they are currently embodied as official development-aid practice limits the contextualisation of many critical features of the learning, organising and development environment as ecology. ‘Critical’ is the sense of the inherent abilities with the discursive practice to generate flexibility, re-flexivity, recursive attending. Organising practice and consequently, development practice becomes ‘less’ as a context of larger or slower processes as change. On these terms development-aid organising practice becomes inefficient, disconnected and mis- or discommunicative and exclusive of significant – although possibly marginalised voices or messages. From this pragmatics description of practical learning with a strategic planning process, from the ways the process was talked and imagined, it seems that practices for ‘alignment’ are those that come to matter. The belief here is that noticing this tendency has the potential to generate *another* context as/for organisational learning, no-matter how shaky such a different ground may appear. ‘Another’ contextualising practice/pattern is imagined on the premise that ‘textual pragmatics’ can become a way of deutero-learning for better organising practice; that it is always possible to *become* otherwise. This is the frame for imagining a phenomenology of con/textualisation.

For such a phenomenology the projective/receptive features of knowing with language-use and for which there is a double-receptivity are marked. The ‘first’ reception is of information from a proto-learning perspective, the reflective action of learning-from an experience or situation. The ‘second’ reception is of ‘in-formation’ that *comes-through*, or is the fruit-of deutero-learning

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<sup>132</sup> As explored with the Literature Review of Chapter One.

process. Deutero-learning is the 'learning of context' that enables recontextualising when many contextual factors including practical imagination, assumptions, principles, methods and the 'matters to hand' with play are becoming obsolete for the living ecology. With such describing practice/exercise comes or is 'received', an ability to 'learn to receive signals' that is at the heart of trito-learning (Bateson, 1972: 249). While proto and deutero-learning are to be contextualised as active organising practice, consciously decided-for as organisational values to be embodied, trito-learning becomes differently. For example, 'characterising' is an organising phenomenon that emerges with practice as patterning, and becomes apparent from time to time and place to place, often as experiences of 'coherence' or 'attunement' marked 'after the fact'<sup>133</sup> (Tosey, 2005); such learning is *received*. The 'phenomenology of contextualisation' is imagined as an active practice for which describing textualising processes from time to time and with place to place becomes a practical learning exercise. The difference with such a phenomenology as relating process is that many other dimensionalities of textual production could be included with the description (as imagining/deciding) than seems currently the case.

For 'another' contextualisation the social practicalities of talk need to feature. So many of the functional dynamics of language-use are *social* as many 'senses'. *Social* as phatic-engagement charged with emotions and feelings that matter, *social* as threading and constructing a sense of 'Society', *social* as twisting and shifting and changing at every turn with which language-utters – the complexity of which pragmatics explores. The infinite adaptability, negotiability and variability that enables language as *used* to perform, to *do things and how*, and by extension the learning and organising practices by which participants continually and contingently generate meaning is reflective. Knowers always have an 'eye' on how their *forcing* (illucutionary and perlucutionary) is getting-on for the context mattering (Garfinkel, 1967). Intrinsic to this living process of continual adaptation are the places, events, situations and tools that are mostly referenced or in fact *used* and are therefore forcefully *sensed* or made to count as with abstracted meanings as context. To practically understand this patterning as 'contextualising force' with language-used is to find paths to the organisational learning of context.

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<sup>133</sup> To place this form of learning as a functional category (of narrative genre for example) it might be likened to the stories from Luke or John's Gospel describing experiences of meeting a 'Risen Jesus'. Exploration of the narrative form used could render some understanding of how recursive interpretation is generative. Note for example the language-use of the utterance, 'Were not our hearts burning within us' to describe the experience of two people travelling to Emmaus with 'Jesus' (Luke 24:32). Reading this utterance as an account of *knowing*, and as a third-order-of-abstraction interpretation renders interesting insight about the projective/receptive functionality of trito-learning. Beyond theological comment, the textualisation is with a genre of poetics, creative 'narrative' or *creating*-forms; but as syntax, it also seems to embody the sort of Aorist Ecology or Epistemology suggested with Chapter One (*The Marking of the Text*).



## Conclusion - A Decision About Irish Aid Organising Practice as ‘Connecting Pattern’

To finish this Chapter a simple *state*-ment is made *about* practical learning as Irish Aid organising practice. It is made with attention to the conditions of its making and clear about its purpose as a position taken for new learning practice. It is made with the topographical form of the *Figure of Practical Learning* along the lines of the four movements of learning as with two parts, thematic and rhemic. As a determination it is made to disturb or provoke a potentially fresh relating process; for that which is uttered has potential force. A better discursive action than that which I can determine *about* Irish Aid as a statement is how such potential might be explored with practice. This Chapter has sought to pre-figure that exploration to some extent.

As ‘Irish Aid’, the topic-in-use as ‘theme’ is the review of strategic planning of CSPs. With this theme a general ‘rhemic’ pattern is discerned as a functional imagination of procedural or technical clarity and linearity as coherence, and foreshadowed with *The Issues Paper* (Irish Aid, 2007b). The ecology-in-use, by which processual means the topic is talked, traces the theme of institutionalisation and all the formal and informal relating processes that this image brings along<sup>134</sup>. The rhemic features of this institutional ecology are marked with many ways but include tendencies towards generating authority on the basis of ‘Field’ experience, in the face of a complex patterning of careers, concerns, roles and responsibilities generally unacknowledged as topics for reflexive enquiry. The dialogic-in-use is clearly stated with many embodiments throughout the process, worked and un-worked, as a discourse of Logical Model of Results Based Management, Managing for Development Results and Quality Assurance. Along with these themes as dialogic practice there comes the rhemic forces of decidability/workability as the de-facto or *in-use* organising pragmatic practice, whether talked as strategic planning or forms of bureaucratic *forcing*. These priorities prevail.

The pragmatic-in-use, as a theme, is topicalised here as ‘talking’, as language-used, and secondarily, as the review of current practice with strategic planning and CSPs by means of a ‘Review Workshop’ and all that that entails. Rhemically speaking<sup>135</sup>, this theme generates a teleological determination to new textualising practice, this instance of organising practice has been ‘Irish Aid learning’. The critique made (as another flexibility) is that this new (strategic) practice is not ‘fresh’, not sufficiently ‘original’ or attuned with the complexity of ecological

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<sup>134</sup> As explored with Chapter Four

<sup>135</sup> I.e. speaking with context – the relating of thematic/rhemic terms is further explored with Chapter Six.

concerns appearing – it is learning of a technical fashion. In the domain of the ‘greater cycle’, which is a picture of ‘development-aid’ that must be considered from time to time and for place to place, the practical learning is *incomplete*. The connecting pattern is accountability, proficiency, peer review, articulation – essential but insufficient.

Figure 12 describes the patterning of this dynamic with the *Figure of Practical Learning*. Figures 13 and 14 show the ‘story board’ method that was used to generate a sense for *telling* the Chapter. They also use the *Figure of Practical Learning* to learn as research practice.

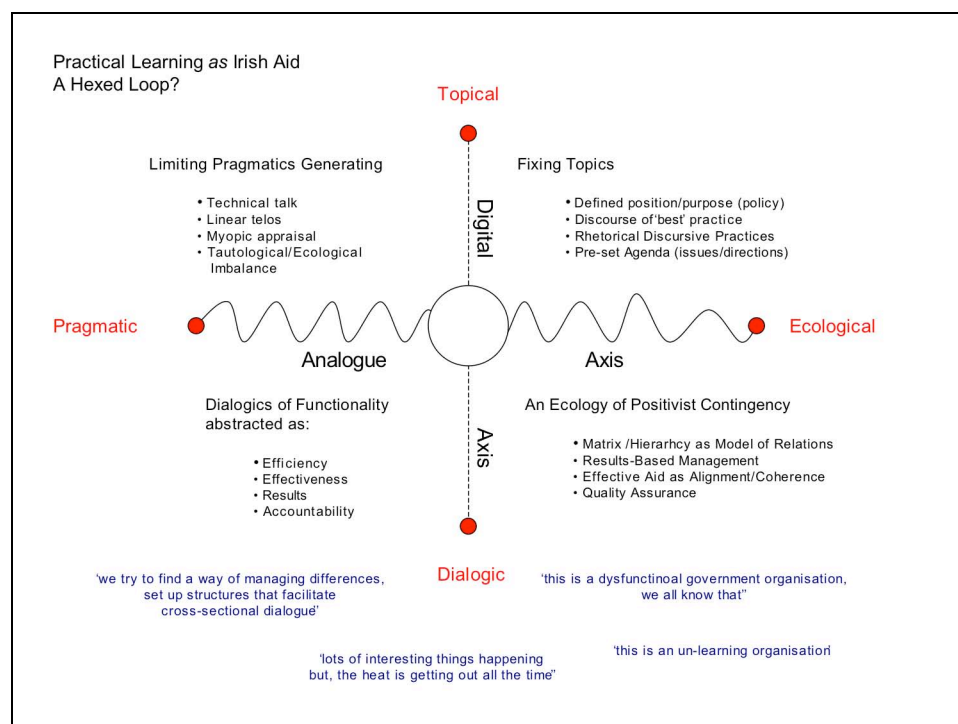


Figure 0-12 - Practical Learning as Irish Aid with Hexed Loop Pattern

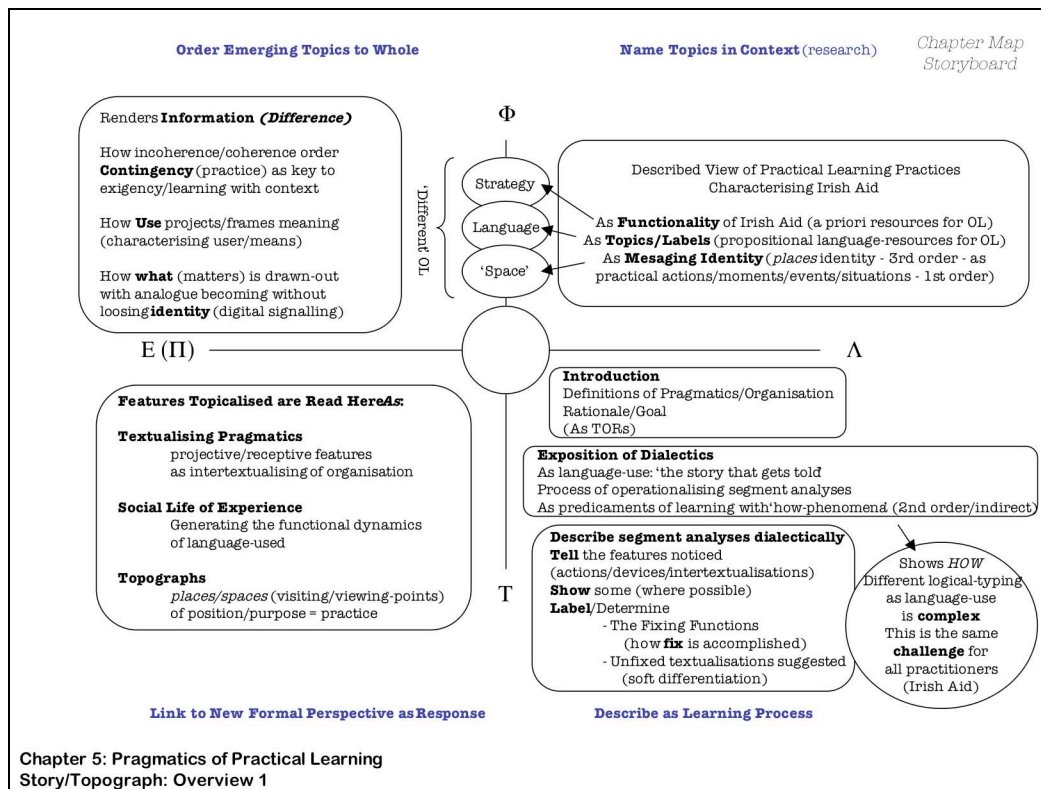


Figure 0-13 – Dialectic Storyboard Method Used for Constructing the Description 1

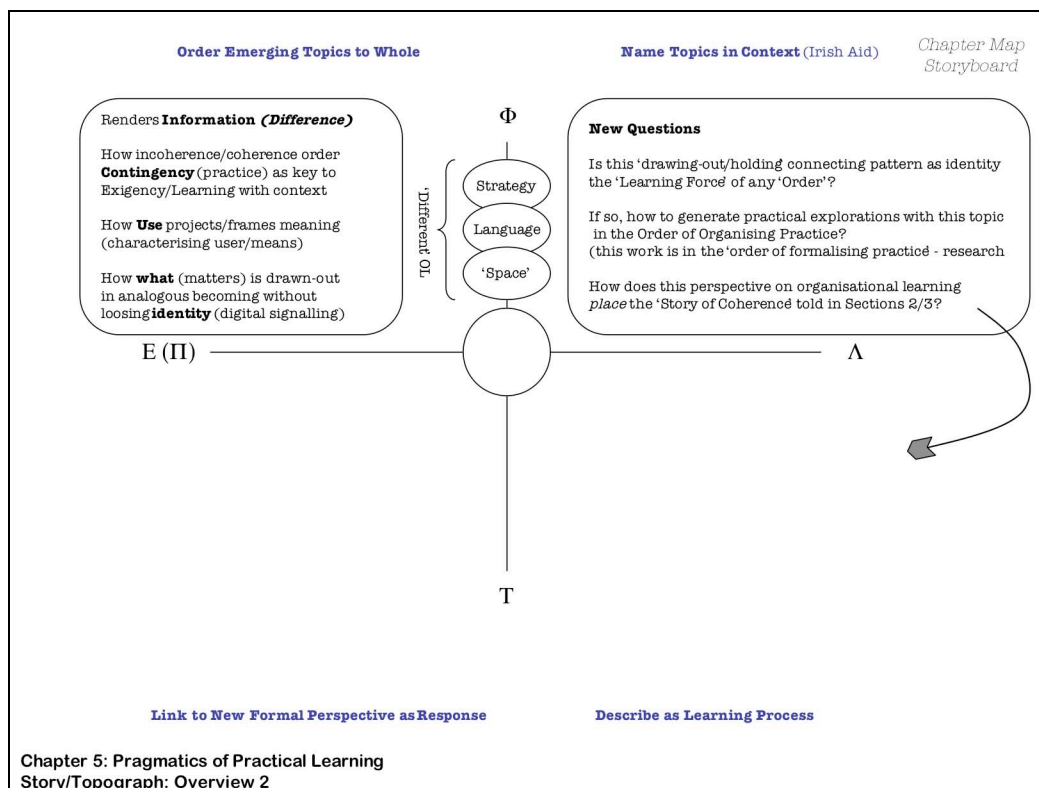


Figure 0-14 - Dialectic Storyboard Method Used for Constructing the Description 2



## Chapter Six: Exploring Dialectic-Dimensionality as Practical Learning

‘For manifestly you have long been aware of what you mean  
when you use the expression “*being*”.  
We, however, who used to think we understood it,  
have now become perplexed.’

*Plato*

*as quoted by Martin Heidegger at the opening of Being and Time*  
(1973: 1)

‘We want to understand something that is already in plain view.  
For this is what we seem in some sense not to understand’

*Ludwig Wittgenstein*

(1953: No. 89)

‘It’s the thing we do in the dark that is more real’

*from The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 6: 122*

(as quoted in Goldman, 2006: 80)

### Coordinates – Chapter Six

- This chapter describes how ‘topics’ are generated with dialectic relating processes for ‘position/purpose’ as ‘ontological condition’, ‘syntactical language’, ‘learning cycles’ and ‘participation’. Irish Aid’s learning ‘problems’ are revisited from this perspective as ‘predicaments’ and ‘patterns’ apt for practical deuterio-learning.
- Where might we ‘begin’ with a *Figure of Practical Learning*?

## General Introduction

Whatever 'we do in the dark' is only in the 'dark' in the sense of our abilities to 'see' or 'notice' – there is nothing mysterious *per se*, nothing 'more real' than that which is about us. It is our processes of perceiving, imagining, understanding and deciding (all our acting) which perplex us. They are always 'in plain view' but continually and always becoming those relating processes which we seem 'not to understand'. And even though 'not understanding' may be our lot, and we may not enjoy full view of how we go-on making meaning and knowledge with these embodied processes (making myriad artefacts and constructions); as conscious participants always *Becoming*, the continual and contingent need to seek that understanding is critical.

With Chapter Five I explored how the learning practice of Irish Aid seems, in some important respects, *incomplete*. The term 'incomplete' means 'limiting' or 'insufficiently receptive' on grounds of often highly defined practices for the appraisal, analysis and facilitation of possible learning contexts. With a pragmatics description of language-used and chosen, a determination was made that discursive practices continually tend towards formalisation of a hegemonic positivist rationale, as constructed with the discourse of Logical Modelling and Results Based Management. A results-driven epistemology seems to become the contextualising order without critique as to its aptness for development-aid organising ecology.

This situation is judged to be the case and the context that continues to generate a deutero-critique, thus mapping as it were the contingency of organising and learning practice. A positivist, results-driven epistemology is judged to be ultimately decadent for a generative ordering of organisation on the grounds that it disconnects learning and organising practice from the complex and living dynamics of practical life – the 'matters to hand' that connect learning and practice. A technical exercise thus ensues that discounts as 'problems' or 'gaps' the features of living process that do not 'fit'. Paradoxically, the beginning of practical learning is with just such pressing predicaments, recontextualised for possibility and as relevant feedback, in order to generate the 'coherence' desired, even on its own terms. A basic axiom for a critique as on 'another map' is the contextualisation of deutero-learning as a contingent feature of organising practice. It seems that deutero-contextualising is difficult for Irish Aid; as it is for most organisations (Argyris and Schön, 1996); but it can be judged a critical factor for the organising and emerging predicaments of our times (Bateson, 1972, Hosking, 2007).

### *How is Practical Learning?*

The purpose of this Chapter is to *show* some of the features of how practical learning is as it is. Practical learning, as a reconstruction of organisational learning, is thus described with the

rationale of relational constructionism and relating processes as dialectic, praxial, phronetic, syncopated, syntactical and as a metapractice, i.e. an ordering rationale for how organising practice goes-on. The term *functionality* is taken-up to mark how context is continually ‘happening’ as it were with discursive practice. The *difference that makes difference* is the interpreting practice that designates such functionality *as* X – as a ‘problem’, an ‘opportunity’, a ‘gap’; as ‘efficient’, ‘effective’; as ‘best’ or ‘development’, or whatever. An important point for practical learning is to note that interpreting practice is not only rhetorical and purposeful, but also conditioned with contexts constructed inter- and transtextually, material or abstracted – which is why contextualisation matters so much for learning as interpreting practice. Whatever learning or organising practice becomes, that name or ‘topic’ emerges as a relationally constructed process that differentiates according to ecological, dialogic and pragmatic factors always functional. Thus practical learning framed for this project with a *Figure of Practical Learning*<sup>1</sup> that marks the processing of *topics* with *dialogics* by means of ecologic and pragmatic contextualisation; and the processing of *ecologies* with *pragmatics* by means of topical and dialogic contextualisation. This relating process is eminently practical as it goes-on generating, unto ‘itself’ as it were, and for which there is no definitive ‘end’ nor ‘beginning’ or ‘purpose’ beyond that of *becoming*. As participants intrinsic to this becoming we construct ‘ends’, ‘purposes’ and ‘beginnings’ as a key feature of how this metaprocess is functional. This is the reason why reflexive enquiry is critical for generative practice – we have to keep noticing what is going-on.

The functional nature of this relating process is described with the term ‘dialectic’. A construction of dialectic, on the basis of the root words, διαλέγω (dialegoo) which means to ‘pick out or choose, to converse, reason, talk with’ that carries traces of διάλογος (dialogos) which means ‘a conversation or dialogue’ (Liddell and Scott, 1891) suggests a form of ‘speaking-through’ in order to generate difference, ‘a picking out’ of a sort. λέγω (legoo) is the verb to ‘speak, to say, to utter’ (Liddell and Scott, 1891). The question ‘speaking-through *what?*’ is answered propositionally as speaking-through *this* or *that* or whatever topic features. Answering the question contextually, and as a way of thinking differently to the binary either//or dichotomising marking rational (so called) knowing process, one might say that *whatever* is moved-through as itself, its own processing as the categorisation of knowledge that orders the organisation of worlds becoming. For this project categorising knowledge is figured as two modes or movements. As digital ‘out-of-time’ signalling<sup>2</sup> ordered for knowing, and analogue-surrounding as the unfolding of experience that a ‘spoken-through’ clause describes. The core relating process of learning, knowing and making meaning is thus figured as two distinct modes

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<sup>1</sup> Presented with Chapters One, Four and Five as a practical resource for deuterio-learning generated with the research practice.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Ordering’, ‘framing’ or ‘boundary-making’ to be exact.

that ‘move-through’ each other generating insight, newness and change as that which drives practice.

This is an understanding of con/textualising dialectic that is creative rather than conflict based. It is a word that describes some featuring of the pattern of relating as reference/sensing-performing that Bateson postulated as a ‘necessary unity’ of tautologous explanation/ecological description (2002). Although the word has a history suggesting forms of historical determinism, idealism, materialism or class struggle, what is meant here is simply the nature of the relating process by which means knowledge is made; in this way it is an epistemological exploration above all.

As a second description practical learning is considered ‘dimensionally’. How we imagine or think is figured according to our bodiliness and experience of the dimensions of the world about us. The pragmatics orientation shows how this is so with language-use that positions and situates in many ways beyond the deixis explored. Our experience of spatiality and temporality significantly frame how we abstract as ways of understanding and generating knowledge with forms of graphic and extensive dimensional descriptions. Our abstractions may be cognitively classed as choices, decisions, functions of desire and the like, but they generally root us with the core temporal and spatial dimensions of situated and bodily experience (Bourdieu, 1990). Such graphic representations may be understood as the ‘finger that points at the moon’, but never the moon itself, in the sense that we can never access even our bodily ‘being’ as it were; our perceptions are always already interpreted as body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Bourdieu has analysed how the logic of practice is always unavailable or untenable since practice is always beyond our framing and boundarying practices; practice is always somehow other, something else (1990). This difficulty lies at the heart of any research method that seeks to show and tell in any fashion a ‘living process’ – which of course by nature is already a moment passed, no-longer living, now something else. In response to these limitations I have sought to attend as reflexively as possible to the quality of feedback generating with the describing of data; and to designate research ‘results’ or determinations as ‘conclusions-for-now’, positioning them as ‘claims’, but more importantly as ‘useful resources’ for going-on with learning.

The *Figure of Practical Learning* is a fruit of research practice for which the describing of complex ideas with graphic representations was originally a practical action for sense-making. As learning tools for the process as it was going-on these graphics are best defined by Bourdieu who talks of diagrams and models as offering, with their ‘synoptic power of synchronization and totalization’, a view that discounts the practical (1990: 92-93). With a difficult sentence he points out that such devices (a ‘family tree’ vis-a-vis ‘kinship’ in Bourdieu’s example) fall prey to the ‘projection into



the object of a non-objectified objectifying relation' (1990: 35), in other words the researcher or learner's (even as 'organisation') 'objectifying relations' thus generated for an 'overview' remain implicit. The practice is thus 'blinding' the researcher/learner from a view of those 'objectifying relations' as a source of critical feedback and catalyst of deuterio-learning.

Regarding Irish Aid practical learning one could argue that an uncritical orientation towards certain frames and models for sense and action-making<sup>3</sup>, if unexamined for how they are generating 'objectifying relations' (a path which offers ways of making control and accountability which are organising exigencies) means that the Organisation is not learning as might be. With the overall goal of 'poverty reduction' as a relative 'end' to which Irish Aid can only contribute by participation, the 'unobjectified objectifying relation' is the organisational or functional goal of '*showing* poverty reduction'. Becoming aware of this relating process and accounting for it would enhance the knowledge and learning capacity of Irish Aid.

Taking Bourdieu's caution into account the *Figure of Practical Learning* proposed here is not 'practical learning', as Bateson comments, the map is not the territory (2002: 27), but a guide with a future-orientation towards on-going and changing practice. The figure is in this sense, purely formal. It is presented accepting that such graphs, diagrams, devices or tools are generated for the purpose of 'getting a view', especially of the relating processes of any phenomena, and that this is done in order to change the logic of that very practice. The *Figure of Practical Learning* presented here is therefore in the same category of the logical model matrix, which is also a tool for defining and getting a view of relations. The difference lies with the underlying orientation and purpose (the ontology/epistemology and therefore rationale) which generates priority or bias, as well as primary focus. The *Figure* imagines 'learning *for* practice *for* learning' and onwards (centring contextualisation) while the *Logical Matrix* imagines (strategic) practice *for* (implementing) practice, thus silencing the learning going-on (as practical epistemology), and failing to objectify the 'objectifying relations' going-on with it. The belief is that noticing this difference potentialises changing practice.

As a third orientation for describing practical learning a notion of praxis is used. Praxis is learning that might be succinctly described as 'purposeful, intentional, and reflectively chosen ethical action' (Groome, 1980b: 152) or to be even more technically precise, based on Aristotle's understanding, praxis is 'ethical conduct in a political context' (Groome, 1980b: 154). Praxis always entails the 'twin moments' of action or engagement and reflection, but importantly, 'not separated from each other; it is action done reflectively, and reflection on what is being done'

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<sup>3</sup> The discourses of harmonisation and alignment, results based development and aid etc. as rationalising key organising texts such as the CSP Guidelines or the Mainstreaming Strategy.

(Groome, 1980b: 154). The praxis approach (sourced from Adult Learning literature but also traced as participatory development-aid practice as noted in earlier chapters) is important for practical learning since the ethical or moral features of learning process are accounted for. Learning is always an empowering process and praxis offers a way of figuring the power-generating dynamics of engagement/reflection as a core relating process for practice. The complexity of context is accounted-for with praxis in ways that critique the construction of environment, social interaction, functionality and power.<sup>4</sup> From its root in the Greek verb, *πράσσω* (prassoo) we also learn that the word carries meanings of ‘passing through’ or ‘finishing a journey’, thus suggesting that it can also mean, ‘to achieve, bring about, effect, accomplish, to do, work’, as well as having a sense of ‘managing public affairs’ (Liddell and Scott, 1891).

Linked to praxis and as a fourth feature of practical learning a certain ‘completeness’ or prudence as practical knowledge for the learning cycle is marked as ‘phronesis’. This word roots to Aristotle’s term *φρόνησις* (phronaesis) traditionally translated as ‘prudence’ (Stewart, 1892), but more recently as, ‘practical knowledge’ (Aristotle, 1976). Aristotle notes phronesis as knowledge that is for its end, as opposed to more instrumental knowledge types. The phronetic feature of practical learning foregrounds that fact that all meaning-making processes are socially and ethically charged with becoming as ‘good’ on whatever are terms they are constructed, technical or otherwise. As a notion of prudent, practical or ‘complete’ learning process phronesis marks that ‘completeness’ not as a ‘whole of knowledge’ as any sense, but as becoming a ‘common’ or societal good that must account for how it is made or becomes. Thus learning is considered important for the sake of a *good* that is more than ‘best’ or ‘efficient’ performance<sup>5</sup>, but is a question of justice as a proper concern for any public organisation. Aristotle’s description of knowledge is returned to later in this Chapter.

A final useful marker for practical learning is the feature of ‘not-following’ always inherent for knowing. Attention to what is incongruous, disturbing or pushing-back as it were towards the ordering of learning and organisation generates a path for attending to relevant information, but also is a profoundly deuterological move that realises a choice for ‘every next time’ (Shotter, 2008). Derrida calls this feature the ‘anacoluthon’ (*ἄνακόλουθόν*) described (by his editor) as a ‘rhetorical device ... which the dictionary defines as ‘a sentence or construction lacking grammatical sequence’ (Payne and Schad, 2003: 5). This term for ‘that which does not-follow’ is based on the traces of ‘acolyte’ in the verb *ἀκολουθέω* (akoluthēō), which is to ‘follow, go after

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<sup>4</sup> For high-end formal organisations this power is generally embodied as ‘meaning’, ‘knowledge’, ‘sense’, ‘strategy’, ‘instrumentality’ etc.

<sup>5</sup> But not exclusive of these ‘goods’.

or with' (Liddell and Scott, 1891). Derrida points out that, 'there is no simple opposition between the acolyte, or the 'acoluthon' and the 'anacoluthon'. That is a problem, because to accompany, or to follow in the most demanding and authentic way, implies the 'anacol', the 'not-following', the break in the following, in the company so to speak ... in order to follow in a consistent way, to be true to what you follow, you have to interrupt the following' (in Payne and Schad, 2003: 7). This is powerful explanation of a form of 'coherence' that reckons with the necessity for critical and reflexive praxis. It is simply the requirement to 'interrupt the following' from time to time, place to place, and as organising practice to create the context where this possibility becomes practical. The phrase suggests a certain open-eyed following that is attentive to its own terms and consequences, and thus embodies characterising qualities of commitment and faithfulness.

### *A Deutero-Rationale for 'Another Practice'*

With this selection of features described and some initial principles for practical learning generated for a deutero-rationale as organising practice, Derrida's title, 'Of Grammatology' is useful (1976) as a general frame of reference for this chapter. His deconstruction of the relating processes that construct knowledge by way of attending to the functioning of the logos (λόγος) with various key texts (as the science of writing) offers a path to constructing as 'grammar' or 'syntax'<sup>6</sup>. By exploring dialectics dimensionally a view of the 'grammar of learning' or 'dialectical syntax' focusses some of the ways that practical learning is functional while at the same time, offering a context for flexible epistemology as a metapractice, from which learning choices can be made on the basis of expanding senses. The thesis is an exploration to prefigure a 'practical grammatology', which is limited by its scope as a formal *text* contextualised with and contextualising a research-oriented discipline. The principles generated are therefore imagined as tending or figuring towards new contexts with some exploratory devices for new interpreting practice. The grammatology is open to practical critique or praxis as a way of going-on with some 'différance' (to differ/defer), to play-on Derrida's term.

Whatever the 'syntax of learning' featuring a given sense or situation becomes to great extent as happenstance to the particular features and factors generating. By way of a practical grammatology (always *in situ*) any *particular* 'grammar' of learning becomes the focus of attention as the critical 'matter to hand' for that time or place. This is what deutero-learning is all about. With forms of reflexive enquiry, or as a 'phenomenology of contextualisation', practical capacity with the functional *rules*, the 'grammar' of how sense is getting made as organising practice, can

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<sup>6</sup> 'Syntax' from the Greek, σύνταξις (sun-taxis) which means to 'arrange together' (Liddell and Scott, 1891).

become the pattern characterising a learning organisation. Such a practical grammar would be marked with leadership and responsibility for the *forcing*, dynamic or power of the functional grammar/syntax, thus rendering living resources for 'knowledge', 'method', 'tradition', the sociality of organising life and following with these embodiments and abstraction the sort of context called 'culture'.

The focus of this Chapter<sup>7</sup> with dialectics explores a grammar or syntax of meaning as the arranging or holding-together of sense. Sense understood as practical learning and as organising practice with the common media and 'matters to hand' of practicality. The grammar attends to *how* the 'logos' (word) is relating to its 'legein' (spokenness) and vice-versa, how deuterio-learning shows how the sign (mark, text or *grammè*<sup>8</sup>) becomes a complex relating of signifier (subject) and signified (object). There is therefore no 'gap' or 'in-between', no distance in epistemological terms *from* 'learning' *to* 'action', or 'research' *to* 'practice', from 'lessons learnt' to 'implementation'. There is the relating process that makes meaning with the fabric of 'reality' for which the knowing process is itself inherent, and functional and by/from/with/for all 'whats' or 'propositional determinations' are made. From an empirical (Chapter Five) and now, more formal philosophical basis the exploration of the functionality of practical learning is expanded.

This is a way of thinking-out or imagining the notion of learning that has been functional throughout the research process but has been thickened greatly by seeking to ground the basic notions of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and praxis (Freire, 1970, Groome, 1980a) (starting points that had been established through work experiences and reflective practices with a variety of organisations and locations<sup>9</sup>) in the ontology of relational constructionism, that is with an 'ontology of becoming' (Hosking, 2007: 8); and the pragmatics approach to language-use, as a deeply contextual lens-on, and approach-to organising practice.

### *Outline of the Chapter*

The Chapter is organised as a general introduction, five exploratory parts, the last of which uses the resources generated to explore features of Irish Aid practice, and a conclusion. With the general introduction initial exploration of the terms of practical learning as dialectic practice establish the context for the exploration. What follows is an expansion on these terms. With Part I the ontological grounds for 'imagining/deciding' as practical learning for organising practice are

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<sup>7</sup> Of the entire thesis

<sup>8</sup> Derrida's marker for the textualised/written mark (1976)

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix C.

explored. Part II describes some syntactical<sup>10</sup> processes of language-use that mark how context functions as a second order of abstraction with embodied practice. Part III focusses more directly on learning cycles using Aristotle's categories of knowledge to consider how practical learning is of ethical concern. Part IV briefly considers the notion of rational communication as liberating with a critical approach. Nonetheless, this frame for generative practice does not seem to account for the complexity of con/textualising processes, the dialectics of 'not-following' are thus taken up for an epistemology-for-participation. Part V describes some features of Irish Aid relating processes according to the rationale of deuterio-learning developed with this research practice in the shape of the *Figure of Practical Learning*. The Conclusion considers this dimensional exploration with dialectics for practical learning, as rendering practical resources for learning with an ecological epistemology.

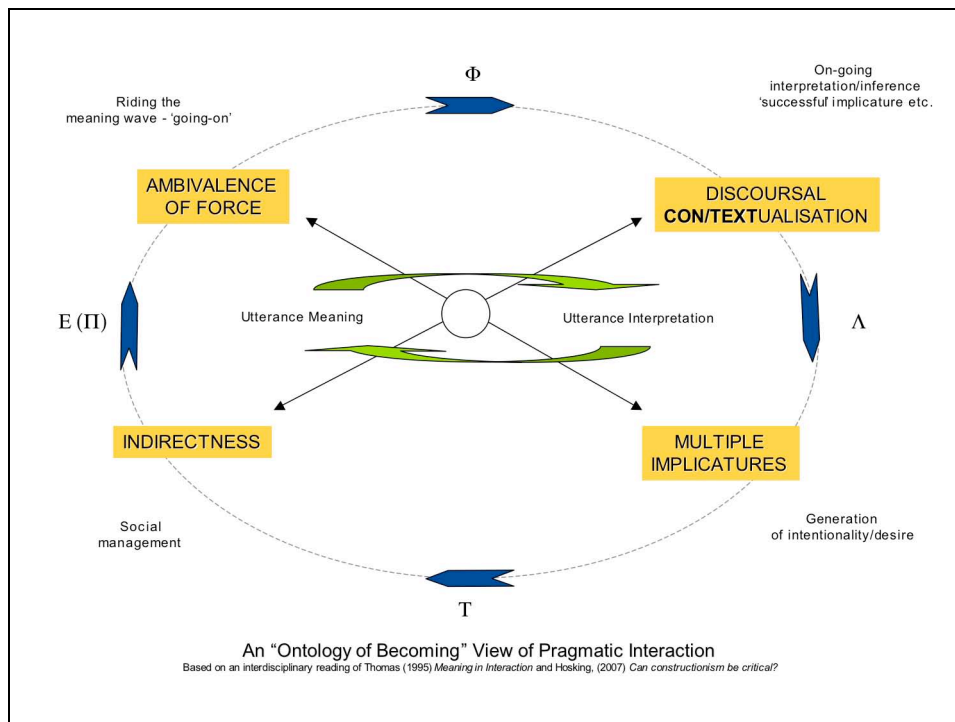
## **Part I: Imagining/Deciding as Practical Learning**

### *Beginning with Language-Use as Pragmatics*

Mapping out the relations functional with language-use according to the approach of 'meaning in interaction' (Thomas, 1995) and with the notion of ontological *becoming* at hand, the following Graph No. 1 was created in which the movements between utterance interpretation and utterance meaning were explored.

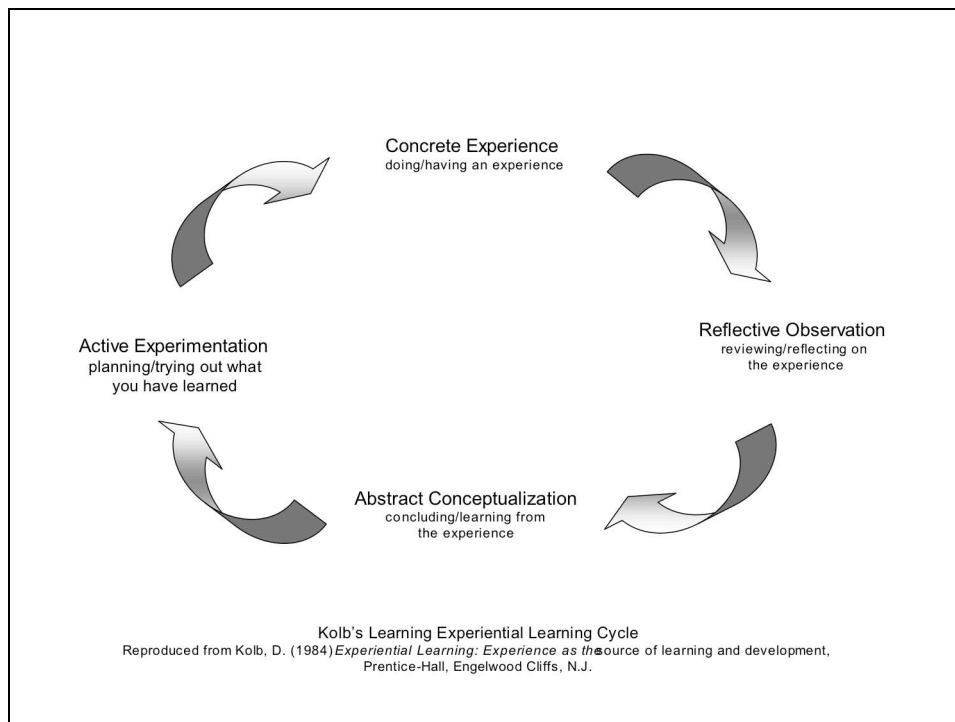
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<sup>10</sup> Also usefully itemised as 'syntactical'.



*Graph 1 - An 'Ontology of Becoming' View of Pragmatic Interaction*

The language-use phenomena of ambivalence of force, discursual contextualisation, multiple implicatures and indirectness (Thomas, 1995) were placed according to the movements of the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984). For this cycle 'concrete experience' becomes 'abstract conceptualization' by way of 'reflective observation'; which in turn is the source of the movement towards 'active experimentation', by way of 'abstract conceptualization'. The final movement noted in this experiential-cycle of learning is from 'active experimentation' towards 'reflective observation' once again, made possible by way of new 'concrete experience' – as shown in Graph No. 2 below.



*Graph 2- Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle*

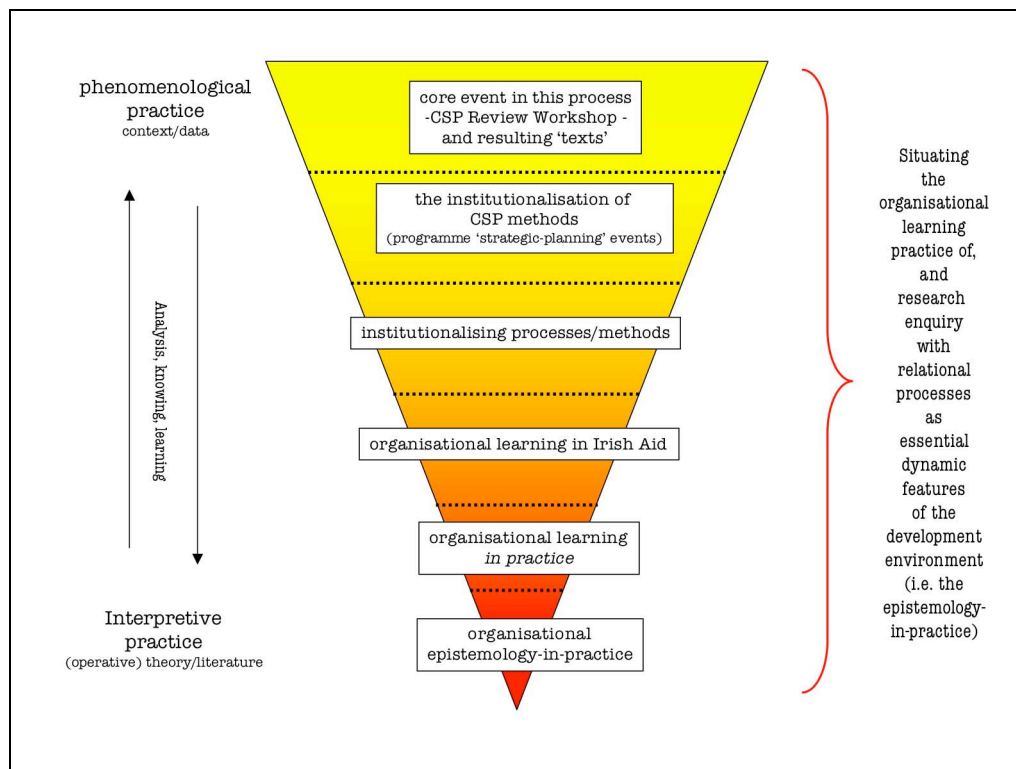
These movements outline the stages of individual sense-making of experience as the path of learning and development. Taking these core moves (corresponding to stages envisaged by educationalists Dewey (1938) and Friere (1970) when taking a more societal view on learning) as indicative of the learning process, the positioning of the phenomena of 'meaning in interaction' or language-use shows how experience is contextualised in talk, which understood as a reflective process, generates multiple implicatures or meanings. From here the role of indirectness comes into play as a means of managing the social situation and 'saving face' by way of politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987). With indirectness, there is an inevitable ambivalence of force which requires contextualisation for on-going meaning and actions to be made. The dialectic links also became more apparent with this graphic representation. In the movement from discoursal contextualisation towards indirectness (for social management), multiple implicatures are generated, while moving in the other direction it is clear that indirectness generates ambivalence of force in the drive towards discoursal contextualisation. The same formal observation can be made about the dialectic relating of multiple implicatures with ambivalence of force through the social phenomena of indirectness and discoursal contextualisation.

What becomes clear in the mapping process of these language-use phenomena is how the 'meaning wave' goes-on through the phases of social interaction always generating something more or different – a new emerging meaning or message to be processed (and producing its own process) with the practices of using language. This 'going-on' feature of interpretive practice, now envisaged in social interactive terms, led my exploration in two directions – back to the data and

how the research process might situate the various formal terms in use such as ‘organisational learning’ and ‘relational processes’ with the concrete situation of Irish Aid; and towards the phenomenological ontology suggested by the immanent generation of meaning in the relational constructionism and pragmatics views.

### *An Epistemology-in-Practice*

With regard to the situation of Irish Aid and the research enquiry towards ‘learning as relational processes’ the following graphs were generated. With Graph No. 3 ‘relational processes’ were situated as the core functional dynamic<sup>11</sup>, power or force driving or projecting the learning process operating in any instance and processing over time of any organising initiative such as the CSP Review Process. Whatever the processes of relating, they are constructed and constructing, primarily as language-used, such abstracted orders as ‘organisational learning’ and an ‘organisational epistemology-in-practice’.



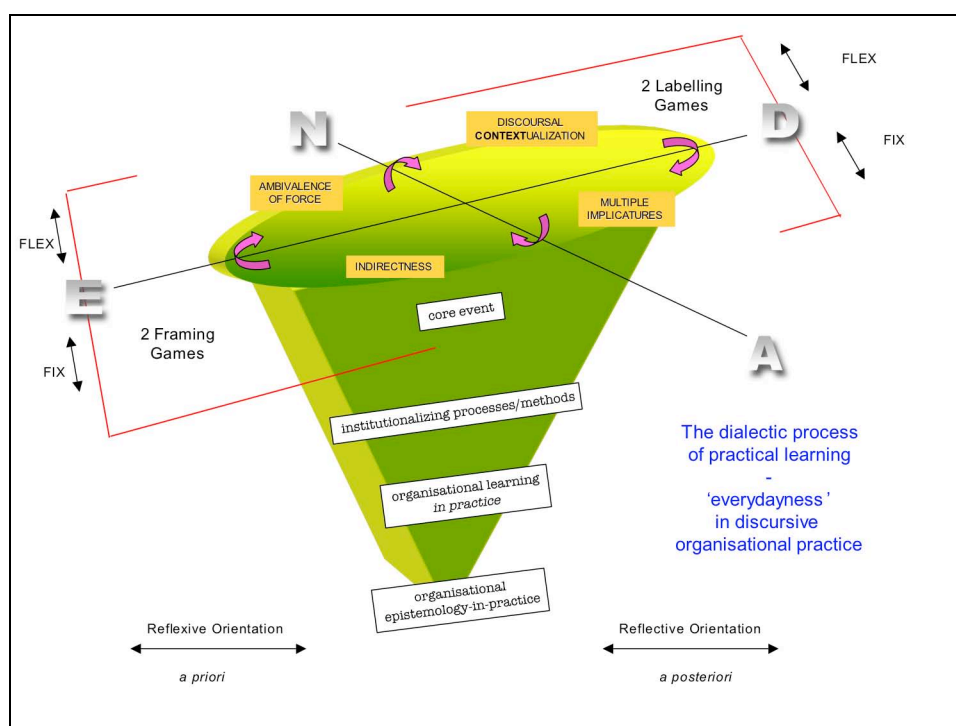
*Graph 3- Situating Relating Processes Generating Epistemology-in-Practice*

<sup>11</sup> δύναμις (dunamis) strength, might, power, ability – including the ‘force of a word’ (Liddell and Scott, 1891)



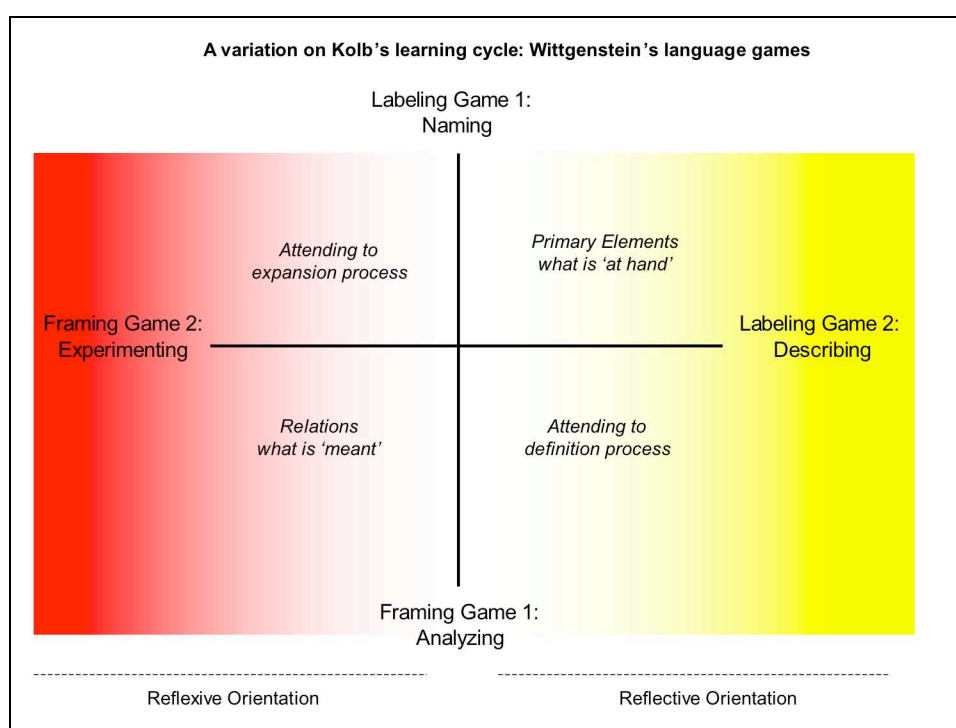
As a corollary to the situating of relational processes, the research cycle itself is figured as a phenomenological practice in which data generated in context begins to figure according to the interpretive practice of the researcher, including the initial perceptions that are forming before any formal analytic practice takes place.

Following on from this representation, Graph No. 4 shows how the image of the learning cycle was integrated into this levels-view of organising process, generating some new stages – the labelling of the ‘points’ or ‘forces’ of the learning process as N – naming, D – describing, A – analysing and E – experimenting, and the designation or placement of the reflexive and reflective orientations, including noting how these movements are both *a priori*, that is tending towards the unknown on an informed basis; and *a posteriori*, that is tending towards past actions in order to thicken or generate a more processed understanding or better analysis from which to proceed. Another addition is the growing attention to the differing modes of *fixing* and *flexing* in the learning cycle. Kolb has noted these forces or orientations as movements of diverging, assimilating, converging and accomodating (1984) in which a form of equilibrium, or the balance of adapting towards a continually new situation is managed-for with the learning process. Using Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘language games’ (1953) in conjunction with the flexing or expanding, and fixing or contracting moves of language-use two paradigmatic movements might be discerned with two labelling-games and two framing-games as noted with Graph No. 4 below (a juxtaposition of Graphs No. 1 and 3).



Graph 4- Integration of a Pragmatics View as Epistemology-in-Practice

A simplified version of these movements, whether understood as games of language-use or as the slightly more telic ‘learning cycle’, is generated with Graph No. 5 with which the learning ‘points’, better understood as orientations in that they are always going-on energies or forces, of ‘naming’ and ‘describing’ are designated as ‘labelling games’, while ‘analysing’ and ‘experimenting’ are designated as ‘framing games’. With this Graph there is a definite shift towards a textualised, discursive-reading of the learning cycle away from Kolb’s more behaviourist and individualist psychological perspective. Already the medium of learning is understood as ‘relational’ in the textualising sense of happening with the production of meaning as the ‘grounds-for’ and ‘as’ action, as second and third-order dynamics generating with the contextualising uses of language from a pragmatics perspective.



*Graph 5 – A Variation on Kolb's Learning Cycle: Wittgenstein's Language Games*

### *Phenomenology for an Ontology of Becoming*

Turning now to the phenomenological considerations emerging, the reading of Heidegger's reflection on the primary nature of human beings as ‘dwellers’ (1971) for Chapter Three, whereby ‘dwellers’ whose building actions (including thinking) therefore require an ecological attentiveness in order that they may build-in-tune with this nature, suggested another stage of contextual complexity. As noted in that Chapter, learners as dwellers work like weavers with the materials to hand, allowing those materials to ‘push back’ as it were in their facticity – a representation of the *givenness* of the world, or indeed any learning situation with all its

complexities of relating (Plumb, 2008). The notion of a landscape of learning was developed including the idea that a topographical reading of that landscape would render a description of the ‘matters to hand’ as the critical or prime interfaces and opportunities for learning in accordance with the search for the conditions by which deuterio-learning might become integral to organising practice. As dwellers, knowers are clearly located within the unfolding processes of being – or *becoming* as articulated from a relational constructionism point of view.

This question of ‘becoming’ was explored in greater detail using a reading of Heidegger’s ‘Introduction’ to *Being and Time* (1973: 1-64) to orientate and develop an understanding as to *why* the contextualising process always ‘goes-on’ – and the effects of this particular ‘facticity’ or given-conditionality as functions of learning processes. Heidegger states that his ‘provisional aim is the Interpretation of *time* as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of Being’ (1973: 1). ‘Interpretation’ here needs to be understood as a sort of ‘delimitation’ or description (phenomenological) that places the question of Being in the context of time or temporality as constitutive – he considers ‘time as the transcendental horizon for the question of Being’ (1973: 63). The notion of ‘Dasein’ – ‘Being There’ or ‘Being-in-the-world’ is distinguished, by which he means, ‘[e]verything we talk about, everything we have in view, everything towards which we comport ourselves in any way, is being; what we are is being, and so is how we are. Being lies in the fact that something is, and in its Being as it is; in Reality; in presence-at-hand; in subsistence; in validity; in Dasein; in the ‘there is’ (1973: 26); to put it succinctly, as he does, ‘Being is always the Being of an entity’ (1973: 29). Being *there* (dasein) therefore shows the importance of understanding all knowledge-making processes (how we are) as practical and particular embodiments with all the contextualities of their making.

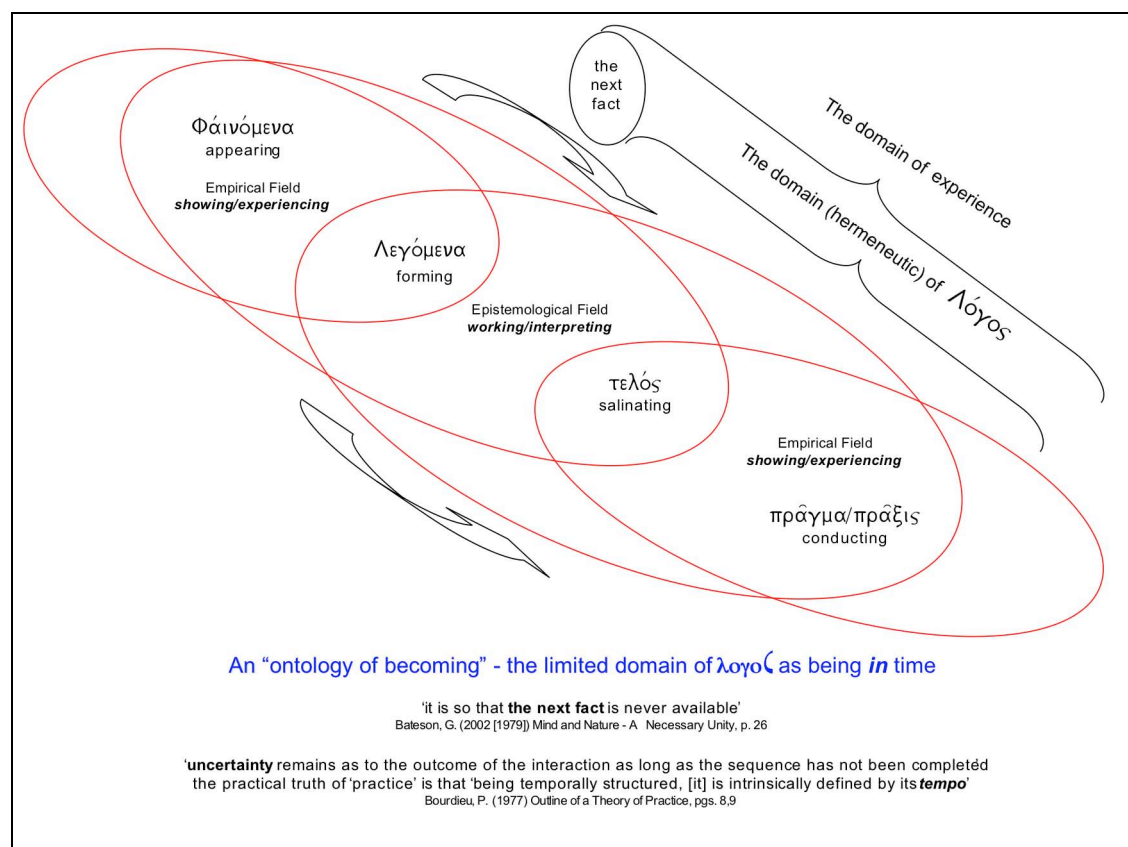
As a general comment on the knowing process Heidegger references Aristotle’s understanding that ‘Man’s soul is, in a certain way, entities’, this might be understood as an early iteration of Bateson’s sense of the unity of mind and nature, ‘the ‘soul’<sup>12</sup> which makes up the Being of man has αἰσθησις and νοησις among its ways of Being, and in these it discovers all entities, in the fact that they are, and in their Being as they are’ (1973: 34). Αἰσθησις (aisthesis) is perception, feeling, initial sensing, while νοησις (noesis), rooting with the verb, νοεω (noeo) to discern, think, be mindful, to purpose or intend (Liddell and Scott, 1891), might be translated as, ‘mindfulness’ or ‘thought’, the ‘second reflection’ to ‘perception’. The point to remember here is that *knowing anything* (and thus participating or expressing Being) is a process of perceiving and discerning or thinking – for a truly dialectic consideration of this relating process these

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<sup>12</sup> Aristotle’s word is: ἡ ψυχή (he psuchae) or psyche – with meanings of ‘breath’, ‘life’, ‘spirit’ to ‘soul of man’, ‘being’ and ‘seat of the will, desires and passions ... heart’, ‘the soul, mind, reason, understanding’ (Liddell and Scott, 1891)

movements or actions must be signalled as: perceiving/thinking or thinking/perceiving. It is not irrelevant that αἴσθησις (aisthesis) is also the root of the word, aesthetics – the principles concerned with the nature and appreciation of beauty (OED).

Graph No. 6 shows how the distinction made by Heidegger between λόγος (logos) and λέγειν (legein) (1973: 55-58) whereby the ‘logos’ – as the word/sense/logic of meaning – is effected and embodied in the speaking action of ‘legein’ – the verb to tell, relate: hence to speak, say, utter (Liddell and Scott, 1891). With this clarification, or rather this *placing* of the logos (standing for logic or rational thought) in the embodied context of its making as always a *spoken* word, never in isolation, as having no-being *apart* from ‘speaking’; but rather as discursive action, as discourse – the full force of the **contextualising** nature of knowing, sense-making or learning comes into view. If knowledge is always a *spoken-term* then the processual as well as social, powerful, historical and instrumental nature of its making is of critical importance. Graph No. 6 shows how (with layering from Bateson (2002) and Bourdieu (1977) the becoming *fact* is always unknown in the situation of ‘being in time’ and by extension, ‘being in place’.



Graph 6 – The Limited Domain of the Logos in Time

The familiar cyclical-form of the learning cycle has been ‘stretched-out’ here in order to show its progressive nature and how, that which is always unknown (and always particular to context) is beyond the functionality of what we might call the domain of the logos – that is the domain of interpreting practice whereby sense is generated for action. The Greek words (suggested by Heidegger’s text) taken up to mark the ‘points’ or ‘moments of orientation and force’<sup>13</sup> indicate the primary nature of those forces in the learning or meaning-making process, but are still searching terms that changed as exploration went on.

Φαινόμενα (phainomena) is a play on the designation of ‘phenomenology’ as words-about or the science of phenomena, rooting back to the verb ‘to bring to light, make to appear, to show’ etc. (φαίνω – phainoo). This construction is an attempt to mark that force or movement of ‘appearing’ – *almost before* naming – which is a property of Dasein. It must be imagined as a sort of ‘no-time’ *when* new facts or relations come forth – this is the source of being that T.S. Eliot called, ‘the still point of the turning world’ (1944: Burnt Norton, Part II), the notion of which is probably best approached with such metaphoric expression, even though Heidegger’s Treatise is an analytical treatment of the same.

Nonetheless, this ‘unknowable’ feature of Being is implicitly present in the organisational learning literature when Argyris and Schön designate double-loop learning as ‘Organisational Learning II’ (1996). With this name a sort of zero-sum ‘before’ Learning I (single-loop) and II (double-loop) is silently functional in making-sense of the stated concepts. Learning I and II are in fact first and second orders of abstraction in the knowing process and may be designated with the composite signs, I-OA and II-OA in relation to which this zero-sum ‘field’ is the source of meaning, quite simply Being (which can perfectly be argued as immanent according to *its* own processing) and can be designated with the composite sign, O-OA. This notion will be reiterated as necessary ‘symmetrical being’ (Matte Blanco, 1975, Dalal, 1998) from which all asymmetricality – or knowledge – arises when the principles of practical learning are set forth.

Λεγόμενα (legomena) is a play on the verb, ‘to speak’ (legein) denoting that moment of movement by which whatever has ‘appeared’ (been perceived/named) is described in greater detail, by which actions language and knowledge-about are developed in use. This is therefore the initial forming phase that moves towards or generates what is more properly called analysis – where existing frames of reference are brought to bear. Here this force is designated with the item τέλος (telos), ‘end, purpose, accomplishment’ and the root of the word, ‘teleology’. This feature of learning is called the ‘salinating’ moment in the sense that desire, goal or intention

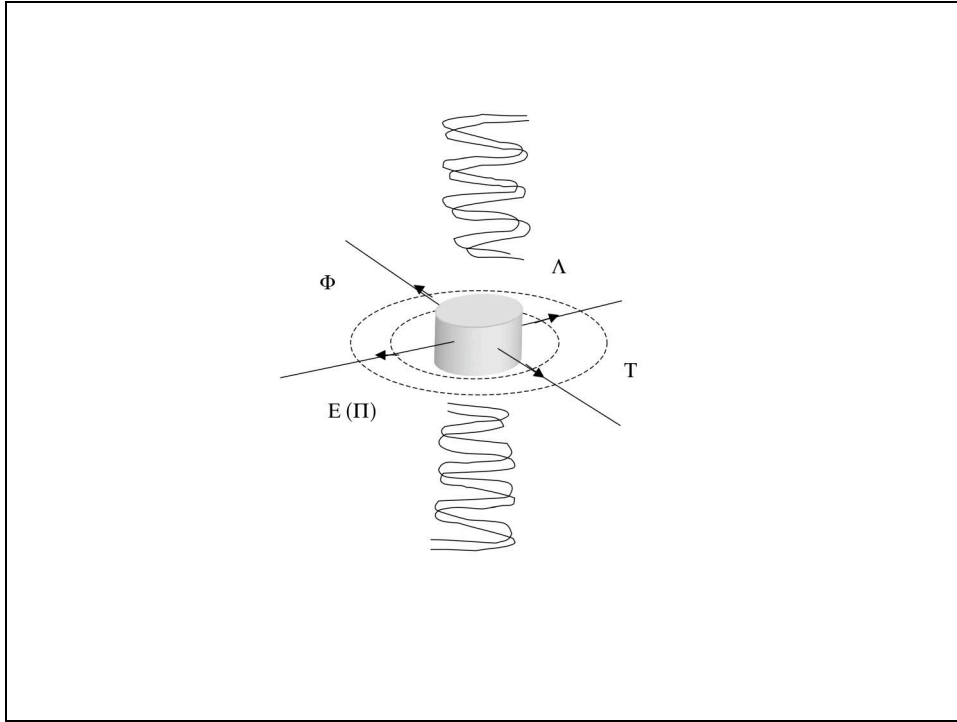
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<sup>13</sup> These might be helpfully imagined as the relating which happens when the wind fills a sail and the boat is moved ... movement is the outcome and condition of the meeting of wind and harness ...

coming to generate force. As the exploration developed, telos was understood as an energy of another order of abstraction beyond the immediacy of the learning cycle per se, an organising orientation working over time in extended series of contextualising and patterning moments and encounters; but what was sought here was a marker for the analytic force that was more than purely ‘analytical’ or cognitive and took into account such factors for the knowing process as rhetoric in language-use (Cheney et al., 2004), empowered social interaction (Gergen, 1995) and the conditional nature of the knowing process itself. The position taken here is that desire or intention is situating and developing (getting definition and progress) by way of intrinsicality to textualising processes – this is why no ‘one’ person or group has full-view or full-power or force of what is ‘going-on’.

Finally, *πρᾶγμα* (pragma) as ‘that which has been done’ (Liddell and Scott, 1891) denotes the factuality/facticity happening. Whether called, ‘results’, ‘actions’ or ‘experiments’, the ‘works’ or ‘deeds’ are the works (and working) of Being – the most concrete and given aspect to which interpretive practice is author and response – and the leitmotif of conduction, as if the ‘funnel’ of all Being/Knowing. In an attempt to mark how ‘learning’ is commonly understood as somehow ‘improving’ or ‘doing better’ as ‘conscious works’, the item, *πρᾶξις* (praxis) was juxtaposed here. Praxis marks the discipline of practical learning as the fullness of cycling. It is (like telos) of another order of abstraction to the immediacy of the cycle. Praxis is learning that takes account of the social, emotional, phronetic and textual features of the learning process and stands out from the cycle itself. It is reflective action. This point will be further explained with the consideration of Aristotle’s categories of knowledge.

Returning to the totality of Graph No. 6, in its ‘stretching-out’ it is easy to see how the domain of the logos – or sense-making – is always taken out of its own processing by the unavailability of ‘the next fact’ (Bateson, 2002: 26). Whatever is appearing is always the source of new experience. ‘Practice’, whether framed as ‘learning’, ‘organising’ or even ‘research’, is action ordered according to the processing of the domain of the logos, but is nonetheless always unfinished, incomplete or open. This is why cycles of making-meaning and the unfolding of practice are often imagined as spirals. Cycles that ‘lift-up’ at their ends and beginnings as it were – as figured with Graph No. 7 below – which suggests an image of DNA as the ‘source of life’.



Graph 7 – The Life-Generating Character of the Knowing/ Learning Process

All of this functionality is generated and formed by the dynamic feature of time, and place (or space<sup>14</sup>) with the processes of ontology/epistemology that define whatever practice becomes in context. As Bourdieu notes ‘the practical truth of ‘practice’ is that ‘being temporally structured, [it] is intrinsically defined by its *tempo*’ (1977: 8-9). This is the source of ‘uncertainty’ – the unknowability of the next fact appearing. Whatever gets designated as an ‘outcome’ or the ‘completion’ of a sequence, it is always of a transitive-nature with the on-goingness of time. In all of this the limited domain or reach of the logos, the sense-making process, is noted as the foundation itself of ‘becoming’ as a dynamic and powerful ontological description that *places* ‘relating processes’ as a very useful formulation or term for understanding the nature of learning and practice itself. Although empirical and epistemological fields are distinguished here as primary-operations, whereby for research practice the describing (λεγόμενα) and analysing (τελός) phases of the research process might be understood as more ‘epistemological’ in their telic-force than the phases of data generation (φαινόμενα) and practical-exploration (πράγμα/πράξις) (including on-going research), these fields-of-focus are of course always

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Place’ is preferred here as the corollary to time since it suggests a specific and contextualising *situ-ation*, of sound, body, group, community, organisation ... the item ‘space’ is reserved to designate a new *place* of learning where/when/with-whom soft differentiation of S/O relations can be explored with greater facility and enabled to feed-towards organising practices to a greater degree than seems currently the case in much formal organisation.

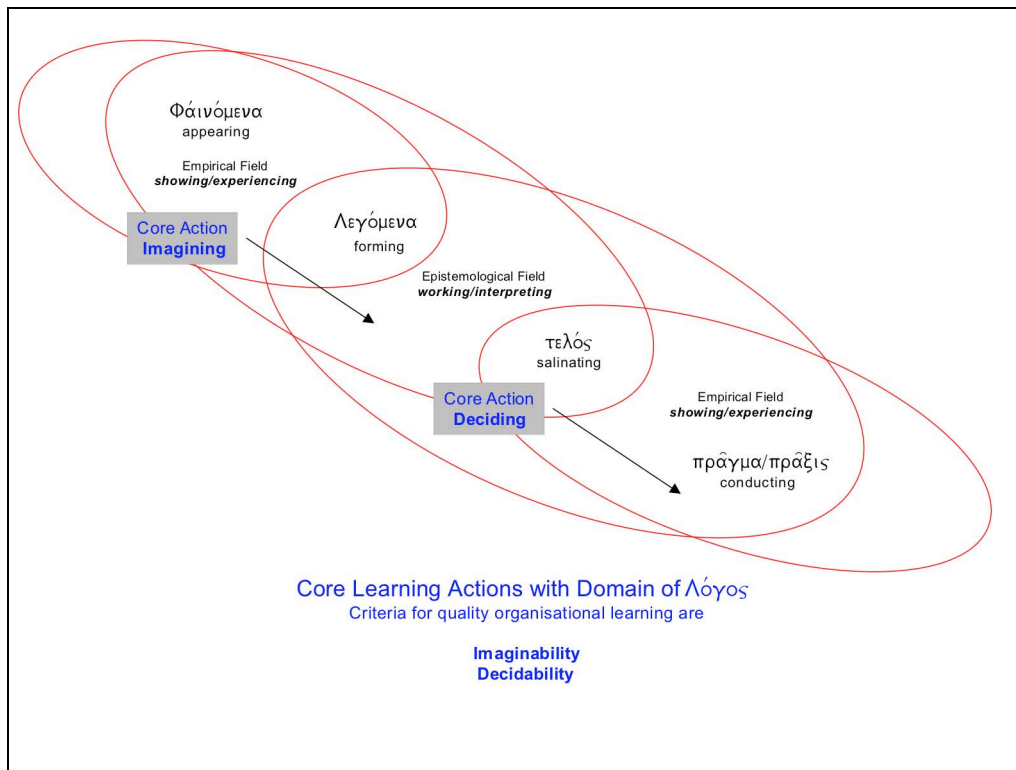
intrinsic in use and practice. There is a paradox functional here whereby practice is ‘intrinsically defined by its *tempo*’ in extensive and intensive senses – i.e., there are ‘phases’ that are all ‘of an instance’.

As a final note on Graph No. 6, processing of knowing/learning/practice is understood as a ‘hermeneutic’ in the sense of the ‘hermeneutic circle’ for which the act of ‘reading’ is intrinsically also an experience of being-read by the text as it were (Ricoeur, 1981). This notion, taken from the context of biblical and textual interpretation, foregrounds the influence of the process of contextualisation itself so that ‘knowing’ any matter is not only ‘relational’ in its functionality (i.e., how the movements connect in themselves), but also ‘relational’ in nature (to make an artificial distinction between function and nature for a moment’s clarity) since the process of contextualisation itself is a condition of a more evolutionary process, a slower-turn of patterns complex and chaotic, random and full of ‘noise’, generating what Bateson has described and called, ‘a necessary unity’ of mind and nature (1972, 2002).

### *Imagining/Deciding as Practical Learning*

Moving more specifically into the dialectic process operational in the learning cycle two core telic or teleological interpreting/actioning ‘moves’ are defined as criteria for a quality-reading of organisational learning when taken as a process of three orders of abstraction. The action(s) of *imagining* encompass all those words, instruments and frames that make-up the ‘journey’ or process from ‘appearing/naming’ to ‘salinating/analysing’ in the movement *through* ‘forming/describing’ – this includes all the devices used, such as matrices and metaphors. The action(s) of *deciding* encompass all those words, instruments and frames that make-up the ‘journey’ or process from ‘salinating/analysing’ to ‘appearing/naming’ in the movement *through* ‘conducting/experimenting’ – this includes all the devices used, such as the structures and tools of meeting, reporting, managing etc., moments or encounters that may themselves be marked as the beginnings of new contingent learning cycles. While deuterio-learning seems key with all the phases of the learning cycle, it is with this movement through experimentation that the role of reflexive enquiry seems most critical. The feedback process generated with a reflexive orientation suggests that what and how the focus and frames *imagined* in the organising practices of planning and policy-making are effecting the going-on learning process is critical information that needs to be accessed and facilitated in as immediate a fashion as is feasible. To translate this concern into the management cycle of a CSP, what is at stake here is the quality of the monitoring and evaluation process; understood as always intrinsic to the focussing and planning processes that have defined its unfolding. Graph No. 8 places these organisational abilities as learning processes according to the same dimensionality of Graph No. 6.



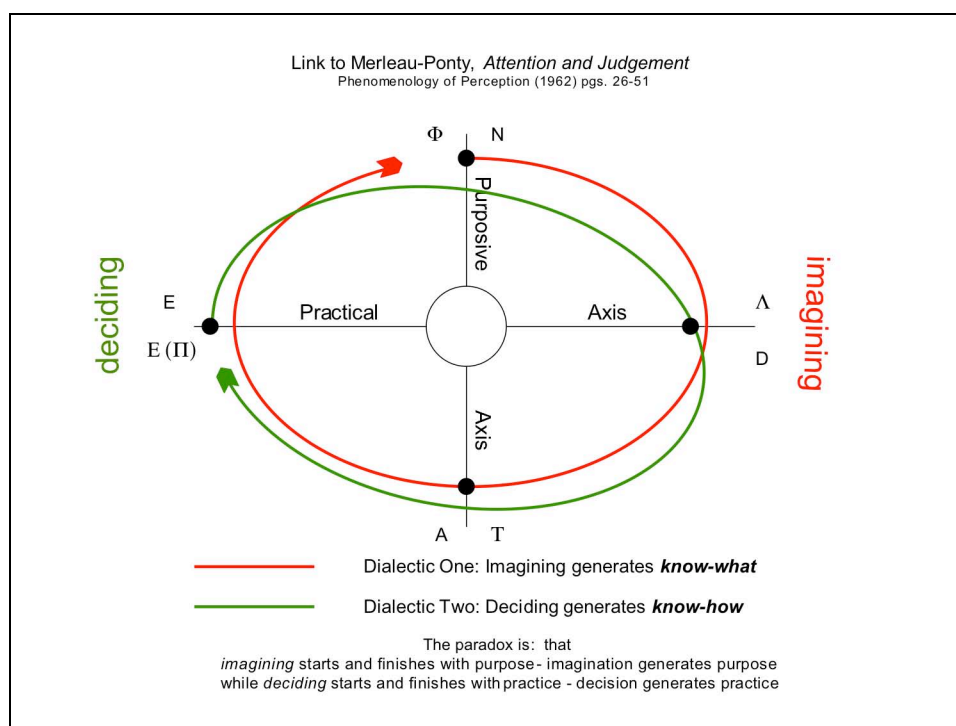


Graph 8 – Core Learning Actions as Imaginability/ Decidability

In two steps of thickening understanding Graphs No. 9 and 10 take two parallel directions with this basic notion of imagining/deciding as the core organisational abilities for organisational learning and coherent, or attuned practicing. Graph No. 9 shows how *imagining* is the action that generates ‘know-what’, i.e. the focus or propositional determination of any organising practice, while *deciding* is the action that generates ‘know-how’, i.e., the operational or methodological determination of any organising practice.

These movements manifest or embody the phenomenology of perception as described by Merleau-Ponty in the analysis of ‘Attention and Judgement’ (1962) for which the operations of *how* attention *becomes* are framed by judgement, and concordantly the operations of *how* judgement *becomes* are framed by attention. In succinct fashion, attention (an imaginative faculty) makes judgement, and judgement (a decisive faculty) makes attention. The relating of these inclinations or movements is thereby paradoxical since ‘imagining’ is resourced and generated by ‘purpose’, that which ‘texts’ (know-what) ‘context’; while ‘deciding’ is resourced and generated by practice, that which shapes the ‘con’ (know-how) of ‘context’. Essentially what is highlighted here is the receptive nature of knowing when formulated primarily from the perspective of ‘perception’. In the first instance, knowing is perceiving by which means we *participate* in a ‘knowledge bringing event’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 30-31), a formulation of learning that admits an ecological intentionality or telos that coheres well with the idea of trito-learning – a marker for the ultimately receptive nature of learning processes.

In a discourse of learning that predominantly figures the *projective* functionality of such abstractions as ‘organisation’, ‘strategic planning’ and ‘organisational learning systems’, this *receptive* approach is useful in the formulation of practical learning as concerned with the matters and media to hand, read either as topography or ecology.

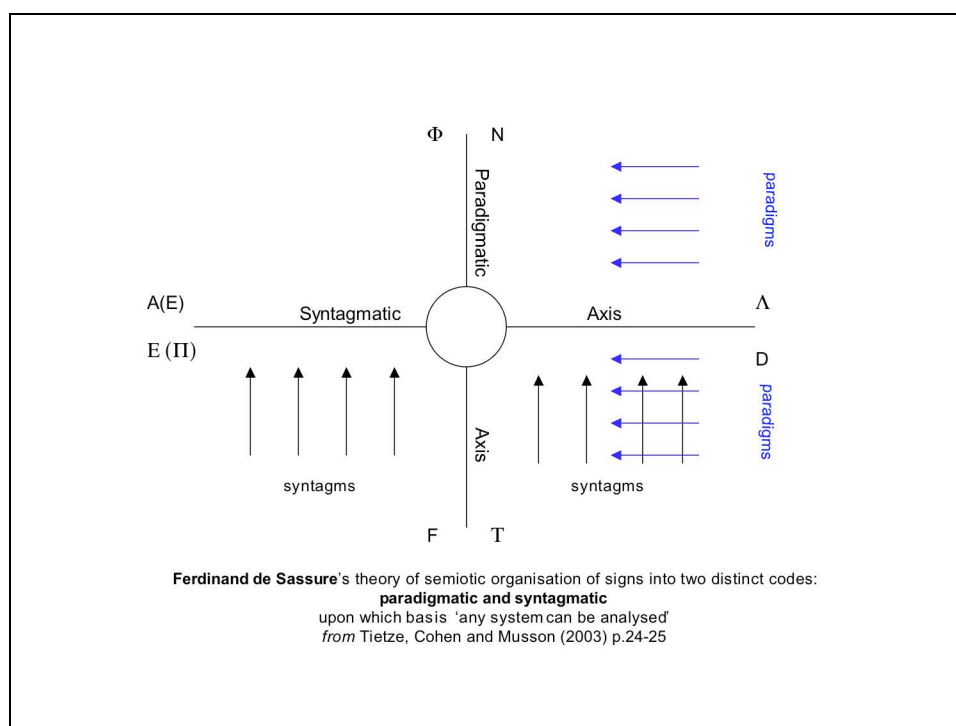


Graph 9 – Imagining and Deciding as Knowing-What and Knowing-How

Graph No. 10 takes these notions of ‘imagining and deciding’ to task by translating them into the emergent form of the matrix. Using Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory of semiotic organisation, as presented by Tietze, Cohen and Musson (2003), two distinct codes of signalling<sup>15</sup> are identified – the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic. Paradigmatic signals are *ordering* signals that drive the knowledge-making and organising process, while syntagmatic signals mark the *embodying* or *used* de-facto eventfulness that drives the freshness and necessity of the knowledge-making and organising process, this is the unfolding and queer nature of life which has been described as ‘a syntagmatic soup swimming with simultaneous differences’ (Bradbury, 2002: xii). In placing these codes onto the learning cycle figure it is possible to see the form of the matrix emerge wherein its force as an instrument of controlled relating processes becomes apparent. The paradigmatic

<sup>15</sup> Signalling is a mode of figuring the learning process that becomes central to understanding the difference between the axes of knowledge-making.

order carried in a defined ‘objective’ is closely related (with the matrix-format) to a particular focus or action as a syntagmatic phenomena.



Graph 10 – An Interpretation of de Saussure's Theory of Semiotic Organisation

The difficulty with the matrix (understandable given its seductive simplicity, clarity and ordering force) is that a fallacy is continually figured<sup>16</sup> with its presentation (remember Bourdieu's caution about models, diagrams and frames as synchronistic and totalizing with which the objectifying relations involved remain implicit or unobjectified). This fallacy is a practical belief that the order of paradigmatic signalling remains in some way untouched, abstract or unchanging, as it does in its figured-form on the matrix – 'still in its box' as it were. The nature, nonetheless, of unfolding Being as has been explored empirically<sup>17</sup> and now formally, is that paradigmatic orders are in fact changing, morphing and becoming different matters, something else; with each and every particular syntagmatic or embodying event or action (which is a learning cycle). Organisational learning that learns to attend in practical fashion to the living-relating processes of changing orders in embodied actions will understand (in a literal and practical sense of the word) the force and limitation of such a mainstreamed tool as the matrix – with the logical model paradigm that stands as its rationale.

<sup>16</sup> 'Before our eyes' as it were in the most concrete of ways from personal performance schemas to business/annual to strategic planning ...

<sup>17</sup> With Chapter Five

### *Summary of Part I*

In sum, by considering the ‘ontology of becoming’ approach of relational constructionism, principally through the medium of language-used as a central feature of discursivity for organising practice, several steps were taken. Graph No.1 made the connections between an experiential approach to the learning cycle and the phenomenon of language-use to show how experience is contextualised and becomes meaningful with talk as *language-used*, encompassing all the social and interactional forces that generate ‘meaning-in-interaction’. This placing together of different approaches to the experiential/discursive/meaning process also foregrounded how the ‘meaning-making wave’ continually rolls-on as it were, due to the social and practical nature of its functionality. From the perspective of the research process in hand, Graph No. 3 placed the category of ‘relational processes’ at the heart of organisational learning practice and the research enquiry, thus shaping the force of an epistemology-in-practice (Edwards, 1997, Easterby-Smith et al., 2000) as pivotal to how organising contexts (in this case the CSP Review Workshop) unfold. This placement is what justifies a detailed exploration of the practice (Chapter Five) and notion (this Chapter) of practical learning or epistemology – since the power to understand such relating processes is the power to ‘learn context’ in all its features. Graph No. 4 juxtaposes the ideas of Graphs No. 1 and 3 showing how at each instance of organising life the epistemology-in-practice is operating (as a complex and multivocal pattern) that tends towards general movements of *flexing* and *fixing* by way of labelling and framing games (as clarified with Graph No. 5 which also marks the shift towards a constructionist and textualised reading of the learning cycle).

With Graph No. 6 the reasons why epistemological practice is on-going, unfolding, emergent and contingent, are shown by taking up Heidegger’s understanding of Being and Time, and the distinction of logos and legein (the ‘word’ and the ‘spoken-word’). All meaning is ‘spoken’ and therefore processual, social, powerful etc. Meaning is conditioned according to time, place, group of language-users, convention and culture, developing the ‘habitus’ that Bourdieu describes as, ‘history turned into nature’ (1977: 78). The fact of ‘being *there*’ (dasein) means that all knowing is marked by unknowing<sup>18</sup> – we never know the complete situation-appearing or outcomes of action. The effects of this situation of ‘Being (in/with/for)/(time/place)’ conditions what and how we know – as well as generating the forces, or *forcing* of the learning cycle. New terms to describe the ‘movements’ or forces of the learning cycle are explored. The ‘stretching-out’ of the learning cycle shows how practice is always ordered according to the representative work of the logos/domain (or epistemology) which is always limiting and opening to a new set of variables due to its nature as ‘legein’, spoken-ness. Thus the approach of ‘relating processes’ is understood

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<sup>18</sup> Since any one person or group are radically *situated*

as an appropriate and practical way of imagining learning and organising work when taking the unknowing and contingent nature of learning-in-organising into account. The processes of contextualisation and intertextualisation are encompassed with this view.

As organising practice the dialectic nature of learning suggests two key actions of *imagining* and *deciding*. Graphs No. 8, 9 and 10 thicken-out this idea showing how the movements of labelling are imaginative and the movements of framing are decisive (No. 8), the relating of these movements is paradoxical in that imagining is the condition and generates purpose, while deciding is the condition and generates practice (No. 9). Finally No. 10 shows how imagining and deciding are classified according to the emerging form of the matrix which aligns the paradigmatic and syntagmatic nature of signalling processes. This is understood as a powerful, although restrictive frame that discounts the flexible nature of the relating process of paradigm/syntagm, while also narrowing the focus of the imaginative process, of which such an instrument as the matrix is an embodiment.

These considerations become topical in context when we remember that modernist control paradigms are no-longer as effective as they once were in a world of increasingly distributed knowledges (Easterby-Smith et al., 2000); where the ‘louder sound’ of syntagmatic life is increased multi and plurivocality, diversity, incoherent-practices and thought-systems (Gergen et al., 2004). This is a matter very much to hand when considering the pressing and critical economic and socio-political issues of our time, matters that are intrinsically and increasingly relevant to the development-aid business – to give just one example, note how the question of climate change has been taken-up as an issue for advocacy by development-aid organisations. The participation of all interested members in the organising practice of development-aid (or any public concern) is critical in a situation where the authority of role or position no-longer has the force it once had – consequently understanding epistemological process is important for creating spaces and generating meaningful participation.

## **Part II: Rhemal Dialectics and Embodied Dynamics**

### *How to Do Things with Words*

As noted implicitly with the language used here, a distinction between the uses of *with* and *about* is employed to generate precise attention to the difference that ‘talking-*with*’ or talking-*about* any matter makes (Shotter, 2008). This difference is the nature of the objectifying relation functional in the relating process taking place. ‘Talking-*with*’ is a differentiation that makes knowledge by way of, and embodying/generating a ‘soft’ subject/object demarcation, while ‘talking-*about*’

‘distances’ to some extent the processing from the matter, placing a new layer of differentiation – another order of abstraction – into the relating process. Talking *about* a matter thus makes knowledge by way of a harder S/O differentiation. This form of knowledge-making enables talkers to ‘stand apart’ or ‘outside’ in some fashion, while ‘talking-*with*’ suggests a more engaged, dialogal and reflexive process of differentiation (Shotter, 2001) for which the subjectivity of the subject as integral to the process is taken to count.

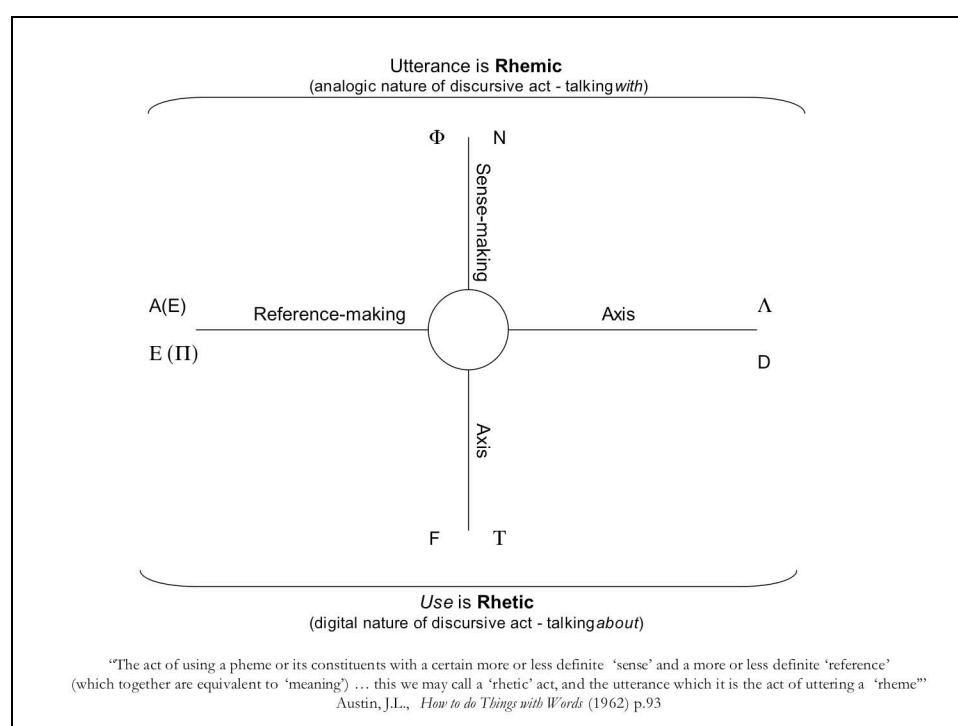
The question is which formulation, or mode of relating is best suited to organising practice? Certainly the more apparent knowledge-making mode is the objectifying, ‘talking-*about*’, epitomised in forms of ‘scientific’ discourse, including the discourses for development-aid of ‘Results Based Management’ and ‘Management for Development Results’. A form of knowing perhaps parodied with images of controlled laboratory experiments and impersonalising ‘clean’ white coats. The position argued here is that from the perspective of dialectic process, knowledge-making or learning that can be considered ‘complete’ or fulfilling, requires the movements of ‘talking *with*’ and ‘talking *about*’, and a deutero-understanding of the S/O differentiations generated therein.

This scaling of differentiation according to the fixedness of the S/O relations, or transitive positioning – including positions taken up and held – with relating subject/object processes is a useful means for stripping back to a sense of primary epistemology. The position taken here is that this ‘primary epistemology’ takes *place* with language-used as a social, variable and powerful embodying and unfolding of Being, all of which can be described as ‘becoming’. The signalling that becomes, and is (agent of) becoming, is of course far beyond the range of constructing-and-categorizing-language and includes all forms of discursive, that is, relating, message-making, signalling processes. The focus here has been on language-use as a key intertextualisation of organising practice.

Exploring how the basic generation of meaning is possible with that languaged form, the relating of *reference* (the implied action of ‘pointing’ with discourse) and *sense*, as that action which in relation to reference creates meaning, is at the heart of much of this presentation. J.L. Austin offers us a distinctive language with his text, *How to Do Things with Words* (1962) in order to develop our differentiation of the processes involved. Austin points out how, ‘the act of using a pheme or its constituents with a certain more or less definite ‘sense’ and a more or less definite ‘reference’ (which together are equivalent to ‘meaning’) ... this we may call a ‘rhetic’ act, and the utterance which is at the heart of uttering a ‘rheme’” (1962: 93). A ‘pheme’ may here be understood to mean an utterance viewed as ‘form/substance’, and is a useful resource for making

a slight distinction from ‘theme’ as that which is meant, or generated with the use of the pheme, i.e. an objectified determination such as a boundarying-concept or principle.

Graph No. 11 shows, by placing the terms of Austin’s analysis of the constituent parts or functionings of meaning, as a reference/sense-making process, onto the basic figure of practical learning (that we are ‘layering-up’ here) a view of how *utterance as rhemic* and *use as rhetic* is generated. This is an exploration of the different natures of ‘talking *with*’ and ‘talking *about*’, that helps us ‘slow-up’ or ‘unpick the tight weave’ that is the differentiation of S/O relating process, i.e. knowledge-making.



Graph 11 – Rhemic/Rhetic Talking With and About

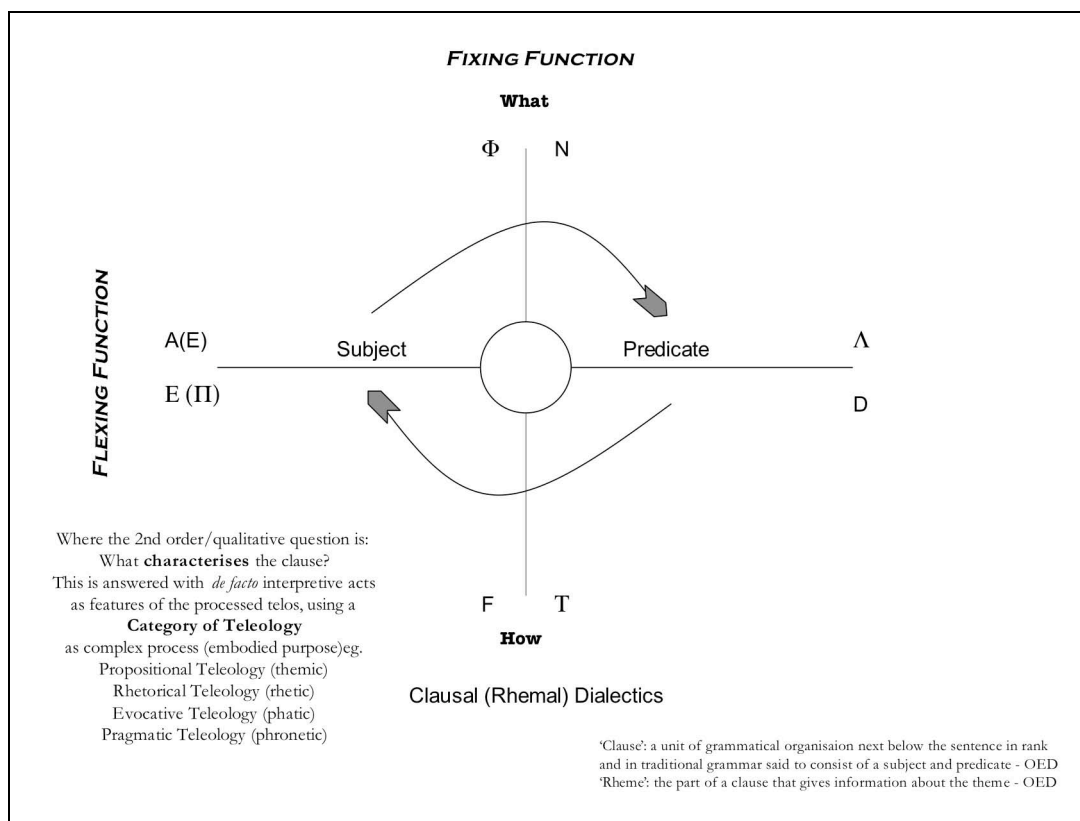
As can be seen with Graph No. 11 the reference-making axis is the analogic signalling that goes-on in time and place with discursive practice. This is a continuous signalling that moves in dialectic fashion from description to practical action or experimentation and vice-versa. As language is used this movement is continually a process of formation, constraint and limitation while thus also offering new opportunities for describing and extensive morphological movement – the conditionality of Verschueren’s ‘adaptability, negotiability, variability’ analysis of language-use (1999). The reference-making feature of language-use is enabled by way of its dialectic relation to the sense-making axis as shown. The movement taking place, the relating of noticing/naming *with* formalisation or analysis is digital signalling, which by its nature is

fragmenting, categorising and ordering. This movement is the making of 'sense' which is only possible by moving *through* 'reference'; while 'reference' can only be made – signalled as it were – with the movement *through* 'sense', as the paradigmatic sign that generates order for the referencing process.

What Austin brings to this view with the distinction of rhemic and rhetic modes as the difference between *use* and *utterance*, is a language that enables discernment of the subtle differences that make meaning-making possible on a scale of differentiation as suggested by the distinction of 'talking *with*' from 'talking *about*'. The key to the contribution for the purpose here might be simply taken as the difference in sound between the 't' of 'rhetic' and the 'm' of 'rhemic'. Both terms suggest the intending force of meaning being made, always as *for* some action or purpose, the *rhetorical* nature of all language-used – with the 't' consonant as the clipped, fragmenting sound, and the 'm' consonant as the more flowing and levelled sound – by which means at very minute quarters the dialectical process is shown. How we do things with words is also how we imagine and decide for our organising practices. Our '*uttering* words' is always according to purpose (albeit largely implicit or customised) and is *rhemic* as a talking *with* what resources we have to hand (referencing experience/language). Our '*used* wording' is always according to purpose (in more explicit fashion or awareness) and is *rhetic* as a talking *about* what resources we have to hand (sense-made of experience/language).

Taking up the rhemic mode of language-use and using this frame for talking at another order of abstraction – that of fixing and flexing in the learning process as noted above, Graph No. 12 shows how the dialectics of a learning grammar or syntax might be usefully understood according to the dynamics of the 'clause'. The clause is 'a unit of grammatical organisation next below the sentence in rank and in traditional grammar said to consist of a subject and predicate', while the 'rheme' is defined as, 'the part of a clause that gives information about the theme' (OED). Translating these terms onto the Figure being developed here generates a view of clausal or rhemal dialectics as language-use.





Graph 12 – Clausal (Rhematic) Dialectics

The fixing function of learning is that process which generates the distinction between 'whats', or themes and 'hows', or rhemes (of which rhetorical force is a constitutive feature). What in fact characterises the clause, or makes the clause particular and thus meaning-full is the series of going-on interpretive actions that make such a phenomena as 'processing telos' possible. Here we note that on the digital sense-making axis the movements of production are between whatever is the theme or focus and however that theme is rhematic, clausal or in another language – formed, which also means to be made available as a way of acting. With these interpretive movements for action the referencing is possible by way of movements that generate the subjective and predicated features of meanings made. From here a category of teleological moves or tendencies is generated as the complex processing (which is embodied) of meaning for/from which there continually becomes a propositional teleology, which is *themic* by nature; a rhetorical teleology, which is *rhetic* by nature; an evocative teleology, which is *phatic* by nature; and a pragmatic teleology, which is *phronetic*<sup>19</sup> by nature. These terms of clausal dialectics offer a way of noting the subtle dialectical movements between sense-making or digital thematic and rhematic forcing (telos) *through* reference-making or analogic phatic and phronetic forcing (also telic) that in turn

<sup>19</sup> An item generated from Aristotle's category of 'practical knowledge' or 'prudence' – phronesis, or φρόνησις (Aristotle, 1976, Liddell and Scott, 1891)

move-through the thematic/rhemic vortex. Taking up and re-wording Bateson's phrase, 'as form is to process, so tautology is to description' (2002: 178) this graph shows how, 'as rhetic is to phronetic, so thematic is to phatic'.

Once again the import of this determination needs to be pronounced. The clue lies in the subject/predicate relation made with the clause. As can be seen from Graph No. 12 this is a dialectic relation – a process of *talking* through the sense-making axis that orders or formalises all knowledge (knowledge as/for action). Any 'subject' is fruit of thematic/rhetic processing; as is any 'predicate' or describing/embodying feature. The difference in the telic movements is one of purpose – 'subjects' emerge from phronetic or practical (including political) tending, while 'predicates' emerge from phatic or social tending. All of this shows how meanings-made (imagining and deciding as organising practice) are the fruits and conditions of complex teleological purposing that always tends towards social and practical considerations. The detailed exposition here offers resources for deconstructing or paying close attention to the social and practical forces that order and drive the forms of differentiation (knowledge) that make organising practice as it *is* in any instance. They offer grounds for the learning and developing of deuterio-attentiveness and skill with contextualising forms of learning practice.

As noted above the rheme is the 'part of the clause that gives information about the theme' (OED), a dictionary *description* rather than *definition* since what that 'part' is, is not defined propositionally. It seems this is the case since that 'part' is not a *part* but the continuous and contingent actioning of utterance/use by means of rhemal dialectics – the syntax in action that generates information. Bateson notes that, 'information consists of differences that make a difference' (2002: 92). Where can such 'different differences' come from? Bateson suggests that this is the role of random or 'stochastic' process. A simple way of putting this notion is, trial and error. We *react* to a given perception, situation or event largely on the basis of the terms we have to hand, but there is always the possibility that some part or move is slightly altered (Heraclitus' infamous, 'never dipping in the same river twice') – a random feature or factor that shifts the whole, albeit in imperceptible ways.

Hence the generation of change and freshness must be located as much in the tendencies and movements of the syntaxing or relating process as with intentional and explicit decisive moves. This syntaxing process is imagined here as a cycle of teleological moves that are as much *about* that process as the intended or stated goals of any organisation or order. Imagine this 'about-ness' in figurative fashion – a sort of 'moving-about' emerging themes in the process of making such resources as information, knowledge, organisation. Returning to the idea of a topographical approach to the learning organisation, this 'about-ness' might be imagined as akin to the way a

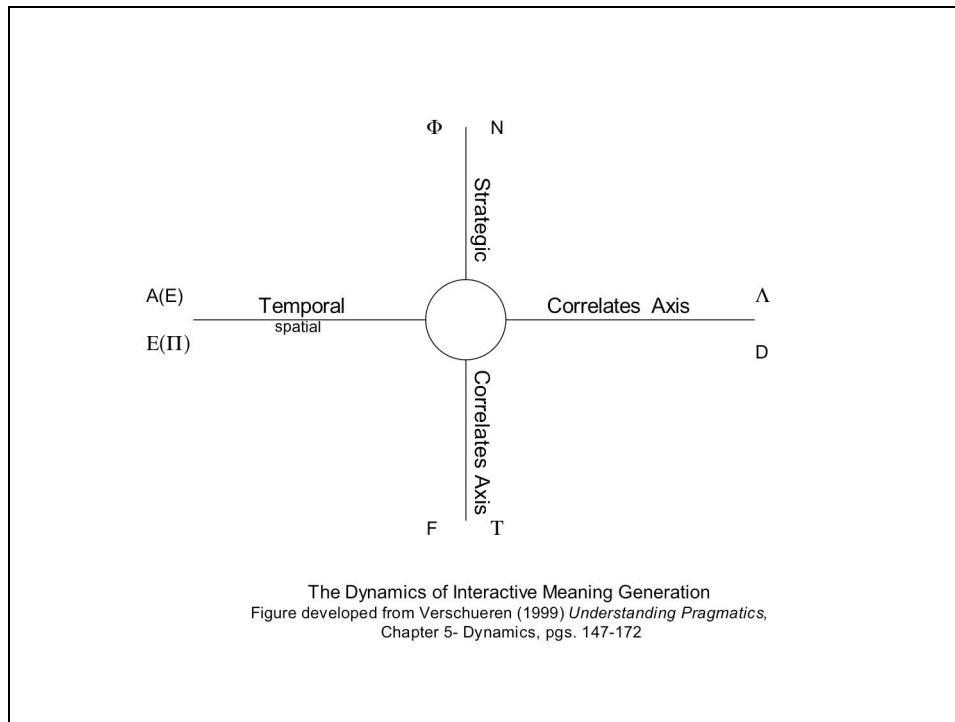
visitor would walkabout a place of interest, a site of note, thus thickening the experience and view.

### *The Dynamics of Temporal/Spatial Correlation*

Taking a step back from analysis of how clausal or rhemal dialectics carry-on telos, generating meaning and order as much with form as intention, Verschueren's approach to 'interactive meaning generation' in dynamic terms highlights how the 'temporal/spatial correlates' of language-use are continually the context of the 'strategic correlates' of language-use and vice-versa (1999: 147-172). This relating process is shown with Graph No. 13 as the dialectic movements of time/place (space) with strategy (purpose/intention/decision) or, as Verschueren defines pragmatics, language-choice. Conditioned choice-making is the dynamism that generates the phenomena of interacted meaning – movements such as organising practice, organising culture, customised procedure or orientating knowledge. The 'conditioning' is not a fixed state for Verschueren, 'language-use' is always 'language-choice' since to utter/use is to adapt, negotiate and vary the very resource or embodiment that enables the act of uttering/using itself. The condition of using language in a temporally and spatially unfolding 'reality' is the opportunity of the material or 'matter to hand'<sup>20</sup> to be moulded as it were to context, to what is apparent and important in the *now*, within view for the moment. This dynamic feature of language as *used* is what unbinds its apparent fixed structure and gives what might be called a 'living syntax' or grammar its potential.

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<sup>20</sup> An extrapolation from Heidegger's 'ready-to-hand' or 'every day Being-with' of Dasein (1973: 8).



*Graph 13 – The Dynamics of Interactive Meaning Generation*

### *Organised Cohabitation - Figurative, Symbolic, Abstractive, Phonetic Elements*

Derrida clearly links the abilities or forms of textualising-apparent to how perceiving/thinking takes place, in fact he notes that new ways of thinking will emerge as the manual ordering of writing in linear terms<sup>21</sup> – as in a book - falls prey to ‘the general phenomenon of manual regression’ whereby ‘philosophy and literature will definitely see their forms evolve’ (1976: 333). The end of ‘alphabetic graphism’ (1976: 333) that he foresees is also the, ‘end of linear writing’ which is ‘less a question of confiding new writings to the envelope of a book than of finally reading what wrote itself between the lines in the volumes’ (1976: 86). The attention all through this research work is towards ‘what [writes] itself between the lines’ (but *with* the ‘lines’ as it were) whether that be according to the alphabetic graphism of a text like this one (here attempting to break with some of its linearity by the use of graphic representations and a somewhat unfamiliar graphic code of Greek lettering) or whether that be carried along and silently objectified, as Bourdieu suggested (1990), with the matrixed instruments of organising practice for development-aid.

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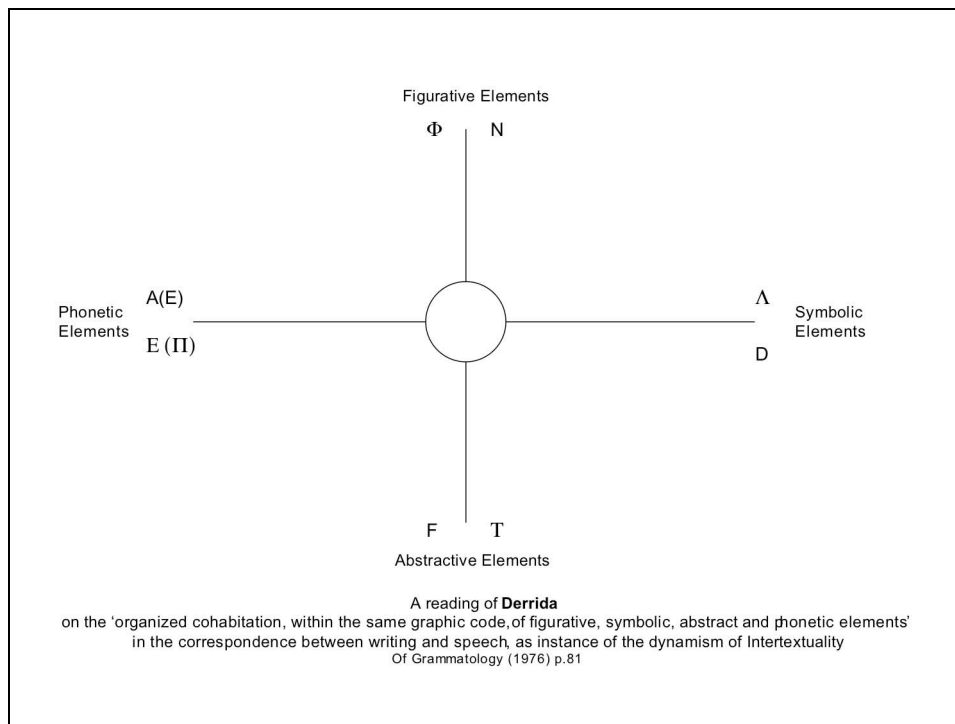
<sup>21</sup> His analysis is of *writing* as intrinsic to the textualisation of logos as the constitution of sense or metaphysics.

These reflections refer to the situating of knowledge-making on ‘another map’ (2007) where the objectifying *hard-ly* differentiated S/O relations so common with any discourse are no-longer the terms mattering. With a grounding phrase that links Derrida’s history of ‘grammatology’ to the pragmatics approach to language as *used* and contextually defined or meaningful he notes that, ‘[t]he history of writing is erected on the base of the history of the *grammè* as an adventure of relationships between the face and the hand’ (1976: 84). The *grammè* is in the first instance, the ‘written mark’ (1976: 9) as the touchstone which renders the going-on forms of grammatology that Derrida deconstructs<sup>22</sup>. What is of particular interest here is the notion of an ‘adventure’ involving the relating of face and hand – an evocative and simplifying image that takes account of all the complexity of the relating processes of the social and practical matters that generate contextualisation – and therefore, communication.

Derrida points out that ‘[w]ithin the logos, the original and essential link to the *phoné* has never been broken ... because the voice, producer of *the first symbols*, has a relationship of essential and immediate proximity with the mind’ (1976: 11) ‘The relating of voice, hand and face is integral to the making of meaning and sense for knowledge and practice, and is as Derrida notes, ‘an element without simplicity’ (1976: 9). We might underline the fact that this ‘element’ is a relating of voices, hands and faces – a teleological, practical, social and therefore textualising process. This is the heart of the rationale for a pragmatics analysis of any sort for which the contextualisation of meaning is what generates intelligibility and force. The constituent elements of this textualising process, which is the condition of all communication, learning, knowledge-making and organising action, are in Derrida’s view figurative, symbolic, abstract and phonetic. They *become* as ‘organized cohabitation, within the same graphic code’, represented here dialectically with Graph No. 14.

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<sup>22</sup> To expound this point, ‘the *grammé* – or the *grapheme* – would thus name the element. An element without simplicity. An element, whether it is understood as the medium or as the irreducible atom, of the arche-synthesis in general, of what one must forbid oneself to define within the system of oppositions of metaphysics, of what consequently one should not even call *experience* in general, that is to say the origin of *meaning* in general.’ (1976: 9). Derrida is talking about what is understood here as ‘symmetrical being’ (Dalal, 1998) – an imagined origin that makes asymmetricality, or knowledge possible. In this sense all ‘marks’ (written, spoken, genotypical or cybernetic) with their necessary syntax (according to their respective ecologies) are historical, social, constructing – and evoke metaphysical response.



*Graph 14 – A View of Derrida's Organized Cohabitation of Figurative, Symbolic, Abstract and Phonetic Elements*

What *figures* perception is digitally connected to the abstractive order operational by way of movement through the symbolic-phonetic axis, the social and practical on-goingness, the unfolding of Being that we find ourselves always in the face of. We continually return to the condition or fact of unfinished business – the fact of the fact that makes language-use variable, syntax an opportunity and textualisation (Derrida's concern is the relating of writing/speech/thought, ours the relating of textualisation/practice) a series of dynamic processes that render such concepts as 'organisational learning' as complex processes – whether as some-how to do, or some-how to research. The dynamism of intertextuality, as a way of conceiving the notion as 'organisational learning', includes the figurative, symbolic, abstractive and phonetic elements of contextualisation as processes going-on with forms of relating that render meaning and knowledge. These elements function with 'the lines' of any text as complex dialectic processes – whether written down or not. They seek account in a changing order for organisation that is increasingly bringing the reflexive, complex, random, distributed, particular and less/more-than linear vocalities (pluri and multi) to bear.

### *Summary of Part II*

In summary this section on language-use as a phenomenon of dialectic relating has explored how utterance/use is a process of making meaning by moving through the referencing and sensing of experience – which is always languaged, as shown with Graph No. 11. Graph No. 12 shows how,

at another order of abstraction the processes of fixing and flexing meaning with language-use is a clausal or rhemal process that can offer a category of teleological movements in the cycle of practical learning, making intention as much the work of the medium *as used*, as it is a force explicit and controlled by mind or cognitive action. Graph No. 13 shows how such clausal language-use is dynamic by means of the relating of temporal/spatial correlates (reference points) with strategic correlates (the fact that language-use is also ‘language-choice’), and Graph No. 14 shows how, in a turn towards the embodied complexity of context and language-use – beyond formal or clausal dynamics – the figurative-abstractive elements relate, through the symbolic-phonetic elements and vice-versa, thus generating an ‘organized cohabitation’ that is instance of the dynamism of intertextuality which is the energy or dunamis (power) that drives organising practice, meaning and the experience of Being itself as ‘becoming’.

### **Part III: Framing the Learning Cycle**

#### *Double-Loop Learning?*

The learning cycle figured here has been grounded in Kolb’s experiential view of learning (1984), described also as social/political process by Dewey and Freire (1916, 1970), and as (Christian) Praxis by Groome (1980a). Typical approaches to Adult Learning or education follow similar patterns (eg. Vella, 2002). The cycle of learning can also be used as a frame for showing the relating patterns between Aristotle’s categorisation of knowledge types (1976), including his view of praxis as ‘purposeful action’ (based on the verb ‘prassoo’ (πράσσω) – to do) which gives rise to the explorations with teleology in organising practice in this and the previous Chapter.

The loops of learning as presented by Argyris and Schön have been shown along the lines of the top image in Graph No. 15 below.





generates openness to trito-awareness. As has been noted already, trito-learning is not really 'learning' when learning is understood as an active, teleological or 'positive' process – trito-learning is more of a poise or attentiveness that enables the *reception* of trito-type knowledge, a kind of experience of coherence or attunement that is proper to a contemplative mode.

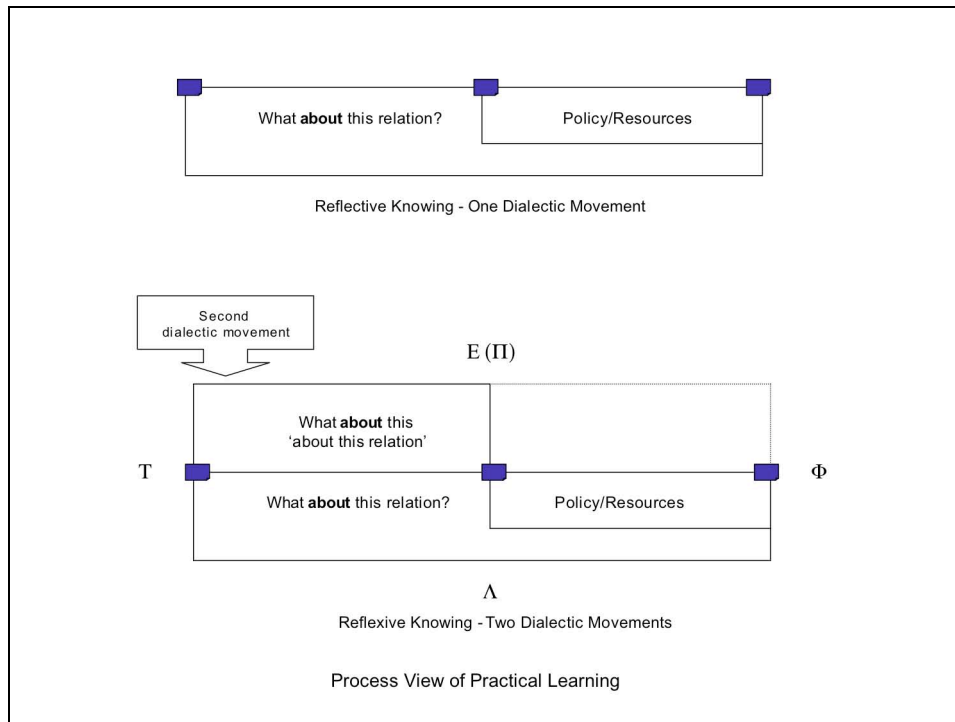
The difficulty with the single/double-loop conception of organisational learning is that actions and their consequences are imagined as objective givens, as 'reality' in some fashion of relatively hard S/O differentiation between the agent and environment of action (organisational or other). In fact such actions and consequences are old and new names (or topics) in other learning processes – the epistemological assumptions that generate the implicit objectifying relations of the learning and research frame are not counted. This is in a sense the difficulty with behavioural approaches to learning and organising that individualise the learning process with personalised and boundaried intentionality, and tend towards a defensive and conflict-oriented understanding of relating processes (eg. Cyert and March, 1963, Argyris and Schön, 1996).

The centre of the cycle is always an unknown, i.e., the symmetry that is the condition of all knowledge as analysed above. The placing of actions and consequences into the centre of the cycle is what closes off access to the triple-loop; reducing the 'cycle' to a semi-cycle, moving through two quadrants only and thus generating only one dialectical movement, a 'half-dialectic' or incomplete 'speaking-through'. The presence or functionality of an 'undiscussable'<sup>23</sup>, i.e., an epistemological assumption unexamined, (which for Argyris and Schön comprises of an understanding of change according to linear causality, and a view that individuals are boundaried units that 'act *on*' organisations) is based on a hegemonic *scientific* discourse. This generates a conundrum since, 'science has a time which is not that of practice' (Bourdieu, 1977: 9), and it is *practice* that is their concern. The ontological premises of their research approach are unexamined and are therefore 'undiscussable', making their approach to organisational learning insufficient (Dachler, 1994).

The 'completion' of the cycle is more clearly shown with Graph No. 16

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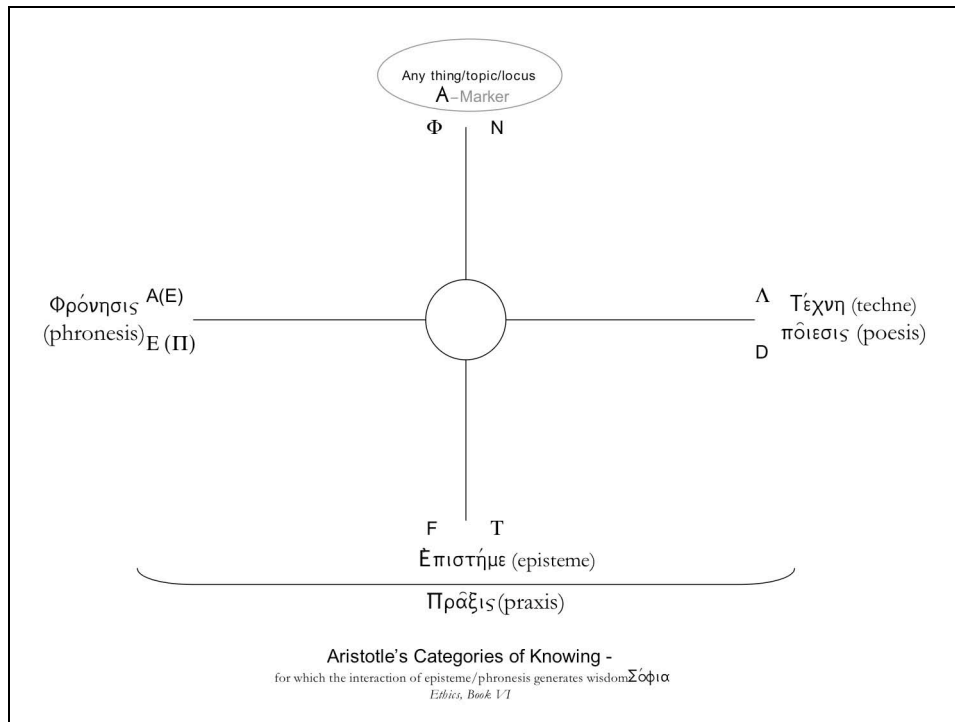
<sup>23</sup> To use Argyris' own term.



Graph 16 – **Two** Dialectics Movements for Practical Learning

### *Aristotle's Categories of Knowledge*

The necessity of openness to the unknown suggested with the conceptualisation of a trito-attentiveness, triple-loop or third order of abstraction can be shown with a graphic presentation of Aristotle's categories of knowledge in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1976). The knowledge that renders tautological proposition is classically defined as episteme (ἐπιστήμη) from which the word, 'epistemology' finds its root – simply put, 'words about' or the 'science of knowing'. This is the careful, categorical knowledge of which we can be sure due to the progression of its construction, on the basis of what is known, towards what becomes known according to the rigorous logic of the process. This is the form of knowing that underpins all scientific enquiry. Secondly, Aristotle defines the more instrumental knowledges of skill (techne – τέχνη) and artistic creation (poiesis – ποιησις). Poiesis is mysterious, the possibility of transition – an intuitive knowledge that is the implicit gift of the master craftsman or woman, the artist, the poet, the muse – hence why this form of knowing is placed with techne or skill in the realm of the spoken or descriptive energy of the learning cycle as shown in Graph No. 17. It also the possible localization of aesthetic modes.

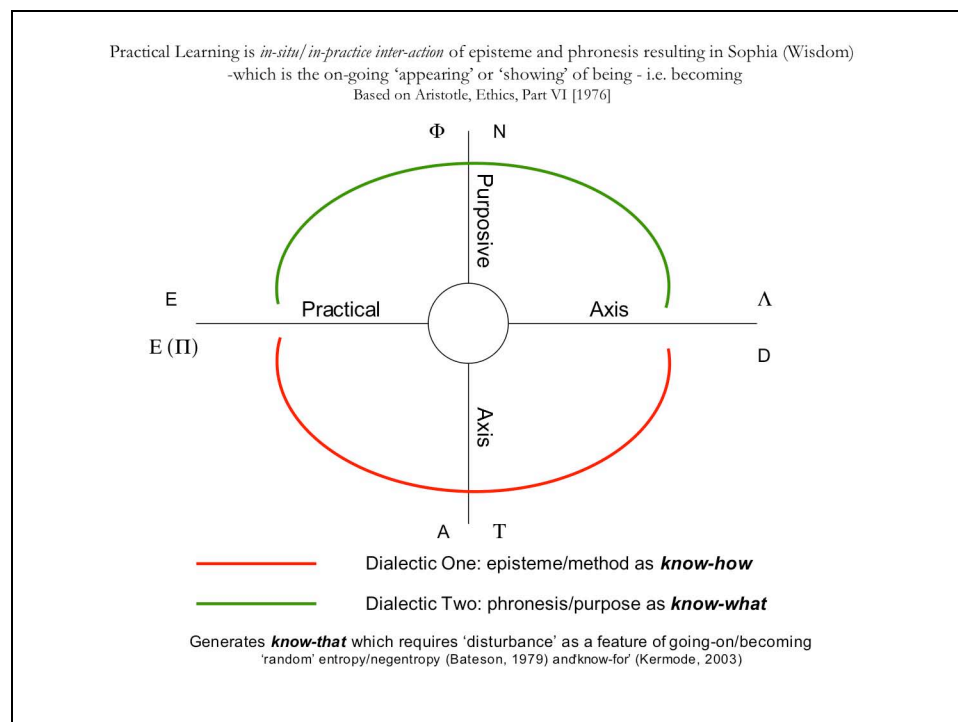


Graph 17 – Aristotle's Categories of Knowing on the Dialectics Graph

Aristotle also defines as practical knowledge, phronesis (φρόνησις), the sort of knowledge that is chosen as a good in itself – and for no other end than itself. Politics might be understood as a social science of phronetic knowledge. As noted above, on the basis on this figuring of Aristotle's categories of knowledge praxis (πράξις) becomes a second order 'how-knowledge' or way of proceeding. It is therefore a discipline that encompasses all the movements of the learning cycle. Praxis is learning process that attends to all the movements for technical, creative, propositional and practical knowledge rendering that which Aristotle calls sophia (σοφία) or wisdom, the fruit of the relating process between episteme and phronesis – propositional and practical knowing; of which skill, artistry and creativity are integral functions. Wisdom can be likened to trito-learning, an ability that Bateson considers 'difficult and rare even in human beings' (1972: 301) since this 'learning of the context of contexts' puts the sense of personal or defined identity at risk, 'identity merges into all the processes of relationship in some vast ecology or aesthetics of cosmic interaction' (1972: 306). And here may be the heart of the matter as to why for 'organisations' and 'institutions', with all their self-preserving and institutionalising concerns, sophisticated forms of learning are counter-intuitive and therefore alien or rare.

Translating this frame of knowledge and knowing into organisational terms means focussing particularly on the relating process of episteme, that can be called 'method', and phronesis, that can be called 'purpose'. This relating of these processes generates wisdom according to Aristotle, but we can also view this 'wisdom' as a practical knowledge for action, a sort of implicit

contingency or ‘flow’ that develops as people work together over time in a certain place<sup>24</sup>. This sort of wisdom may probably be likened to organisational culture and is habitual with self affirmation and preservation rather than with the sort of ecological merging that Bateson describes. Graph No. 18 shows how the movement from method to experiment or action generates the form of knowing that we call, ‘know-how’, a commonly used phrase and an experience that everyone can understand, i.e., the second time round any activity is easier since ‘know-how’ has been generated.



Graph 18 – Episteme and Phronesis as Knowing-How and Knowing-What

The movement from action *back* to method (or description) is the dialectic that generates ‘know-what’, the focussing knowledge that guides towards new cycles of on-going formalisation. These movements taken at a second order of abstraction generate the sort of propositional knowledge that can be termed, ‘knowing-that’, including the practical knowledge that is at the heart of praxis as a concept, i.e. ‘knowing-for’, a term that marks the ultimate organising exigency which holds that learning, knowledge and action are for change, for a difference, for *better-meant*.

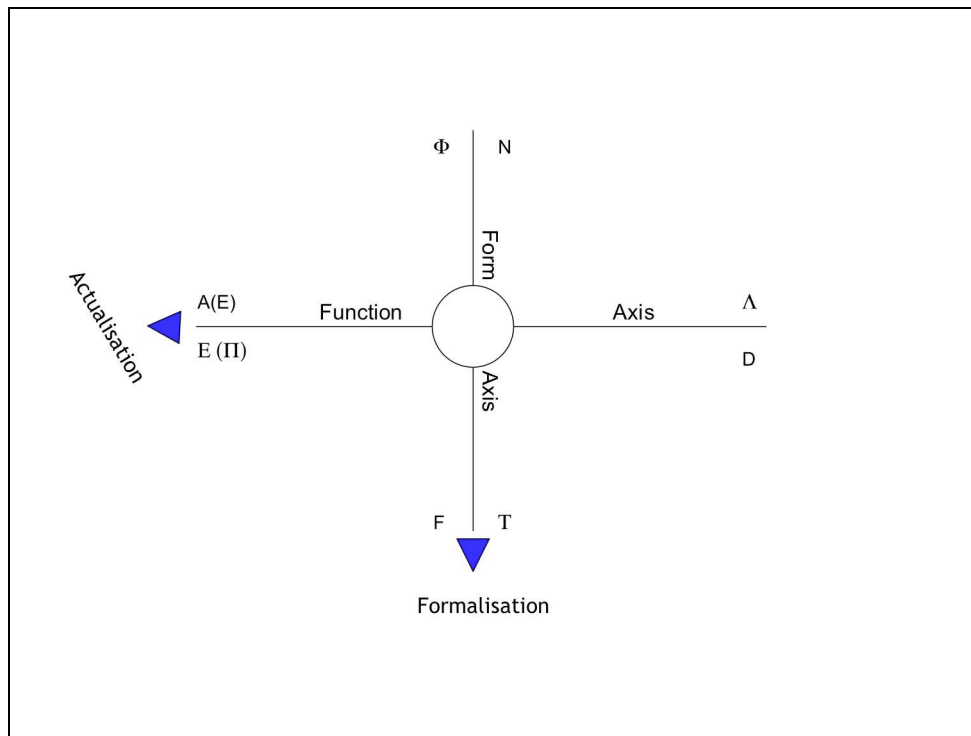
Returning to Aristotle we note that the dialectical movements of practice/purpose are central to the functionality of the on-going ‘appearing’ or ‘showing’ of Being, which is another way of

<sup>24</sup> In another literature this might be likened to the ‘performing’ stage of group dynamics (eg. Tuckman, 1965)

saying, 'Becoming'. If this on-going cycle of 'showing' is to have the possibility of change, then the function of random stochastic opportunity needs to be present in the system or processing. The notions of 'noise' or 'disturbance' have been used to consider and talk about this feature of learning (and evolution) that 'lifts the beginning/end' up or down or across. Whichever way you wish to imagine the dimensionality, there needs to be some feature of novelty that changes the processing (albeit imperceptably) of method/purpose so that knowledge doesn't become overly redundant. Redundancy is required for knowing at all, but an absence of the stain, the mistake, the random feature, the unknown element-emerging would be the onset of decadence and the end of learning. In organisational terms, taking this view into account means finding ways of 'organizing ... for disorganization' (Gergen et al., 2004: 51).

The logical drive of organising practice is towards forms of 'knowledge-that' (i.e. lessons *learned*), taken as the rationale of 'knowledge-for' – skill or action. When 'knowledge-that' is prioritised over other forms, by means of centering and resourcing the abilities to give account, show attribution and prove results; the teleological energies that tend to override and be legitimised as 'organisation', are the energies towards formalisation and actualisation. Graph No. 19 shows this dynamic whereby the 'axis of form' intersects the 'axis of function' and vice-versa, generating organising resources. As can be seen with this figuring of the organising forces or energies, the 'moments' or integral functions of noticing/naming and describing/processing, functions that we earlier designated as labelling games, are more ephemeral and harder to slot into the organising discourse for the reason that they are arbitrary in nature – matters very much of particular contextualisation.

Which groups prevail in getting their 'view' or perception of 'reality' formalised by means of making that set of names or propositions functional? This is how the learning process generates social and organisational power. To attend more critically and reflexively to the labelling games of organising discourse, and to value their functionality, is to bring into view the often implicit forces by which certain voices and groups are empowered and favoured. If a distinction can be made between double-loop and deuterio-learning this may be how to do so – double-loop learning has been described as a method of reviewing the processes of formalisation and actualisation, making explicit the 'governing variables' of behavioural and organisational exigency; deuterio-learning is essentially a 'double-description', the 'learning of context' that holds no propositional presence – it is simply a movement of two distinct describing actions, describing 'form' or digital signalling and describing 'function' or analogic signalling as a second order of abstraction process. Doing so, is to 'learn context'.



Graph 19 – Formalisation and Actualisation through Form/Function Dialectics

### Summary of Part III

Having established an ontological basis for the practical epistemology of ‘becoming’ that is being figured out here graphically and textually, and rooting that basis into the contextualising process of discursive practice (framed as language-use and choice) – which is understood as the syntax or grammar, and the power, force or dunamis of knowledge-making, the processes that generate the ‘movements’ and distributions in time and place of organising practice, ie. the embodiments of ‘organisation’ are somewhat clarified. These movements are understood as marking the process of learning as a frame for organising practice, as a way of imagining ‘organisational learning’ that ‘completes’ or takes into account in a fullsome way all the energies and telic nuances<sup>25</sup> that become knowledge and practice – and thereby form or embodiment. All through this analytic process the ultimate goal has been to discover a formulation of learning practice that would be inclusive of all the features of learning process as practically experienced, and generate more ‘space’ for the articulation of *difference*, contextualisation of discordance, that which ‘does not follow’, the features of the learning process which informants from Irish Aid described as ‘lacks of communication and coherence’. The argument is that the talking and instrumentalisation of Irish Aid learning and organising practice (as apprehended in the research process) normally discounts this ‘feedback’ – generating experiences of frustration, isolation and ultimately creating a context of organisational decadence where practice increasingly becomes impervious to the

<sup>25</sup> The distinctive phasing, embodying or processing of desire – which is moded and made as it becomes ...

messaging signals of critical participants and patterns, which is another way of talking about the environment of matter.

Graphs No. 15 and 16 showed how the classic formulation of organisational learning according to a behavioural ontology disables the trito-learning context that makes deutero-learning possible due to its implied hard S/O differentiation whereby the subject is imagined as a bounded agent that acts *on* 'organisation', talked as 'action strategies' and 'consequences'. Thus the reflexive attention of a second dialectic move is disabled. With Graph No. 17 Aristotle's categories of knowledge are shown to generate praxis as context or pattern-learning that, by dialectically relating episteme (formal knowledge) with phronesis (practical knowledge) *sofia*, or wisdom is generated – another iteration of the notion of trito-learning. The import of this view is to foreground the functionality of purposive and practical movements which make forms of knowledge for action, knowing-how and what, which in turn at another order of abstraction generates propositional (knowing-that) and praxial (knowing-for) conditions (Graph No. 18). By way of critique the prioritising of propositional knowledge (generally with an assumed rather than contextualised link to praxial knowledge) is shown to orientate towards formalisation and actualisation as the markers of legitimate 'organisation' (Graph No. 19). In this pattern of organising practice, the labelling games of imagination (themic and phatic) tend to be under-considered. These are games of great contextualising power and influence – the seeding of the framing games so valued.

## **Part IV: An Epistemology-for-Participation**

### *The Common Good*

Organisational learning must be concerned with the Common Good. This position is not often expressed in the organisational learning literature mostly concerned with analytical questions of how learning happens; or performance questions of how to do better, or indeed 'best', i.e., the established distinction between the literatures of organisational learning and the learning organisation (Easterby-Smith, 1997, Easterby-Smith et al., 1999, Easterby-Smith et al., 2000, C. Argyris, 2005). Nonetheless, for a public organisation such as Irish Aid, the goal is not 'competitive advantage', but a relative and ultimately *political* end (poverty reduction), the embodiment of which is a challenge greater than the operational or resource remit of such an organisation. This might be considered a situation of 'goal ambiguity' (Dimaggio and Powell, 1983) that brings its own organisational anxieties.

In the *meantime*, even the core organising goal of ‘comparative advantage’ sets Irish Aid as different to for-profit organisations since what must be critically learnt in practice is how to communicate, collaborate and cohere with organising groups of very many different hues (as core business) – including their particular epistemologies. This task, prominent in current bi/multi-lateral development-aid practice, is actually a common task that many government departments and their subsidiaries need to face. Many of the current difficulties of public or common life are institutional difficulties. Whether the focus is on banking regulation or political accountability, current crises suggest that the forms of organisation that we are accustomed to are failing us for Society, i.e. not good for the purpose as it is becoming now. The rigorous working-through with the processes and procedures of harmonisation and alignment that development organisations such as Irish Aid are contending with<sup>26</sup> represents in many respects an important interface for general organising practice, and although there is much to be learnt for development-aid, the on-going experiences and reflections that must be generated and shared from this context can be usefully explored anew with and for other organising contexts.

All public organisation is ultimately concerned with the Common Good – even if this is not always apparent with the cycles of institutionalisation that tend to characterise it. Public organisations must be concerned with the practical challenges of communication, collaboration and coherence. This is one of the reasons why the form of organisational learning that must be imagined and explored for development-aid is distinct from the forms that were researched and articulated in the original communities from which the concept emerged<sup>27</sup>. Some traditions of learning and education for societal purpose or the Common Good are extant and have been outlined in Chapter 4 under the title of the philosophies of adult learning, in broad scope these are represented with the work of John Dewey, who takes a pragmatic approach to learning as experiential, but for Democracy (1938, 1916), and Paolo Friere, whose pedagogy for the conscientisation of learners with programmes for literacy in Brazil broke new ground (1970) – causing him some trouble.

### *Rationality for Ideal Communication*

To take a slightly different tack with this notion of ‘organisational learning for the common or societal good’ (a move implied all along with the formulation of ‘practical learning’) it is helpful to briefly reference the work of Jürgen Habermas. His ‘critical theory’ and analysis of pragmatic communication is an extensive treatment of the notion and need for grounds of common discourse and understanding in human society on the basis of rationality. The central point is to

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<sup>26</sup> As described with Chapters Four and Five

<sup>27</sup> Organisational psychology for business advantage and systems, quantum theory in a second wave ...



move from a limiting instrumental understanding of rationality that views empirical and practical (prudent) knowledge as one and the same ('efficiency' equals 'goodness'), towards a liberating or emancipatory way of thinking, communicating and organising (Habermas, 1978, Eriksen and Weig°Ard, 2003, Derrida et al., 2006).

For Habermas, the pragmatics of communication move towards a form of consensus in common understanding for which, '[t]he aim of reaching understanding (*Verständigung*) is to bring about an agreement (*Einverständnis*) that terminates in the intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal comprehension, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another' (Habermas, 1999: 22). This form of mutuality is accomplished on the basis of agreement on the terms of the discourse, a series of 'conditions' for universal communication that are somewhat akin to the Cooperative Principle that guided the Speech-Act Theory of pragmatics analysis for some time (Grice, 1975, Searle, 1969). This is a situation of cooperation whereby, '[a]greement is based in recognition of the four corresponding validity claims: comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness and rightness' (Habermas, 1999: 23), all qualities that suggest an ideal to be 'recognised' by the parties.

The 'agreement' that 'reaches understanding' is nonetheless, a *worked* phenomenon, a discursive practice, as well as an intention of general openness towards the other as implied by the terming of 'reaching' and 'bringing about' that 'terminates' in an ideal situation. In fact, Habermas posited the psychoanalytic conversation as possible site of the 'ideal speech situation' that goes beyond a technical/practical divide (Aristotle's episteme and phronesis) as a form of praxis where no form of domination exists among the participants since autonomy and responsibility characterise the exchange (Habermas, 1978).

In general terms the three categories of human interests as knowledge are technical, ordered towards survival and sustainability, and formalised with the empirical/analytical sciences; practical, ordered towards mutual understanding and the generation of society and formalised with the hermeneutic/historical sciences; and finally, emancipatory, ordered towards freedom from dogmatic or controlling past reifications of knowledge and formalised with the socially critical sciences. Each have their own form of appropriate method or praxis (Lane, 1984). The critical approach of Habermas can be placed within the latter.

### *'Not-Following' for Practical Learning as Difference*

The links with the concerns here for a form of practical learning that encompasses more than a technical appraisal of situation – development-aid or otherwise – will be clear, the difference lies in the site of what might be called the morphology. Where is the work of change to be found? As will also be clear, from a social or relational constructionism perspective the workings of change

are 'found' on the *surface* of the text, meaning at its *making*. 'It' is an opaque surface since it is always a process-relating and a weave that hides as much as it uncovers with its practice.

Rather than positing an 'ideal situation', it is the process that goes-on 'in itself', the relating of subject/object with embodying media and 'matters to hand', the textualising or weaving process as *imagined* is critical. There is no ideal to reach, nor a perfect method. Learning to live-well with the surfacing-work that is contextualisation is the task to practically account for that context as 'context'. This is a phenomenology of textual formation for which the primary 'method', as a simple orientation, is the work of description. The description is deconstructive – not to destroy, but like Habermas, is a call to be critical in Derrida's sense of 'not following' which is a sort of being faithful. By noting the surfacing of the text (the going-on-ness of contextualisation) or the weave, the situation is taken into account that there 'alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward' (Bakhtin, 1981: 272), so that there is no 'language centre at all' (Bakhtin, 1981: 273) but rather a situation of multivocality. Language might be imagined as a curious, playful and devious child – a child living for the moment, but aware of parental control somewhere in the background. It is with practiced attention that the conditions or the context of critique are created. Linking Habermas and Derrida on social concern can be creative, 'a friendship with obstacles' (Derrida et al., 2006: 2) and has been taken up for philosophical reflection on particular issues (Borradori et al., 2003).

Critical approaches to discourse and language-use have deconstructed the social construction of power and the legitimising of hegemonic texts from a macro perspective, seeded often from the work of Marx or Foucault. Fairclough and Wodak have developed a form of Critical Discourse Analysis from which key public texts (the fruits of public organisation in many respects) are attended to; the process making explicit many of the unexamined assumptions and power-making discursive structures embodying the text and its social situations of reference (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). The role of ideology is rooted through the functionality of Discourse<sup>28</sup> in ways that mark the mediating connections and processes of its production. In this sense, critical discourse analysis is clearly identified as a socially engaged or positioned practice. The concerns of the method are social problems (especially of disempowerment) and reflexive attention is paid to its own interpreting assumptions and practices – it is located as a form of 'social action' (Titscher et al., 2000). There are also functional approaches to discourse that study how it *becomes* systems of organisation and institution. These are also socially *concerned* methods of critical

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<sup>28</sup> Fairclough distinguishes 'discourse' as talking practice that formulates such constructs as 'style' and 'genre' from the capitalised, 'Discourse' which embodies ideology at a macro, or Societal level.

analysis but they tend to focus attention on localised discursive practices and particular events, including language-choice on grammatical terms (Eggins, 2004, Harrison and Young, 2004, Halliday, 1985, 1978).

Taking these approaches to the learning situation into account, there is a necessity to make at least their orientation, if not their methods, accessible for organising practice. If the critical approach is to become beneficial as organisational learning, means of translation are required. The principles and *Figure of Practical Learning* may be a useful starting point for a different kind of learning conversation in the contexts of development-aid and public organisation, exploring the ecology and dialogic process of any topic will quickly render access to the priorities, social and ordering assumptions that give a series of activities their shape and direction, and teleology. To be concrete, the assumption of public organisation-ordering is that civil servants are in some fashion *a-political*, functionaries of received policy or decision-making. The ‘epistemological breach’ (Derrida, 1976) is silently practiced here – technical discourse gives political discourse no shape.

Returning to a term explored earlier with Aristotle’s categorisation of knowledge, the category of poetics (poiesis) offers a possible path for embodying such critique in ways that public organisation may be able to bear. Poiesis<sup>29</sup> is to ‘create’ – linked with an excellence of tekne or craftship – so a practical link exists as a way to go-on from current understandings. Beyond technical accomplishment or excellence (tekne) there is crafting or artistry. Poetics function according to principles of transition for which the text is always informal, always unfixed, always open to changing interpretations (Levin, 1999) – it is a matter of constant flux or balanced-instability. Understanding this mode of knowing/unknowing, often explored with aesthetic practices and processes of embodiment and artifaction, as a means of exploring desire and concern, and knowing how to learn with the unstable-‘text’, as it were, is to ‘communicate by crossing barriers’ (Bakhtin, 1981: 424) when ‘crossing’ becomes a practical feature of the fix/flux of organising practice. The ‘category’ of poiesis offers forms of language-use (with an aesthetic tradition) that holds *context* close to focus or attention. It may open paths to forms of organisational learning that are practical in ways that can account for the fixing and flexing nature of the surface-text that is organising practice, a way for ‘successful organizing that establishes the grounds for disorganization’ (Gergen et al., 2004: 51).

Since the *forcing* of discourse, whether localised as language-use, or ideologised as ‘Discourse’, is essentially multivocal, a ‘heteroglossia’ (to use Bakhtin’s term) (1981) making the centripetal/centrifugal flow of text/ualisation take place; a form of organisational learning for the

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<sup>29</sup> The knowledge of making, shaping, creating (Liddell and Scott, 1891)

Common Good and the inclusion of voices requires imaginative epistemological practices that can de-couple from the dominant bureaucratic ‘iron cage’ (Weber, 1978) model/discourse of organisation that tends towards, ‘monologue as an unevenly distributed form of dialogue’ (Gergen et al., 2004: 50) – ostensibly a contradictory phrase. New spaces must be generated as discursive practices.

Once again, taking the tack of building or going-on from current expectations and imaginings, the path of τέχνη (tekne) as craft might enable a ‘space’ for ‘crossing barriers’. The term can be helpfully understood as a sub-category of διανοία (dianoia) or ‘discursive reasoning’ (Stewart, 1892) whereby Aristotle’s organisation of knowledge types or practices is understood as pivoting about discursive and intuitive reasoning (νοῦς – nous) as the core relating process. A sort of hierarchy of knowing ensues from tekne to episteme, which with phronesis, as noted above, generates sofia or wisdom. The key point being that tekne is a starting point that can be recognised but moved-on from. Forms of learning practice that are intelligible to organisers and managers, albeit in-tune with dialogic and many-voiced approaches are important (Clegg et al., 2006).

### *Foucault’s Heterotopia*

Starting with existing practice and exploring a practical-poetics suggests a metaphorical approach to exploring changes of language-use and organising practice. The *Figure of Practical Learning* offers a frame to potentialise a changed conversation or narrative about any given topic, task or predicament. Metaphor offers one path of ‘crossing’ or enabling a context that can generate liminal, unusual or irregular places for listening and learning to the feedback that ‘does not follow’. As an exploratory example of a metaphor for such learning work Foucault’s analysis ‘Of Other Spaces’ (1984) offers opportunity. These are spaces that lie ‘outside the walls’ or beyond the functional normality of societal life and can be likened somewhat to the notion of epistemological symmetry used here and understood to formally underpin any notion of knowledge<sup>30</sup>. These ‘Other Spaces’ are called ‘heterotopias’, echoing Bakhtin’s ‘heteroglossic’ view, while also acting as a powerful trope for exploring new ‘spaces’ as legitimate ‘places’ of practical learning – the *topical* and *topographical* resonances are also helpful with this term. The presencing of ‘heterotopias’ as ‘other’, ‘unusual’ or even ‘strange’ places would be an indicative sign (par excellence) of a learning organisation with high imaginability.

Foucault associates the heterotopia with common articles (the mirror as reflex) and concrete places that function in some fashion as ‘other’ for Society by taking that society ‘out of itself’, or

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<sup>30</sup> Symmetry is an ‘imagined abstraction’ generated by the experience of ‘experience’.

out of its customs and habits in a sense – the cemetery, the theatre, the cinema, the garden, library, museum, and as a chronologically ‘other’ space, a time out of time, the festival. Six functional principles for the heterotopia are identified. Firstly, the heterotopia bears the liminality of ‘no place’ (it is a place of crisis and deviation); secondly, its function in society or culture can change; thirdly, the heterotopia juxtaposes sites that in themselves are incompatible; fourthly, this ‘space’ is linked to ‘slices in time’ – heterochronies – but breaks with traditional time; fifthly, the heterotopia presupposes a system of opening and closing that isolates and makes it penetrable; and finally, this space has a function in relation to all space that remains. In this sense heterotopia are spaces of illusion or compensation, i.e., are perfect ‘other places’. The heterotopia might be imagined as the ‘learning organisation’ or even ‘development’ in a way more generative and workable-with than the ‘typology’, or the reported, ‘best practice’ – forms of imaginative relating that can generate hard and disempowering S/O relations between what is practiced and what is imagined and desired.

‘The ship is the heterotopia par excellence’, according to Foucault, since ‘[t]he boat is a floating piece of space’ and linked to the seaport as a place of opportunity and access to passage. ‘In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates’ (Foucault, 1984: 7) – a description evocative of comments about the controlling and negatively oblique tendencies of managerial and organising practice (Grey and Garsten, 2001, Contu et al., 2003). The notion of a ship as ‘a floating piece of space’ is a good metaphor for holding (as a learning resource) a source of reflexivity, feedback and recontextualisation to hand. This space acts as a (no) place to go (to) when the context needs to surface information that is present and functional and thereby encountered (or sensed) in some fashion but as yet (in time) not fully apparent, contextualised or acknowledged. In the curious dialectic of learning, ‘what’ or ‘however’ is emerging is not really ‘real’ – or does not matter – until such time (and place) that ‘whatever is mattering’ is acknowledged, *made-real* or *realised*. There is a space at the heart of this construction where *something* is present, although not present, where the acts of attending and responding are simultaneous in themselves and to making what matters, what is ‘real’. This is the curious process of be(com)ing. The heterotopic nature of the *festival* as ‘moving time’ is another useful metaphor for these new learning ends. A festival is fun, attractive – an other place that one would want to be from time to time. Derrida’s sense of the instability of boundaries, of how loose they are in fact, compliments the heterotopia. Boundaries or borders are simply ways of knowing, interpretive devices for knowing *this*, while at the same ‘time’ not knowing *that* – and they are greatly enhanced when we know how to open and close them, like doors that save us time and effort (Latour, 1995).

## Part V: The Figure of Practical Learning

### *Principles for Practical Learning and a New Topography of the Learning Organisation*

In order for praxis, as a form of learning practice that is organisationally practical – that is, efficient and good – to become present for the unfolding ends of bi- and multilateral development-aid, the aspiration of ‘learning contextually’ or according to a deuterio-learning rationale requires translation into demonstrable dimensions. The *Figure of Practical Learning* developed here – according to consideration of the process of learning as integral to be(com)ing, the relating of ontology/epistemology – gives rise to ‘titles’ or ‘names’ for practical learning, as well as their syntax or relating process, in other words a *practical language* with which to describe the movements of learning as collective or organising processes as a new syntax of organisational learning with terms for a new grammatology of practical learning. These ‘names’ arise from four observations made about ‘learning as Irish Aid’ through the various methods of describing that have been carried out for this thesis. They are observations that expand or detail in a formal sense a description of con/text dynamics, they are presented as principles that can guide the on-going practice of organisational learning according to a contextual view of the same.

Firstly, learning is **ecological** – that is, determined according to the ‘logic’ of relations, whether pressing ‘matters to hand’ or social concerns. Secondly, learning is **pragmatic** – that is, practiced with the media, or resources to hand, especially language (syntax) and thus conditioned and embodying. This is the ‘logic’ of *use*. Thirdly, learning is **topical** – that is, driven or boundaried by perceptions made according to the ‘matters to hand’, pressing exigency or good desired. That which ‘figures’ is emergent according to desire. This is the ‘logic’ of purpose. And finally, learning is **dialogic** – that is, in two senses at least, formalised *across* logics that interplay, and formalised as *spoken-thought*<sup>31</sup>. This is the grounding ‘logic’ teleological and abstracting – always in flux, commonly imagined as stable. As a simple demonstration of such, note that Irish Aid ‘formalisation’ (for example as ‘policy definition’) is practiced by way of intertextualising the languages of development specialists, general/civil service managers and diplomats – a conversation of apparent disorder (according to informants) that presents in public discourse as fixed and sustained positioning.

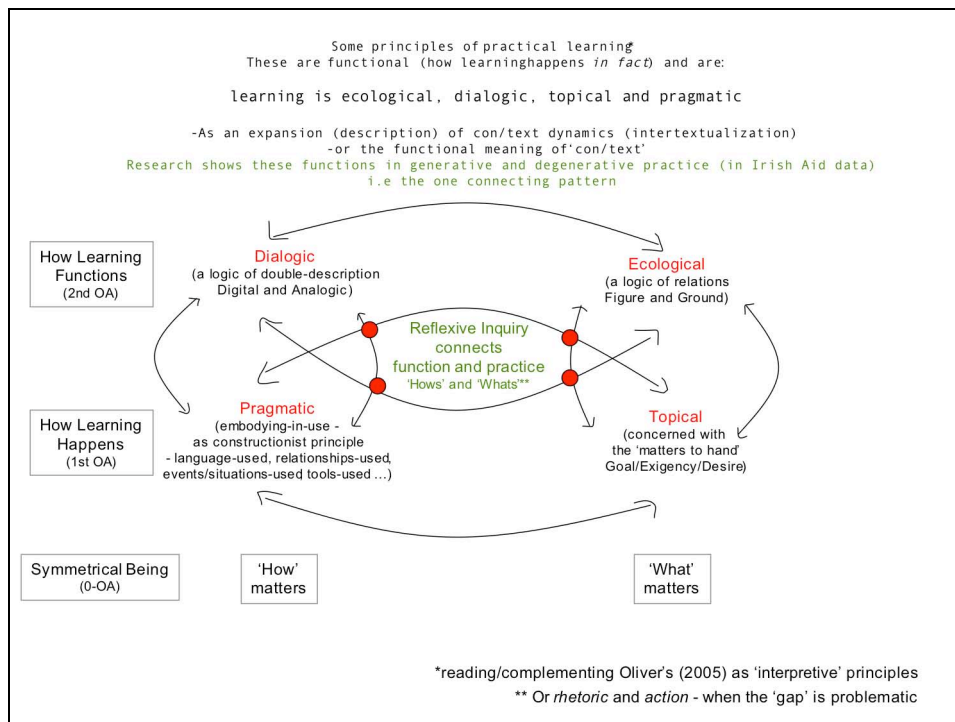
As Kolb has outlined a language and image (Graph No. 2) for contextualising learning as ‘experience’ (1984), so here the intention is to outline a language for contextualising learning as ‘organising practice’. Much of the organisational learning literature focusses learning work, organisational enquiry, on ‘problems’ that need to be solved. The approach throughout this work

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<sup>31</sup> Tracing somewhat the overall definition of the learning process as ‘dialectic’ in accordance with Heidegger’s analysis of the relating process of logos/legein (1973)

has been to discover and define the grounds upon which an everyday, in every-practice type of ‘practical learning’ can be established on deuterological terms. Since such a form of organisational learning is less problem-centred and more contextually defined, attention is duly placed on the environmental factors of organising life – in general terms, the ‘hows’ of practice, not only ‘technical hows’ but also ‘practical hows’ in the Aristotelian sense of practical knowledge and wisdom for which the capacity to demonstrate (episteme) is balanced with the capacity to act for the good (phronesis) (Aristotle, 1976). For this project such ‘hows’ have been explored as ‘textualising processes’ – as organisational story, exigency pressing and language-used – what comes to matter for learning from this contextualising perspective are the practices and embodiments of style, fashion and feature; an indirect language of learning ‘whose’ syntactical work is subtle, and therefore critical. It is a functionality or ‘working’ that is a slight step ‘out’ from the processing of Being-itself – ‘the most universal concept [that is] the darkest of all’ (Heidegger, 1973: 23).

Graph No. 20 presents these emerging principles, understood as ‘interpretive principles’ (Oliver, 2005) for re-imagining the organisational learning process set out according to the functional relating pattern of ‘how’ and ‘what’ matters or concerns. As can be seen, *what* matters for learning are the topical and ecological connections made, and *how* these matters are connected (related) depends on the dialogic and pragmatic ways in which learning is *worked*. Mapping the levels of learning discourse onto this graphic, we see that how learning functions (its ‘logic’ or process) is dialogic and ecologic, while how learning happens in practice is pragmatic and topical. There is no ‘gap’ between function and practice – except maybe to note that functional learning is generative, while learning that is happening in ways that do not count the full nature of the process (the sort of analysis made above of behavioural approaches to organisational learning) is ultimately degenerative, in the sense that it is ‘incomplete’ as a consideration of the environment that matters and thus eventually making the organisation obsolete. Implicit to this ‘levels’ or ‘logical types’ understanding of the learning process is the imagined space of symetricality – a sort of unformed ground without dimension that makes asymetricality or knowledge possible (Matte Blanco, 1975, Dalal, 1998). This idea in another language can be called, ‘Nothingness’ as the necessary ground of Being (Heidegger, 1949c)



Graph 20 – From Principles of Practical Learning to Topical/Dialogic

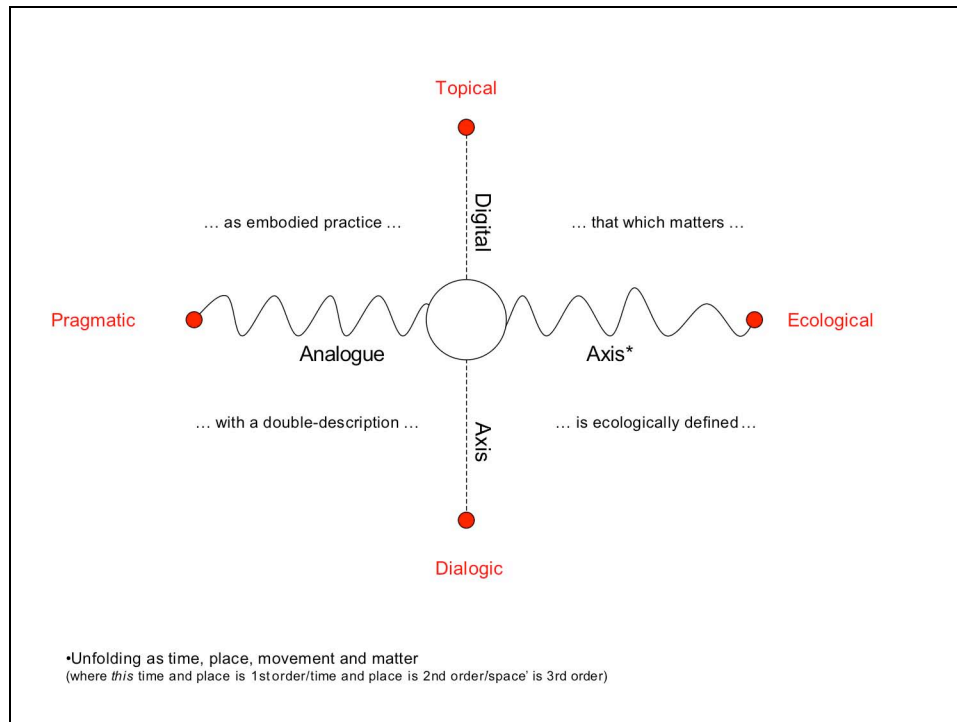
– Ecological/Pragmatic Movements as Relating Processes

The figure emerging with Graph No. 20, according to the rubrics of 'how/what' and logical-type distinctions, might look like a rugby-ball or an eye. As a figure for practical learning this is quite felicitous since rugby is a game that functions on a-priori and a-posteriori action principles for success. Moving forwards is achieved by throwing the ball (the critical focus, that which matters as the topic-in-hand!) *backwards*. And in order for this paradoxical practice to function-to-end, the relations in place and time (the motion of the players) need to be coherent to a high degree. When the ball is thrown backwards, the player behind needs to be running forwards at just the right pace and distance, and when excellently done this can mean 'missing' the on-coming tackle, pre-empting the strike as it were, breaking the line and running with the ball unhindered. It may be the complexity and precision of such a movement that makes the game, well played, so exciting. Rugby is, in this sense, a more sophisticated or complex game than soccer for example, since soccer, although a game of collaboration, strategy and high skill, is unidirectional in its basic functionality.

The figure that follows from the 'rugby-ball' with Graph No. 21 is generated by marking the dialectical relations between the functions or practices. This is achieved by acknowledging the particular nature of the connectedness between how-functions (at first and second levels of abstraction) and how/what matters as noted above. The 'matters' are those topics of focus that matter (i.e., are important and so 'in-focus') that always matter in some *way*, i.e. what matters



always matters *somehow* (as process and end). The ground of all this relational processing is ‘symmetrical being’ – all the rest is in the realm of *becoming*. The symmetrical realm is a formal necessity for becoming – even as an imagined figure – since its ‘presence’ functions as the source of difference, randomness, unfolding, chaos, complexity, whatever way it is termed – ‘it’ is the experience of being always on the inside and seeing only some parts at a time.



Graph 21 – The Figure of Practical Learning

Graph No. 21 is designated as the formal *Figure of Practical Learning*, and stands as a heuristic device for making a *Topography of Organisational Learning* review, as suggested with earlier Chapters.

#### *Describing the Topography of Organising Practice as an Instrument of Practical Learning*

As a way of literally ‘typing with text’ this *Figure* of new syntax, the term, ‘ecological-pragmatic/topical-dialogic’ is generated. It represents the topographical figure of learning or meaning-making relations in practice, and can function as a useful process-guide for the review or valuation<sup>32</sup> of any learning landscape as ‘organisation’. One can ask what *topics* are featuring as

<sup>32</sup> Taking away the ‘e’ in order to foreground an appreciative lens and disturb the more commonly contextualised interpretation of this word-item.

talked texts<sup>33</sup> in any order – giving insight around who's and what concerns are mattering or being made to matter. One can further explore the *ecology* of a topic<sup>34</sup> which will generate insight around how the organisation is functioning in the processing of the relations<sup>35</sup> that are mattering in that context and thus thickening the complexity of the view.

This expansion of ecology begins to indicate the 'forming' going-on. One is thereby asking questions about and with the *dialogic* that makes meaning operational – makes meaning the energy of action and experimentation, that which grounds conviction and risk-taking – all processes of direction-generation. The *dialogic-in-use* is the formal order of organisation and is a phenomena of second-order abstraction (as is the *topical* movement). Questions that can offer insight around the dialogic of organisation might be, 'Which are the registers-in-use?', that is, what 'language-games' are prioritised in the forms of language that are getting chosen; 'What stories in the tradition are mostly valued by telling, and by whom ...?' and 'How or when are they being narrated?' as points of cohesion (Gergen et al., 2004); or even, to take a more formally analytic approach, by examining the official texts of organisation that orientate and operationalise organisational actions, using a lens of critique on the explicit logic espoused therein; possibly comparing or exploring that logic with the processes that made such texts in the first instance.

Finally, and the starting point of any enquiry, is the exploration of the *pragmatics* of any order, that which *is*, the 'done thing' or the practice-in-use. The approach here of course is none other than the topographical method itself (in any other figure, format or language also) whereby one begins noticing and naming the topics that are mattering, and moving towards an ecological review of those topics ... and onwards. This is also why the process, in any 'itself', can only really be followed and made by members. This is because their matters, and process of processing (the interpretation of) those matters is all that matters anywhere or anytime<sup>36</sup>. This is also the reason why the conclusion that *participation* is the practical or functional definition of any 'better' or

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<sup>33</sup> Including written, or even canonical texts (especially for enduring organisation such as established church or highly formalised discipline such as medicine or law in which core texts are referenced continually in new contexts of pastoral and disciplinary practice).

<sup>34</sup> Whether theme or process – although all 'organisational themes' are processual in nature

<sup>35</sup> Read interpersonally, as group dynamics or in epistemological terms as interpretive practices.

<sup>36</sup> And the negation of this fact in theory/practice is the source of most societal predicaments and conflicts – what is exceptionally challenging nonetheless is the generation of workable processes of participation for large and complex systems. Whatever becomes possible must be functionally coherent, i.e. what/however is workable will be an inclusive and systemic (bigger than political) process of becoming. We must also not limit or be afraid of our imagination in this regard; anything is (and needs to be) possible.

‘more’ in any case, is so<sup>37</sup>. Participation is the condition for attuned or coherent practice becoming possible – and not simply participation of people, but also an *inclusive consideration* of all the features of any process or system<sup>38</sup>. As valuation of organisation, which is a sort of baseline review that is already (in its practice) an action of going-on in a certain way, a critical overview of the topographical detail is generated in asking after the qualities of overall dialectic – these qualities might be defined as imaginability and decidability. For *organisation* such abilities are intertextual, social and thus praxial processes.

This coherence of method and function (or nature)<sup>39</sup> is also why the role of the relational practitioner is that of ‘guide’ in the process. What the relational practitioner sees, like any guide, is the path. The relational practitioner does not see the detail of the case or the journey – these are the details that must be lived and contextualised *with* members, principally *for* members’ concerns and desires. Everyone knows that ‘the devil is in the detail’ so that to misunderstand details is decadent and perilous. But ‘devils’ can also become angels<sup>40</sup>, ghosts, phantasms or zombies<sup>41</sup> (to play with the metaphor a little) – whatever way we express and use the notion, the *detail* is what substantially matters; mostly to those for whom it matters. The difference from method to matter<sup>42</sup> is one of leverage; when method, good method, empowers in very great ways.

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<sup>37</sup> Thus placing ‘efficiency’ and ‘effectiveness’ as sub-categories of good or even ‘best’ practice (which is always an imagined space).

<sup>38</sup> Meaning ‘as many as possible’, since a consideration of ‘all’ features is beyond our nature and capacity.

<sup>39</sup> Bateson’s ‘necessary unity’ of mind and nature, of epistemology and ontology (2002).

<sup>40</sup> The Old Testament as Hebrew Tradition has interesting explorations of the roles of angels (messengers) and devils (i.e. the dialogue partners of Job in his predicament of misery for example). The difference seems to be in the nature of the message being communicated, where that difference seems to be necessary for the life-giving journey of the protagonist in some fashion.

<sup>41</sup> Playful metaphoric work with a group or organisation might use these items to generate detailed views of ‘ghostly practice’ – practice stuck between worlds where no cross communication is possible, ‘phantasmic-practice’ – practice generating and generated by some ‘dark presence’ or ‘suggestive power’, ‘zombie-practice’ – practices of the living-dead, ways of going-on that are closed off from change and life-blood etc. This game could be linked to Derrida’s ‘spectres’ and the ‘companionship of ghosts’ (Payne and Schad, 2003: 189) for which there is companionship with those who have no bread (com-pane) by way of the anaculouthon, the ‘not/following’ – since com-pan-ionship in this case would be no-com/pane, i.e., a bread of ghosts.

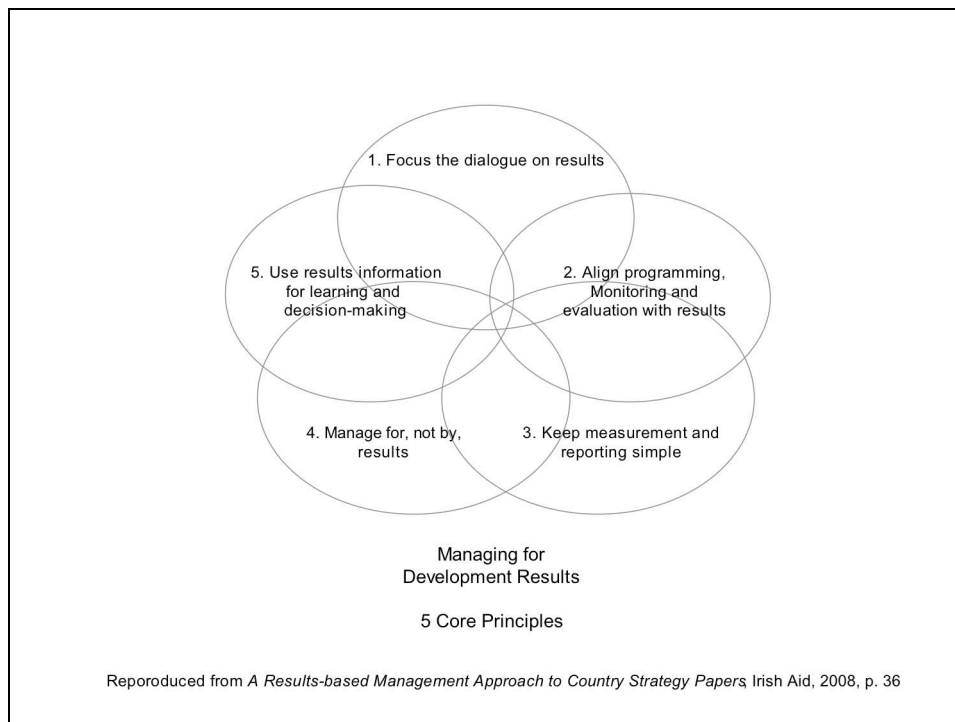
<sup>42</sup> Not ‘between’ but ‘along’ – imagine a sort of ‘distance’, the ‘distance from method to matter and back’

*Describing the Text of Results Based Management from the Figure of Practical Learning*

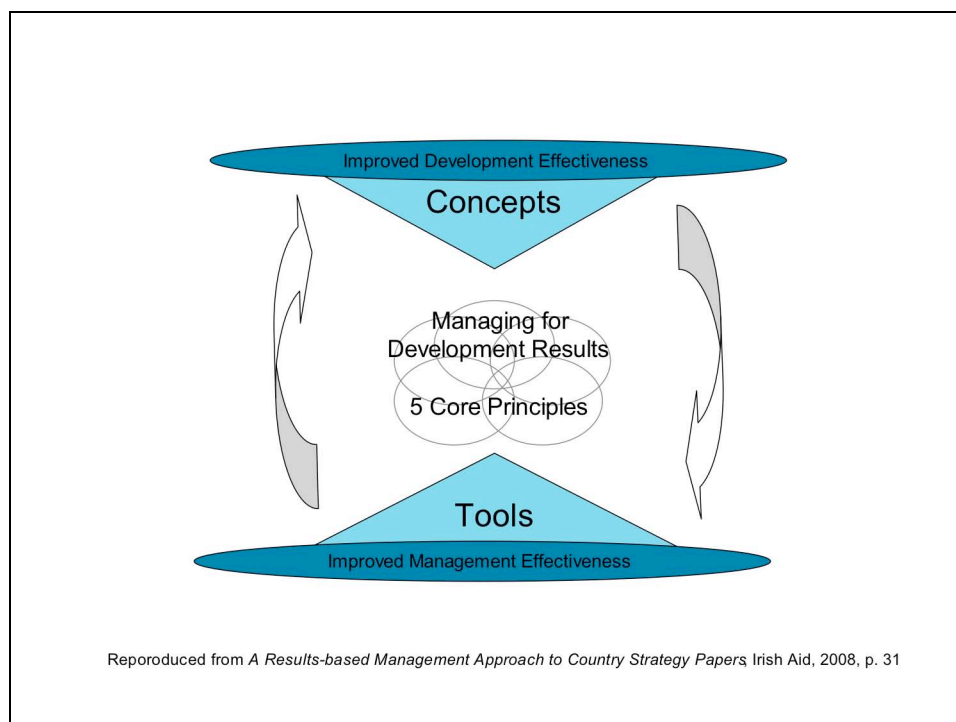
The topographical form of reading organisational learning according to the principles of practical learning figured syntactically – or as relating processes – is now explored in two ways. First a sample reading of the logic of Results Based Management – as outlined with the Irish Aid text to guide the strategic planning of CSPs (Irish Aid, 2008a) – shows how a linear logic generates the ‘gap-type’ interpretive practice that informants displayed when talking about their organising experiences. Secondly, by using the *Figure of Practical Learning*, the connecting pattern of Irish Aid as embodied with the relating processes of Head Office and Field is shown. Of note here is the tendency of the organising practice (according to structuring design) to produce centrifugal signals from Head Office, and centripetal signals from the Field. This is not surprising, but it does offer insight as to how changes with these patterns or practices might be explored for the task of decentralising decision-making and responsibility to Programme Countries.

The dialectics of practical learning suggest not only *that* but *how* learning can be coherent – aligning function (nature and ontology) with action (method and epistemology) and vice-versa – by learning to learn according to ecological, topical, dialogic and pragmatic principles/syntax. This approach is fundamentally different to the Irish Aid, OECD espoused model of learning which is based on five core ‘results-based’ principles (Irish Aid, 2008a, OECD and Worldbank, 2005). These suffer from a confusion in logical-typing which will continually generate the ‘gap’ experiences so often reported in the literature (and in research data). This is because *that* which is analogic is imagined on the same axis as *that* which is digital; which is a (presumably implicit) strategy that serves donors’ needs to upwardly account first and foremost.

Graphs No. 22, 23 and 24 reproduce from a key Irish Aid text (Irish Aid, 2008a) the imagining of the results-based principles with some of the imagery of operationalisation.

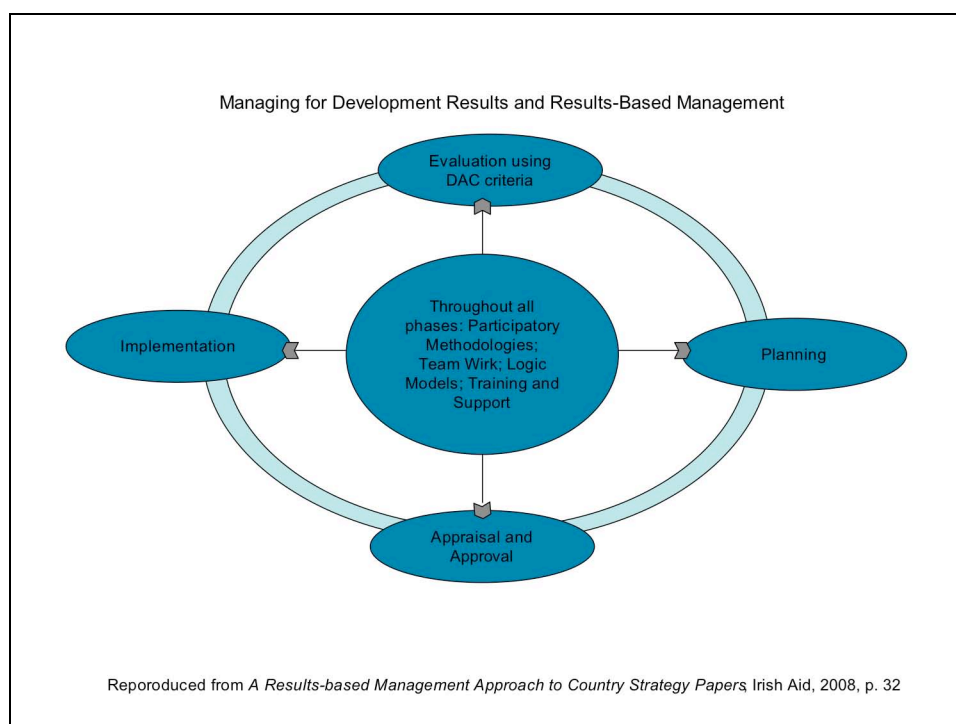


*Graph 22 – Managing for Development Results with 5 Core Principles*



*Graph 23 – Concepts and Tools Situated on the Management for Development Results Frame*

As can be seen here (Graph No. 23), ‘concepts’ are vertically-related to ‘tools’ (Irish Aid, 2008a: 31), and ‘planning’ horizontally-related to ‘implementation’ (Irish Aid, 2008a: 32) (Graph No. 24), and the logical model is generally imaged as unidirectional (Irish Aid, 2008a: 39).



*Graph 24 – Management for Development Results and Results-Based Management*

From a deuterio-learning perspective, concepts are figurative and timeless, whereas tools are ecological, processual and useable (thus implicating time and place, ie., becoming and change); ‘planning’, as ‘a plan’<sup>43</sup> is also figurative and timeless, while implementation is processual and particular, contextual (equally meaning on-going change and complexity). Finally logical models suffer from the fallacy of what Bateson would call, entropy without negentropy (2002), or positivist assumptions, that is, a limited processing of teleological purpose that does not take sufficient account of the empirical and experiential nature of practice (call that ‘development’, ‘learning’ or even ‘existence’ itself) in which knowing/knowledge is grounded. Maybe the physical re-location of development specialists into the capital cities of the developing world (from which they need to venture ‘out’ for ‘reality checks’ – that are increasingly difficult to make time for – and the related methods for keeping in touch with relationships on the ‘ground’ with ‘immersions’ (Irvine et al., 2006) (for example) are symptomatic of the drive for harmonisation that is made inversely paradoxical by means of methods that make such a quality of life (harmonisation) increasingly difficult to experience in practice.

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<sup>43</sup> ‘Planning’ is of course a series of actions in time and place – thus the activity is analogue – experiential, social and on-going ...

To use an abstracted code, there is confusion here about the difference between digital and analogic signalling. There are many effects of this confusion including the ‘lacks’ that people talk about in organisation, the frustrating and perhaps disempowering experiences that accompany the mental gymnastics required in order to ‘fill-in’ all the boxes of the logical model – a challenge possibly beyond some groups or cultures who make knowledge differently, thus excluding or subverting them from necessary opportunities and resources, to name a few.

Perhaps as a counter-balance the voices that critique this form of modelling are constructing a social milieu or *sensus fidei* that rejects this dominant experience of abstraction and alienation from the development process. In this ‘space’ the development project can be considered a failure, abandoned or criticised in ways that contribute little and serve only to demoralise those who have hoped, and continue to work towards making a contribution in the first place. It seems that development-aid organisations intuitively know this as expressed with their concerns to communicate and educate the public about the development process, with the ways in which that story is often told in simplified fashion, i.e., a story of a concrete difference made, and the nervousness at times with a policy such as General Budget Support which is deemed less palatable as a story to be told.

### *On Irish Aid Core Predicaments as Practical Learning*

It was pointed out earlier that Irish Aid works with an ‘ambiguous goal’ in the sense that ‘poverty reduction’ is relative and not definitively within the gift of Irish Aid efforts. It is a goal that the Organisation participates *with*. From an organisational learning perspective this creates a situation of on-going predicament – two core predicaments to be precise. These can be described as managing an ‘unknown that matters on moral terms’ with many participants (or stakeholders) and complex stake situations. Secondly, it is doing this as an ‘un-ending pattern’ or task. For a situation of no ‘end’ the grounding-telos (purpose) needs to be re-imagined continually with practical learning actions as a function, not of ‘ends’ or ‘results’ but of *process*. The teleology of Irish Aid’s predicament is rightly ordered (i.e. is coherent) to processual rather than product-type ‘ends’. Groome, exploring ‘praxis’, says that the purpose of phronesis is on-going action (i.e. a good in itself), phronesis is conduct in such a way that, ‘the end of praxis is more praxis’ (1980a: 175)

The idea of processual ‘ends’ going-on as constant ends, as ‘good’ insofar as *practiced*, evokes notions of ‘end’ or ‘purpose’ as ‘necessary cause’ according to a phronetic rationale. A sort of ‘continuation’, ground or resilient-situation that goes-on might be imagined. ‘Results’ as ‘product-type ends’ are of a different logical type to processual ends. Processual ends are conditional (context/culture/structure/order/organisation), while products as ends are circumscribed. It is

short-sighted to focus only on either conditional or defined end states since with the narrow perspective of definition many ecological changes will be missed. The Organisation will be blinkered to the ground that is always moving. Defined ends (results) are a 'class of outcomes' while conditional ends (on-going and constructive) are a 'class of a class of outcomes'. What is key is the fundamental intertextual nature of the relational process between defined and conditional ends. To slightly twist Machiavelli's famous political statement, the end *explains* the means and vice-versa as an ontology of becoming. Means go-to ends go-to means with an unending cycle that is con/text.

This interpretation generates 'results' as complex ends to be 'received' according to a trito-learning rationale, and for which much attention needs to be focussed on 'something else'. A discourse of Results Based Management is taken-up formally by Irish Aid as the order of change-management (intentional and environmental change), while intuitively (lived as relationships, on the ground, culture, historical precedent, identity of pride) the organisation is organic with change-processing. The unobjectified objectifying relations generated and generating the ways these tools are used relationally constructs a presence of imagined 'gaps' as Irish Aid's learning discourse and processes, as barriers and auto-generated resistances or defences to emancipatory learning practice. While the CSP Review Process shows the institutional willingness and commitment to change the conditionalities of normal practice, this organisational action comes as a somewhat automatic response to a stabilised hegemonic approach operational as a larger sphere (boundaried with the DAC Process for example) which Irish Aid seeks to be a participant with and continue to become a legitimised player. Wittgenstein's notion of language-games suggests that to become proficient with the results-approach is to have a voice for that conversation or discourse. The critically reflexive (identity forming) move is to be able for the discourse, but to also see it by way of 'another context' – a learning and organising practice that may be unique.

The instrumental discourse (including Fairclough's sense of 'Discourse' as societal narrative (2001)) of 'effective aid' is constructed ecologically/pragmatically with an incomplete or overly simplistic approach that essentially serves donor's needs for accountability. The generation of digital signal, what becomes as the topic/dialogic relating process is reductive. The sphere of relevance is a more complex pattern of relationships than the cycle of relationships figured with an order of efficient causes such as with hierarchy as an organisational model. It is a Newtonian imagination that understands cause/effect relations as colliding forces. One might rightly ask about 'relevant aid' rather than 'efficient aid', which provokes the questions, 'Relevant to whom?' and 'How relevant?'. The imagination of effective aid when generated as an instrumental end may be the last great charge of the 'engineers' – now in positions of high management in



organisations such as the OECD and World Bank. This production-driven, analytically-designed and technical discourse has dominated and shaped development-aid since it was invented in the 1940s marked by ‘imaginative sterility’ (Sachs, 1992: 2). The rise and articulation of ‘effective aid’ with the protocols of Rome and Paris and all their operationalising instruments, probably carries within the seeds of its own destruction – that is the solely technical view of development-aid – not as irrelevant – but as overly hegemonic and legitimised as the dominant discourse of what is ‘aid’ and ‘development’ and how these goals or ‘results’ are to be achieved.

The necessary conclusion is simply that the ways of knowing of those working for their own development need to be integral to that process – this is another manifestation of Bateson’s fundamental insight that mind and nature are a necessary unity (2002). This ecological and critical tradition is not alien to the development-aid project (Eade, 2003) as with the participatory methods and critique developed by Chambers (Chambers, 1997, Chambers and Pettit, 2004, Chambers et al., 2001) or the explorations with reflexivity of the ‘Participation Group’ at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in Sussex (eg. Pasteur and Scott-Villiers, 2004). The difficulty seems to be that this connection is broken when the discourse moves into the relational spheres of the major governmental and intergovernmental donors. Their ways of working among themselves are intelligible for them but often are out of tune with their contexts of ‘productive relevance’. Considering the rise of planning as ‘the application of scientific and technical knowledge to the public domain’ that ‘lent legitimacy to, and fuelled hopes about, the development enterprise’, Escobar notes that ‘[e]pistemologically and politically, the Third World is constructed as a natural-technical object that has to be normalized and moulded through planning to meet the ‘scientifically ascertained’ characteristics of a development society’ (1992: 132, 136).

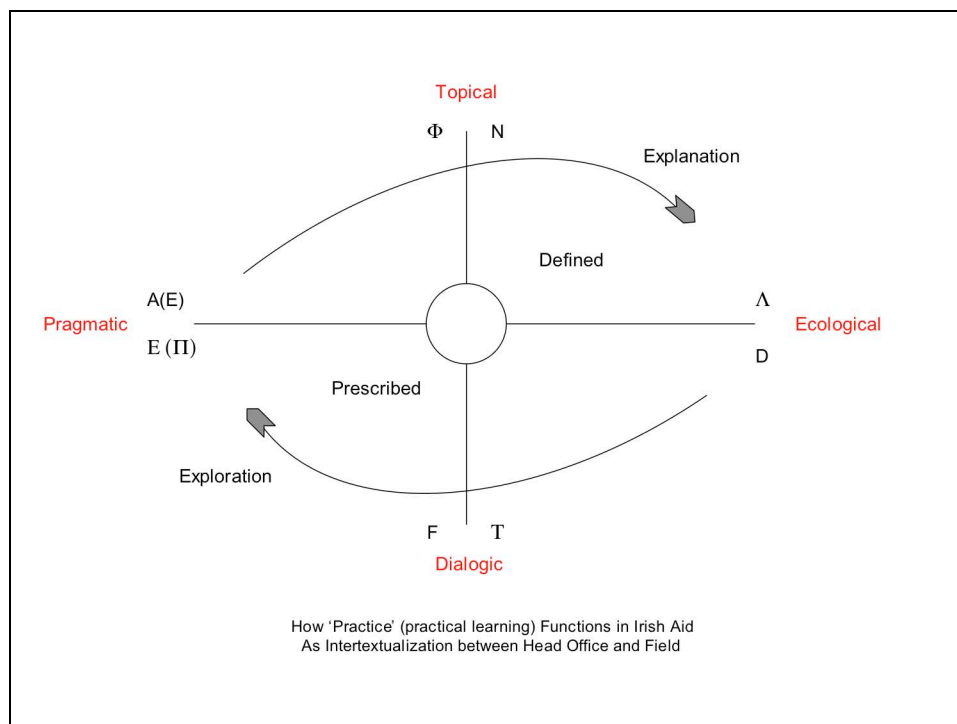
### *The Pattern that Connects as Irish Aid – The Relating Process of ‘HQ/Field’*

Either/Or binary differentiation is the base or paradigmatic figure that continually presents with interpretive practice (including imagining/logging/defining) as Irish Aid, while the practical learning pattern as a functional practice is a more complex relating form. One of the general questions arising from analysis of language-use is, ‘How do changes in ways of working come about?’ Reading the relating patterns of communication and the intertextualising processes that generate the connections or sense of cohesion as ‘Irish Aid’ across various geographic locations, an experiential learning pattern is mapped according to the *Figure of Practical Learning*.

According to this frame the practices of forming a text such as a CSP are *explored* (E to P) in the ‘Field’ in dialogue with donor partners, civil society organisations and programme country governments. In fact this exploration manifests a dialogic form, although with limitations. From

participant research-practice work in PC-A it was clear that participation in a meeting or process was undertaken in order to influence and bring one's focus to bear. 'Participation' was uniformly imagined as rhetorical<sup>44</sup>. The knowledge generated from such Field explorations are *explained* (P to E) in dialogue with/for HQ in various reporting moves. The conversation is then *defined* (T to D) in ecological description by HQ (designing, fixing and sanctioning tools, instruments, guidelines) in relation to/with the Field. Such instruments or policies are *prescribed* (D to T) in pragmatic articulation (textualisation, formalisation) by HQ in relation to/with the Field.

With this pattern the first two dialectic movements are driven by the Field and are dialogic (lateral and centripetal), while the second two dialectic movements are driven by Head Office and are topical (lateral and centrifugal). It is important to note that the pattern with all its movements is a dialectic intertextualisation – this means that 'definition' is generated about topic with an expansive description, while 'exploration' is generated with dialogue as the beginnings of contractive figuration. This pattern is set out with Graph No. 25 below.



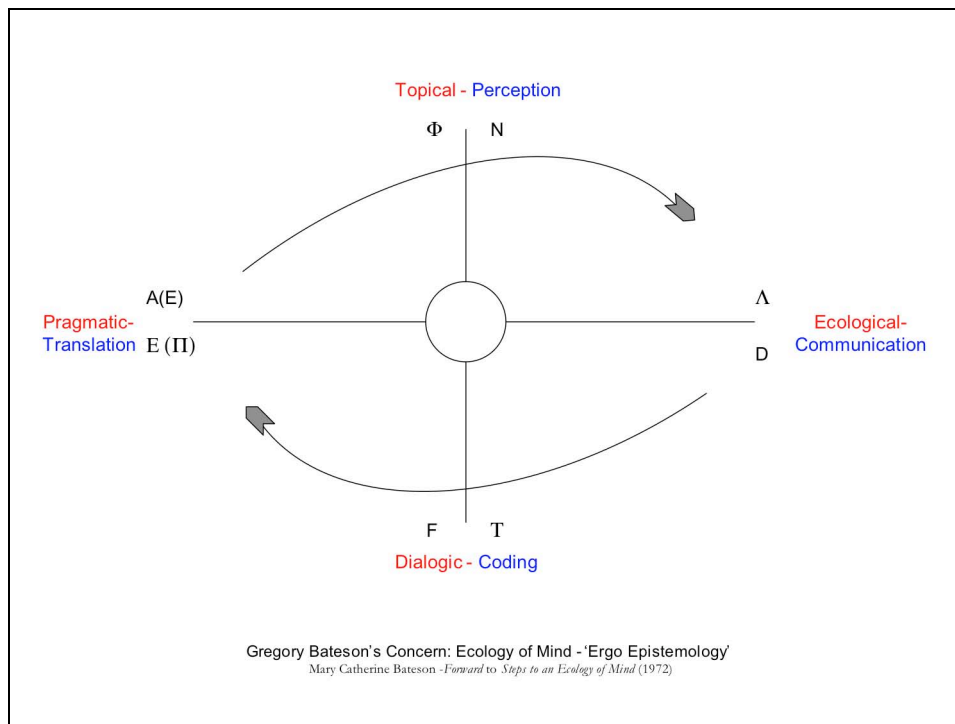
Graph 25 – Practical Functioning as Irish Aid: Relating Processes as HQ/Field

<sup>44</sup> Although interestingly team-members were interested in learning about 'group dynamics' when they heard that I had worked in this area – participant research-practice notes, Field Visit to PC-A.

The complexity-of-positioning embodied with (and embodying) the relating processes of ‘Head Office’ and ‘Field’ thus figured shows how these relating processes are differentiated and defined. The ‘Field’ pushes for changing practice as inherent to the exercises of exploration and explanation. This *forcing* is responded or reacted to with exercises of definition and prescription by ‘Head Office’. This *Figure* does not give us information that we did not already know, but it does help *show* how those processes of contextualisation function and thereby offers a resource for learning and critique. This sort of contextual knowledge is useful with the work of decentralising analysis and decision-making to the ‘Field’ as part of the programme of harmonisation and alignment.

## **Conclusion – An Ecological Epistemology**

Mary Catherine Bateson, reflecting on her father’s work comments that it was always about epistemology – even when throughout his career that fact was often ‘unavailable’, i.e. still unfolding. She shows that his concerns were always about ‘perception, communication, coding and translation. Ergo epistemology’ (Bateson, 1972: xiii). How that epistemology is necessarily ‘recursive’. ‘[B]asic to this epistemology was the differentiation of logical levels, including the relationship between the knower and the known, knowledge looping back as knowledge of an expanded self’ (Bateson, 1972: xiii). This explains why ‘Learning III’ or trito-learning might be ‘dangerous’ for any contained sense of identity, the wider the expansion of knowledge, the less boundaried it becomes or functions. She also states that it ‘is useful to refer to Gregory’s ecology of mind as an epistemological ecology to contrast it with the largely materialistic ecology of academic departments. It seems essential to underline that recursiveness is a necessary feature of such an epistemology (and perhaps of every epistemology, since every effort to know about knowing involves the cat trying to swallow its own tail)’ (Bateson, 1972: xiii-xiv). Graph No. 26 shows this figuring of epistemology along the dialectic relating pattern presented here.



*Graph 26 – Bateson's Concern – Ecological Epistemology*

The core practical rationale of this Chapter, and thesis as a whole, is the recursive epistemology that was Bateson's essential concern. It generated a 'sense of urgency, a sense that the narrow definition of human purposes, reinforced by technology, would lead to irreversible disasters, and that only a better epistemology could save us' (Bateson, 1972: xiv). The reflexive and recursive approach, which no doubt at times leads to a 'swallowing of one's own tail', is to show how an ecological, recursive epistemology is essential, not only for better function, but also for justice, right-relations and the Common Good; the supposed ultimate goal of all development-aid and public organisation practice. Aligned with this purpose, reflexive attention to the research practice itself is for integral knowledge *for* and *with* practical learning as well as *about* the construct.

Language-use is a key 'location', matter or embodiment of the processing that is knowing as a 'way of relating to reality' (Groome, 1980a). Shotter holds that changing language won't necessarily change practice – he tells how he had gone the route of rhetorical language as the path of change, a path that continues to be the focus of much of social constructionism work, but now believes this to be inadequate. He suggests (with a broader understanding of 'language') that 'perceptual rather than cognitive changes are critical' (2008: iii). The approach of the *Figure of Practical Learning* attends to language as used, as practical, as proficient and pliable – but as a terming, a practical syntax that is closely related to our embodied experience of everything – ourselves, each other, the world and importantly, our imaginings with all their instrumentalizations. If we are attempting to become continually aware of our perceiving actions,

then this ecological approach that seeks to map out in some fashion the processing of our relating with the givenness of the world and experience, the textualising, recursive and contingent processing of construction, then this *Figure* is useful as a way of imagining what we might do next. It has the potential to generate information for any 'now' as a sort of 'receptive/practical a-priori' reflexive knowledge as 'another' context. Reflexive enquiry has the potential to bring features of the movements of practical perceiving towards the learning process for changed organising ends.

The empirical exploration by means of descriptive method, as contextualising organisational story (Chapter Four) and pragmatics description (Chapter Five), suggests that a limiting approach to learning is functional with the context of organising practice as Irish Aid. That is, limiting in the sense of 'incomplete' as the term that has been taken up here to mark a mode of learning that remains at a proto-level for its own context of generation. The general conclusion is therefore that the common actions of organising practice for an organisation such as Irish Aid with its exigencies of public accountability, bureaucratic procedures and formal constitution, and according to a hierarchical and specialist division of labour, generates conditions for learning that are inherently myopic. The 'learning of context' will in some ways be always beyond the formal ability of such an organisation insofar as the ordinary, everyday modes and methods (planned and incidental) of learning are unaccounted for. In the language of relational constructionism such features as the practical means by which any thing or how becomes meaning, sense or knowledge are rarely *contextualised* as learning. Contextualisation is organisational learning of a deutero or second-order.

A set of principles for learning with relating practices emerged from the praxis of describing the data and philosophically framing that work. The steps towards a *Figure of Practical Learning* described with this Chapter offer a view of relating processes as learning-cycles that generate a range of knowledges from technical capacity (skill), creativity, practical or political reason to the scientifically-established policies, practices and worldviews that orientate formalised development-aid actions. The series of graphs presented interpret a selection of key theorists (themselves suggested by the literature and methodological reviews) with the rubric of an experiential, contextual approach to learning and sense-making as organisation in order to generate grounds for an epistemology-for-participation. This epistemology establishes conditions whereby diversity and difference can become 'practical' for 'organisation' or for 'learning' on more expansive terms than are currently apparent. It is an epistemology-for/with-action that seems necessary for a world where the practices of exclusion and domination of many 'members' and their ways of making-sense. A situation generating ever-more critical situations of crisis and catastrophe. This must be of critical concern for any development-aid organisation.

This Chapter has been an exploration with and about learning process, imagined cyclically (which is not unusual), particularised by a description of the syntax of the *movements* with a variety of ‘languages’. The moving of the learning-cycle has been considered and graphically explored as energies or tendencies that *move through* each other, generating a raft of relations social, political, organisational, epistemological and meaningful. Thus a distinction is made between the drive for order and ‘sense’, what has been called the digital, fragmenting or categorising signalling force; and the unfolding, given, randomising, always emerging, analogue-surrounding force, different in nature to the drive for order as *the next fact always unavailable*. This means that whatever comes is *not* at the moment of attending<sup>45</sup>. It is the continuous and contingent processing (or moving-through) of these ‘forces’ – of which knowers are constituent factors – not above or below or outside, but always part of the weave itself that makes ‘knowing’ phenomenological. Learning can be imagined in a positivist light making knowledge with an explicit, orienting goal or exigency defined. This orders perception. But the complexity is always generating somehow differently to the ordering for order. It is necessary to learn to ‘order’ with this feature also.

By means of graphic representations of some ideas about ‘being’ and ‘language-use’; about ‘learning processes’ and ‘knowledge types’, about principles for practical learning, an argument is made for new forms of organisational learning that take account of the complex nature of organising practice. This work seeks to be a ‘grammatology of learning processes’ taken-on to boundary and subvert. What new forms might become is as yet unclear, they can only become as experimental, stochastic trial and error for real life situations. There are a variety of exploratory projects in train that seek to proceed on the basis of these types of relational and constructionist principles, reported especially in the social constructionism literature (eg. Bouwen, 1998, Gergen et al., 2004, Blanter and Anderson-Wallace, 2006a), but as yet many of these ways of organising and learning are alien to public organisation.

While initiatives for organisational learning are going-on (Irish Aid has a Knowledge Management Group, has invested in high-end communications technology and is organised for on-going staff training etc.) these activities are generally understood as ancillary and supportive to core tasks such as policy development or strategic planning. What has been attempted here is to nominate such core activities as the learning cycles that matter. The vision of ‘practical learning’ as a term for ‘organisational learning’ is offered as a basis on which to thread attention and

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<sup>45</sup> Quite literally, has no ‘being’. The implication to all of this is that being/becoming is imminent to the process. It is not a Platonic view of ideal forms existing somehow, somewhere, to which the knowledge-making process ‘corresponds’ in the Classic Greek sense. What becomes is always fresh, novel in this sense.

deutero-practice for the core organising actions that embody, give life, coherence, pattern and connectivity to what is called ‘an organisation’.

For the predicaments of our time there is a growing need to learn to organise in a fashion that takes account of, indeed celebrates, what Derrida has called the ‘epistemological breach’ (1976: 80), a necessity that might become a virtue, as moving towards new forms of epistemological participation. This ‘breach’ is present in the very nature of the ‘becoming’ of life and ‘reality’ as has been explored. Deutero-learning is a frame for imagining how such ‘untidynesses’ as that which *does not follow*<sup>46</sup> might become formally relevant features generating the assumptions and explicit principles, concepts, instruments and tools that order practice. Of course, in becoming so, what is untidy is tidied-up and thus digitalised, categorised, showing how and why organisational openness and flexibility can never be tied-down or sewn-up once and for all. Openness is by nature a ‘how’, a context, and therefore a way of be(com)ing which is continually undetermined. In this sense deutero-learning is ultimately an attitude or desire, a form of loose and relatively unboundaried attending. The critical question is how to continually encourage and embody such open attitude for organising practice? As a first, knowing this concern as a critical ‘matter to hand’ takes us some distance. This Chapter has explored how and why this sort of ‘knowledge’ matters<sup>47</sup>. The only practical way of continually embodying openness and flexibility is with forms of reflexive enquiry and so it is to this form of learning that we now turn.

Before doing so though we end with a comment on the *force* that has been the subject of this Chapter, that force of unfolding ‘Being’ which our epistemological presencing makes ‘Becoming’. This is a literary criticism text, a reflection on Virginia Woolf’s novel, *To the Lighthouse*, which captures well the symmetrical nature of the ‘angel in the dark’ that this Chapter, as a sort of ‘Jacob’, has been wrestling with<sup>48</sup>.

‘This force is not the cleaning ladies, Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast, through they share some of its qualities, and this is what lends them resilience when the others are in eclipse. Rather, it is the *irreducible otherness* of Lily Briscoe’s ‘old antagonist, life’

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<sup>46</sup> Noting that Derrida understands this ‘not-following’ as a paradoxical faithfulness, a sort of renewing commitment that needs to continually ‘forget’ in order to make-itself fresh ... (Payne and Schad, 2003)

<sup>47</sup> A contextual rather than propositional knowledge – therefore more rightly phrased as ‘knowing’.

<sup>48</sup> Quoting Woolf again, here explaining why she was interested in the eschewal of plot with her novel, *The Years*, ‘because I think action generally unreal. It’s the thing we do in the dark that is more real’ (The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 6: 122 as quoted in Goldman, 2006: 80) – where the ‘thing we do in the dark’ is the curious relating of givenness and meaning; complex, implicit and textualising, the unfolding and emergent ‘irreducible otherness’ that is noted above.

... What 'Time Passes' celebrates, and acknowledges rather than describes; what resists analysis; what requires strange modes of utterance, from the gothic to lyric styles, is something beyond words, beyond story, even beyond a joke. The purpose of the lighthouse is of course to shine: but it is the blank darkness between its sweeps of light which defines that need. Virginia Woolf's 'impersonal thing' (*Diary*, iv, p. 36), the 'break of unity' in her design, is the definitive element in this extraordinary work.'

(Bradbury, 2002: xvi , emphasis added)



## Chapter Seven: Reflexive Enquiry as Practical Learning

‘We question here and now, on our own account’

*Martin Heidegger*

(1949c: 356)

‘Existence begins with two, with difference – it cannot be otherwise’

*Farhad Dalal*

(1998: 182)

‘I surrender to the belief that my knowing is a small part of a wider integrated knowing  
that knits the entire biosphere or creation’

*Gregory Bateson*

(1972: 82)

‘When you go in and buy a jumper, well that’s alright;  
but when you knit it yourself, it gives you great satisfaction’

*Woman from the Aran Islands,*  
*on ‘Muintir Na Mara’, TG4, 19th January 2010*

### **Coordinates – Chapter Seven**

- This chapter describes ‘again’ some insights generated with the research praxis and ‘tends’ them towards new contexts for practical learning as reflexive enquiry. It is

‘unfinished text’ that describes the contribution generated as a path for new topographical descriptions for practical learning praxis.

- If we knit as text without beginning nor end – What markers endure for living-response?

## Introduction

### *Arriving at Reflexive Enquiry*

‘Reflexive enquiry’ is a relevant topic that ‘gathers-in’ the themes and rhemes explored throughout this thesis as determinations-made and gateways for going-on with enquiry as practical learning. The substantive issue to explore is ‘reflexive enquiry *as* organising practice’ for which the idea of organising learning as ‘practical learning’ makes sense. Rather than being a review of literature about reflexive enquiry for organising practice (eg. Chia, 1996, Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000, 2001, Cunliffe, 2003, Etherington, 2004, Oliver, 2005, Küpers, 2005a, Küpers, 2007) this text is a consideration of some of the resources generated with this project itself, taking them up to tend them towards other contexts and maps to be made with others. This text therefore remains *fundamentally unfinished*. As a praxial learning cycle the proverbial (marked) ‘end’ is yet another ‘beginning’. The textualising living practice of the ‘research’ as practical learning goes-on (enriched) for other places and times to make other ‘spaces’. In order to begin ‘tending towards’ otherness two questions are taken up for exploration as reflective praxis. By way of review and reflection the first question is, ‘How has organising practice been considered (to become)?’ The second question as a practical conjecture towards a possible future is, ‘How *much* reflexive enquiry would be appropriate with/for organising practice? This is a pertinent question for a public organisation such as Irish Aid considering how resources such as time, focus and energy seem limited. It is asked in order to *work-out* what the asking provokes.

The first question can be answered simply. Organising practice has been described as language and interpretations-made as *used*, as pragmatic phenomena for ordering or going-on with practice for an exigent or pressing context. A ‘pragmatics’ rationale holds that language is constituted and lives as *used* and that choices are infinitely variable with the *using* that users go-on with according to the particular contexts that generate meanings made. As language-users we are creative and constructive, and our use of language is a major feature of how we learn with and for organisational settings. The formalisation of knowledge is of keen importance for such domains. Our *use* is propositional and expressive, it matters *how* we *language*. All discursive activity is essential to the organising practices and patterns always emerging. Here the focus has been on ‘con/textualising’ as practices of language-use.

Organising practice has been considered as dimensionality, or graphicalisation. The use of topographical language and metaphor to imagine and describe ‘landscapes of learning’ and some ‘topical features’ of those landscapes has extended towards an exploration of learning processes by use of two-dimensional graphs. These are possible pre-figures for learning how to change currently used matrices and logical frames that order the organising tasks of planning and making useful relations or connections<sup>1</sup>. As a second description practically dimensionalised space (for making sense of complexity) foregrounds the abstracting, constructing or what I have termed the *imagining* feature of organising practice. However dimensionality is figured and imagined, these practices are extensions of language-use that further and formalise asymmetricality or differentiation. Building on the notion that spatial and temporal dimensions order how we think and imagine the world with our language (Bourdieu, 1990), how we dimensionalise or graphicalise for organising practice is generative of how practice becomes. This is a feature of the phenomenon of our talking *as if* (Shotter, 2008) a way of holding and constituting some ‘ground’ with the flux and flow of style, practice and pattern.

Further to dimensionality and graphicalisation there has been consideration of organising practice as formal text. Formal texts are material constructions for ‘presentational’ talk that enable fixing and showing position, decision, stage and purpose with formal iterations of text. Although no systematic discourse analysis of a particular text has been taken up here, the story of the origins, passage and presentation of a formal, operational text has been described for the purpose of exploring how its con/textualising process unfolded as organising practice. The particular language-used with the CSP Review Workshop was also described in detail using a pragmatics orientation for position/purpose-practice as a complex relating pattern. Consideration of ‘presentational’ topics suggests that organising practice has import for organisational learning as image, voice, identity (or textualisation) and confidence. Organisational concerns for the expansive contexts of ‘peers’, ‘public’ or indeed, practices with constructs such as ‘poverty reduction’ and the like. The pressing ecological context has been described as of ‘exigency’, which evokes or relates to the construction of accountability as an ‘upward’ hierarchicalising practice generating forms of power inequality.

### *Another Question*

For the second question posed, ‘How *much* reflexive enquiry is appropriate?’ the notion of *deciding* as the other core feature of organising practice is taken up. In order to manage this question

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<sup>1</sup> The ‘boxes’ that members spoke about explicitly, or imagined with many of their constructions of ‘lack’ – of coherence, communication, connection ... or as ‘silos’. As technical instruments matrices are used continually to make sense of development practice.

(which is a ‘How long is a piece of string?’ type-question) a frame of ‘remuneration’ or ‘economy’ is used. This frame makes it an issue of prioritisation on the basis of belief and understanding. A practical answer to the question, ‘How remunerative is reflexive enquiry?’ is generated each time according to the pragmatic beliefs and understandings about *what* or *how* is considered useful. ‘Organisation’ as a technically ordered situation will consider on instrumental terms, ‘How much ‘return’, value or usefulness will reflexive enquiry render?’ But ‘feedback that makes difference’ is not of this order. Taking up a concept of ‘payback’ will illustrate the point. A ‘payback framework’ to evaluate the utilisation of research has been developed for the literature of primary health (Hanney et al., 2005, Kalucy et al., 2009, Raftery et al., 2009) on quantitative grounds. This approach is inappropriate here since reflexive enquiry and practical learning are second/third order phenomena. Reflexive enquiry is generative as *practice* more than as *method*. It is going-on made ‘good’ on its own phronetic terms by the people for whom the situation matters. The only ‘measure’ that can be constructed is a *received difference* to be appraised by participants as learning goes-on from time to time. A notion of ‘payback’, remuneration-for-effort, or *usefulness* is therefore only useful as a device to generate dialogues about ‘instrumentality’ or ‘practicality’ as opportunities for deepening understanding, transforming belief and generating useful choices<sup>2</sup>. *Economically* considered reflexive enquiry as ‘topic’ has the potential to generate a practical learning space about ‘practical learning’. Deutero-learning or the ‘learning of context’ as reflexive enquiry becomes necessary for on-going organisational relevance and health.

I have argued that as one set of terms or another, reflexive enquiry is not common for the practice of Irish Aid, that the learning practices and patterns of such a formal public organisation are ‘incomplete’ in the sense that a reductive appreciation of the learning process counts as ‘organisational learning’. This practice renders phenomena such as the generation of ‘lack’ and ‘gap’ discourses as discursive practices that disorientate, fragment and dispirit members in ways that might be framed as organisational double-binds. These practices are understood to have important consequences over time. They are judged to disconnect any organising practice from its own functionality and environment of concern, to generate obsolescence and decadence of practice. One of the key factors considered with this processing is the drive for evidence and results-based management of the development-aid project (explored here through the rubrics of the CSP Process) as the primary discursive context for a reductive learning practice. Although practical learning goes-on for every context, the fact that ‘best’ learning and organising practice seems imagined and discoursed along hard S/O fixed differentiating lines means that practice will continually become a space of ‘gaps’ and ‘lacks’; and much of the vital information available as learning resource never formally becomes contextualised (or contextualising) as

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<sup>2</sup> About/With practical matters.

practical learning. Generating a reflexive approach with the con/textualising of all these givens and exigencies seems, despite recognition of its importance, difficult.

### *'Organisational' to 'Organising Learning'*

There is no formal answer to the question, 'How much reflexive enquiry?' Whatever 'answers' can be generated they will become as new experiences and insights over time become *practical* as the ways and patterns that people imagine and make their organising practices. The task for a reflexive and relational practice is therefore secondary, indirect or deuterio. It is a matter of creating or changing conditions so that reflexive dialogue becomes accessible for practitioners of all types. The project must therefore begin with reframing common understandings of 'organisational learning'.

To conclude this exploration of the nature, challenges and dynamics of deuterio-learning with contextualising or relating processes, a re-modulation of the term is suggested that can shift how its scope and tasks might be imagined. To talk of 'organising learning' is with one elision to re-position learning with the common, everyday organising practices that have been the focus of attention for this thesis. A move that decentres the entification of an imagined 'organisation' to which the adendum, *al* corresponds. This term also has the advantage of turning from the entifying notions of 'organisational learning systems', whether imagined as computerised information technology, communications technology, or a 'human-systems' reading of protocols and procedures. As has been said several times here, such systems are not disregarded, but in the context of this research work have been considered as supports to a deuterio-learning sensibility and practice. A third advantage with the 'organising learning' marker is that from here, a task descriptor in the form of a job, team or sectional description could be developed to explore, support and generally create context for new learning practices with the common situations, challenges and tasks of organising practice. The notion of a designated team for practical learning might seem incongruous to all I have argued, but as an interim phase, a proxy, this may be the only way to begin generating changed communications about/with learning communication.

Finally, as a metapragmatic distinction, this term offers a way to imagine (and thus generate) new forms of connection for research/practice dialectics. 'Organising learning' has the potential-in-use of collapsing that which is imagined as 'between' research and practice. As a form of reflexive enquiry for communities engaged with organisational research with organisational practitioners engaged with practice with organisational researchers ... a metapragmatic conversation of 'organising learning' emerges for deuterio-learning questions such as, 'How salient is the knowledge getting made with use? (Verschueren, 1999) or 'How insightful is this practice on its own terms?' It may be the case that the conversation (or relating process) 'research/practice' is

by nature a deuterio-learning, metapragmatic discipline which is misrepresented when talked as 'application'. It may be that generative processes are possible when outcomes are pragmatically imagined as unknowns, for all application is of a technical nature in the service of established methods and ends, which is not to discount the skillful, creative and pragmatic learning that comes with technique. This description of research/practice dialectics could also be salient when considering the relating of consultant/organisational practitioners, and would thus become a radical change.

What follows is a review of some of the positions and understandings constructed through this research and textualising process from a reflexive enquiry perspective. The metaphor of 'knitting' is taken up as figurative and evocative of the nature of the relating processes that generate forms of proto and deuterio-learning. The topics of difference, differentiation and not-knowing are presented as key features of the general epistemological context which so defines learning process and problematising for 'organisation'. Appropriate response to this predicament is determined as forms of double-description (whether talked as deuterio-learning or reflexive enquiry) according to a figure of 'bootstrapping' that builds on the *Figure of Practical Learning* drawn up with earlier chapters. This figure also links with the description of 'con/text' from a relational constructionism view by threading the movements of ecological-pragmatic/topical-dialogic dialectics through 'con/text' as dynamic going-on. In all of this, imaginative practice is considered key for generative organising practice and for which new forms of a 'phenomenology of contextualising' will be required. As part of this journey accountability needs to be re-imagined according to relationally-responsive constructions, and for which 'giving account' becomes a question of learning position afresh each time (Shotter, 2008). Some ideas about how the hierarchicalising accountability currently generated might be shifted are explored using frames of praxis and hospitality. Finally, as a resource for new constructions for 'giving account', the notion of an 'economy of knowledge' is briefly discussed as a reflexive enquiry method for organising practice.

This revisiting of key constructions sets the context for a short consideration of some methodological insights generated with the praxis of the research as resources for practical learning in other organising contexts; and as platforms for new steps to go-on from and with this research including consideration of interpretive-paths not taken up so-far as well as different organising contexts that offer opportunities for 'organising learning' about and with deuterio-learning. The Chapter closes with a suggested 'Glossary' of terms for contextualising relating processes.

## Part I: New Resources for Practical Learning

### *Knitting Matters*

Knitting is the ‘thing’ that matters<sup>3</sup>. Whether we call this fundamental and first practice, connecting, linking, relating; or call its ‘effects’, order, syntax, language, system, production, or result – whatever names we take up to mark or describe the process that makes ‘energy/matter – difference’, that is, life as *becoming* – the most pragmatic situation remains (and requires) *our attending* to such processing, i.e., *how* we knit. As we have seen in the steps of exploration taken here, ‘knitting’ (talked as) relating processes is the ‘condition’ and ‘result’<sup>4</sup> with many seemingly strange features. Relating processes are *contextualising*, the making of ‘text’ is always ‘connoting’ forwards, backwards, sideways, upwards, downwards, ‘*n*wards’ – in, on and out of itself *with* and *about* infinite imagined and material dimensionalities.

Relating processes are inter and transtextual as subcategories of con/textual, they function from ‘within’ in the sense that they are encompassing. No one group or person or unit has full view, control or understanding – and their traces move about and with us in chaotic and curious ways – sometimes rhetorical, always more practically dialogic than we imagine, often exclusive. The tracing is ‘manual’ and ‘facial’ as Derrida has it (1976). However marked, the *grammè* is practical and social, therefore powerful and particular. Relating processes generate a processual experience that requires us sentient to live *as if* with a myriad of styles (Shotter, 2008). This might be called the practical metaphysics of everyday knowing. It is a sort of ‘practical a-priori con/jecturing’ that enables us to anticipate ends that might or might-not become; it is how we go-on. Relating processes are embodied and embody extensions of imagination as knowledge that are primarily figurative in form, and secondarily categorical. Figuration matters as imagination dealing with analogue mode. It might be constructed as an ‘almost movement’ generating from perception to thinking or judgement. Contextualisation is foundational. Relating processes generate immanent telos, dynamism or *force*. This might seem incongruent as telos has been understood as transcendent property. As ‘another’ way the ‘purposing’ or ‘purposeful-ness’ or relating process is

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<sup>3</sup> I really want to say, ‘Knitting how matters’ or ‘Knitting is how matters’ (the second changing the mode/meaning of ‘matters’), but the elliptical-syntax that this employs is probably too ‘far-out’. A language-use that seeks to reflexively enquire with relating processes will need such new and ‘strange’ formulations as it goes-on. For example, Karsten Hornstrup responding to a question (Copenhagen at the Social Constructionism Conference, August 2009) said, ‘yes it isn’t’. This construction is of course juxtapositional rather than elliptical, but does the same kind of disturbing work as reflexive enquiry.

<sup>4</sup> These words are ‘inverted’ since according to Heidegger’s logic of *dasein* there is no time, nor place, only imagined ‘space’ (or model), where or when we can over *view* or *judge* the ‘condition’ or ‘result’ of relating processes – ‘they’ are the sea we swim.

always emergent or unfolding with/as con/text. Dalal says it well when he remarks, ‘we are completely of this world, from our molecules, to our thoughts, to our feelings, to our aspirations’ (1998: 194). Our desire (*working-with* our situating) is at the heart of how we know/act. To mark for ‘telos’ is to attend to how *working-out* desires and exigencies at play are processing order and practice, as extensions of being/knowing as itself. Whatever the ‘end-purpose’ might be it is always ‘unavailable’ (like the next fact), or unknown simply because at any given moment ‘it is’ as yet not extant; ‘it’ is with the knitting, and therein is changing. With endogenous-unfolding our markers such as ‘lessons learnt’ or policies articulated for a time are significant. A history of learning process is always a path for going-on with learning, a method well explored as hermeneutics. As a continuing practical presence the shapes and traces we carry from context to context as propositions, principles and ‘context markers’ (Bateson, 1972: 290) or recipes (Garfinkel, 1967) that tell us ‘where’ we are, are significant.

The strange truth seems to be that the principal figure to be learned is how to receive that which is not there, but becoming. This ontological/epistemological conundrum, or ‘paradox of learning’ (Schön, 1987) has been *worked-with* using a describing of data generated interpreted with some key theorists. Matte Blanco’s concept of the bi-logic of symmetry/asymmetry as the dialectic structuring of the unconscious (1975) generates a possibility of ‘infinite sets’ for relating processes. I compare this idea for discursive language as comparable to Verschueren’s theory of adaptability, negotiability and variability for which variability is infinite (1999). Matte Blanco is concerned with the functionality of the unconscious, but a notion of necessary ‘symmetry’ is useful for thinking and talking about differentiation as a situation of possibility as well as of classification for ‘knowing-that’. Heidegger’s notion of ‘Time’ as the transcendental horizon of *Dasein* as ‘Being-There’ connects with Matte Blanco’s psychoanalytical approach for which ‘time’ is the basic given for epistemological process with unconscious logic. Heidegger’s construction of a necessary ‘Nothingness’ from which Being becomes (1949c) or ‘lifts up’ in a sense is also coherent with Matte Blanco’s asymmetrical conception. Central to my understanding is Bateson’s concept that the difference that matters (and for matter) is the relating of surround/signal. The processing of analogue- flow/digital-message that generates dialectic figures to guide ‘processes-for’ (whatever) is a powerful resource for deuterio-learning practice. This cybernetic approach is congruent with the Gestaltian notion of figure/ground that initially informed my understanding of the data-field and my relating with it. Throughout the research process I have grown in my awareness that how we perceive is what we see and what we make<sup>5</sup>. I have found the terms, ‘analogue-surround’ and ‘digital-signal’ helpful for reminding me how these features of our being/knowing relating processes are different ‘patternings’, marking, as Dalal says, that ‘[e]xistence begins with two, with difference – it cannot be otherwise’ (1998: 182).

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<sup>5</sup> The ‘we’ is important here in that my perception is a relating text(ualisation).



### *Difference, Differentiation and Not-Knowing*

'Difference' connects key theorists used for this project; Austin, Bateson, Derrida, Heidegger, Matte Blanco and Verschueren – all interpreted with a relational constructionism frame, as does disturbance or not-knowing. Derrida's 'différance' marks how our grammars are always saying/not saying, constructing/deconstructing. By being discursive 'différance-used' is to 'differ' and 'defer'. The issue becomes inevitably a question of ethics. As a question of distribution and discursive ability, recognition, viability, the generation of knowledge as a difference that empowers and generates voice is ultimately phronetic (Clegg, 2002). Thus becoming a question of co-ordination for a context of multilogal, plurivocal – even 'plurispecial'<sup>6</sup> – diversity (Hosking, 2002). Congruous with their topical matters I have found with each of these writers deep ethical concern for the communities and world that we live. Derrida's ἀνακολουθόν (anacoluthon), the 'not following' that is forgetting/faithfulness is a wonderful trace for inspiring the commitment to 'learning again' for each moment, event and situation (Payne and Schad, 2003). This is the ultimate rationale for any reflexive enquiry – respect, care and commitment to the other. For Hosking, a relational approach to differentiation (the workings of difference) is profoundly about becoming other (2007).

Working from these (and other) key notions I have suggested that learning can be actively promoted at two orders of abstraction, first and second, while the 'third', the figure of learning *how to receive*, is more of a contemplative poise, as noted already. This opening or orientation is often described using the 'third' as metaphor, 'knowing of the third kind' (Shotter, 2008), 'trito-learning' (Bateson, 1972), the 'third way' (Elkjaer, 2004) or 'the third ear' (Berendt, 1992), to mention just a few examples. It is an ability to listen and receive that is itself received, almost as 'gift', in the processing of attentive first and second order learning. I have been exploring how the notion of 'praxis', rooted in Aristotle's *Ethics* (fittingly) (1976), but developed as a concept from the social and political concerns for empowerment, justice and participation – with the philosophy of adult education among other trajectories, as well as an approach to taking the whole social, emotional, historical and hermeneutic nature of the learning process into account, is an important way in which to imagine, 'organisational learning' or 'reflexive enquiry' for the project of development-aid. This praxis-tradition within the development-aid project seems to 'fall-away' as the project embodies administration, structure and accountability norms – typically figured as 'centrist' concerns. The 'third' orientation is a possibility for generating a praxial approach with just these *situations* since it is 'located' at the surface of discursive life. It belongs with the language-uses that are common, the 'basic ways of talking' as Shotter terms them (2008), which

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<sup>6</sup> This is a created word to mark a space where all living organism's organic integrity is respected.

are by and large relatively formulaic in the instance of Irish Aid talk explored here. The search throughout the thesis has been for ground(s) on which another way of talking that is practical and inclusive can become; finding the ‘third’ is important and it involves living contingently and peacefully with unknowns.

Esoteric as this ‘third’ may sound, I believe the strange truth that ‘knowing not-knowing’ as an experience to learn about and with is a very pressing and critical challenge for formal organisations (with names and structures). I believe this because of the ways with which I have come to understand Irish Aid practice – while striving for coherence with many situations and texts, the generation of a ‘discourse of gap’ continually undermines the hope for communication, connection and linkage that efforts at alignment entail. I believe it is especially difficult for public organisations such as Irish Aid to generate another communicating style when they are *accountable to* and *in* the public sphere by means of bureaucratic and political procedures and processes. It is this situation first and foremost that contextualises the organisational learning of such organisations – as how they seem to conceive of the concept, as well as how they situate and allocate resources to the series of particular projects that make it up. Often ‘normative’, the reaction to not-knowing is the construction of ways of going-on or knowing accompanied with a concerted presentation of the robustness of that knowledge. I have characterised this organising-drive with the use of the label, ‘presentational talk’; that intertextualises ‘public’ and ‘private’ talk – whereby none of these three labels are ‘first’ or ‘foremost’, nor totally distinct.

It is the drive for ‘evidence-based practice’ as a ‘destination-oriented metaphor’ for order, production and results that characterises this ‘received view of science (RVS)’ in organising practice (Hosking and Mc Namee, 2006b)<sup>7</sup>. There seems to be a ‘reception’ here of sorts, but it is pervasive and hegemonic and therefore unlikely to carry a reflexive-attending. I have suggested in this thesis that the telos of ἐπιστήμη (episteme), ‘for-standing’<sup>8</sup> as ‘knowing-that’ has a tautological functionality that for a practical sense and setting disables the faculty of ‘not-knowing’ due to its circuitous processing and inherent rationale. Certainly, for Irish Aid practitioners who have embraced the notion of evidence-based practice as the ‘ideal’ for development-aid with the CSP Process (and others), the concept of ‘organisational learning’ is continually referenced as a question of ‘knowledge management’, ‘training’ and the implementation of a ‘system’ – all ways of being ‘coherent’ and ‘tautological’ in a sense. A less entifying and more implicit understanding comes with the language of ‘lessons learnt’ ordering monitoring and evaluation, and threaded through the CSP processes of planning and implementation. These may well be the starting points for changing practice.

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<sup>7</sup> With the ‘RVS – received view of science’ appellation coming from Wolgar (1996)

<sup>8</sup> ‘Epi’ (ἐπί) as ‘before’, with ‘isteme’ (ἵστημι) which is ‘to make to stand’ (Liddell and Scott, 1891)

The way to begin with more sophisticated or second-level learning – deemed necessary in the original organisational learning literature for competitive advantage, staying in touch with a shifting market or environment, or the internal connections and practices within an organisation – has been presented as ‘learning to learn’. The words chosen here to explore and expand this organisational learning dictum have been primarily those of Bateson, who stands somewhat apart from the original disciples of ‘organisational learning’ and the even more positivist, ‘learning organisation’ group. A transdisciplinary working towards an ever-wider perspective, his ‘deutero-learning’ (1972) or ‘the learning of context’ (2002: 126) brings the ecological and epistemological sensitivity that a truly relational approach requires. Additional to the notion of the double-description, and to slightly adjust the insight that ‘without context there is no meaning’ (Bateson, 2002: 16), it is also held that ‘without context there is no communication’. In the phases of data generation the topic of ‘communication’ continually figured, discoursed as a ‘problem to be solved’. It seems that ‘communication’ is always an organisational issue, but it has also seemed typical that ‘communication about communication’ is rare. Argyris and Schön constructed this situation as forms of ‘undiscussability’, and embraced an action research approach to reflexive enquiry in order to address it in practice (1978, 1996). Nonetheless, their own research paradigm (the scientific paradigm that rationalises action research) has been judged problematic, indeed ‘undiscussable’ (Dachler, 1994), thus disconnecting in some ways and therefore ‘incomplete’.

When ‘communication about communication’ is rare, or censured, it can be called a ‘double-bind’. Bateson describes this phenomenon in the context of the family system, especially with reference to the contextualisation of schizophrenia (1972). The concept has been taken up here as a frame of reference for making sense of a phenomenon we can call ‘gap-generation’; here particularly as Irish Aid discourse and discursive practicing as I have perceived it with my research practice. Taking seriously a relational approach means positing that ‘gaps’ do not exist analogically, they are discursive devices useful for keeping contextual information and feedback at bay – and, it can be argued, are thus somewhat necessary. To take one example we can note ‘face-saving’ as a practical discursive practice for social cohesion (Brown and Levinson, 1987) or other ‘activity types’ that enable or ‘allow’ certain practical or institutionalising discourses to take place (Levinson, 1992). ‘Undiscussability’ is therefore an ability to ‘not-discuss’ as a legitimate discursive practice, and as Argyris and Schön point out, the generation of this ability is a shared interaction with unintended consequences (1996). The difficulty is that the sanction of such an ability in practice, possibly imagined as the separating of the ‘private’ from the ‘public’ or ‘corporate’ domain in many organising contexts, is an ultimately degenerative practice giving rise to obsolescence, or practices of ‘organisational schizophrenia’ whereby many participants are

silenced or disabled or important signals are missed. Much of the textualising process going-on, ‘gets disappeared’ as Fletcher termed it so well (1998), or as Shotter has marked (playing on a term from Garfinkel) the ways that ‘most of our actual social life’ is rendered ‘rationally invisible’ (Shotter, 2008: 22, 37). Every way, the organising practice is losing-out, becoming incomplete or impoverished.

### *Describing ‘Twice’ – Figuratively and Categorically*

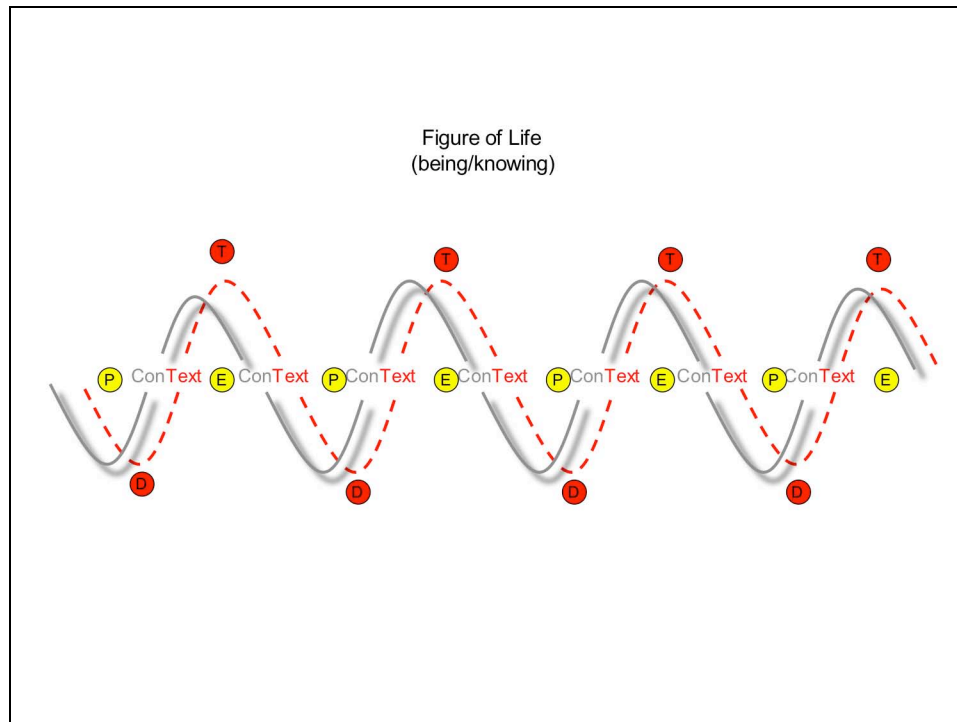
Bateson’s response for more generative processing has been the formulation of the ‘double-description’ and attentiveness to whatever might be the pattern that connects (2002) – a model taken up here as guide for this research and tending towards new organising practices. This ‘double-describing’ has been formally imagined according to a dialectic-relating of ‘descriptions’ that are ‘different’ due to the ‘ontology of becoming’. Our becoming as ‘sentients-with-desire-who-textualise/organise-that-desiring’ is the matter of ‘being-in-time’ with a sort of syncopated disjoint, the secondary nature of perception that seems to purpose our ‘thinking’ or ‘knowing’ or ‘learning’. Working from Bateson’s sense of description, and noting with increasing attention the power of this process as the research continued with the practical matters and media that form Irish Aid practice<sup>9</sup>; the discourse of reflexive enquiry offers new resources for describing with and for organising practice, as does the *Figure of Practical Learning* that has emerged from this work. Connecting that *Figure* with the relational constructionism articulation of ‘con/text’ as the basic pattern of an ‘ontology of becoming’ – and to expand the formulation by using the figure of – con/text/con/text/con/text – or to syncopate slightly – text/con/text/con/text/con – the figure below was drawn up as a ‘figure of life’ in which the moves of practical learning as ‘topical-dialogic/ecological-pragmatic’ (T-D/E-P) are shown in the Batesonian dimensionality of analogue-surrounding/digital-signalling (Figure 1). The figure is limited, showing only one strand of this ‘DNA-shaped’ processing but showing how, by means of its own unique ‘bootstrapping’, the process continually ‘turns itself on’<sup>10</sup>. The ‘strand’ is to be imagined as a (thread of) weaving

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<sup>9</sup> The abductive description of organisational story, text, landscape and language-use, as a context ‘from which’ and ‘to which’ the research attends.

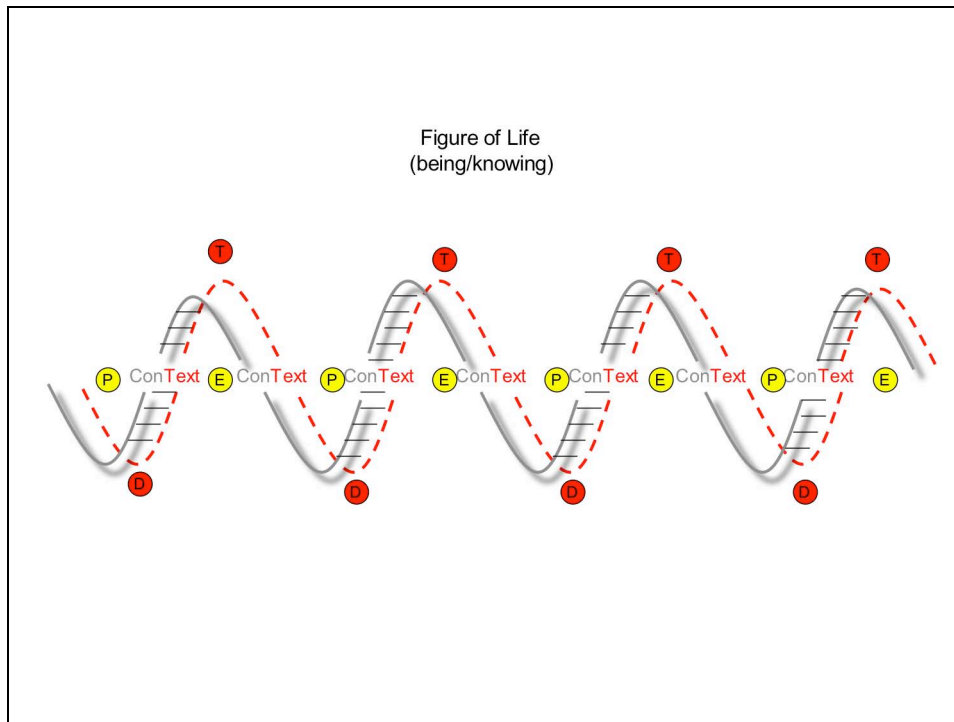
<sup>10</sup> Noted by Dalal as an, ‘impossibility that they [computer buffs] deal with every time they get computers to turn themselves on. In their language it is called bootstrapping, literally lifting oneself by one’s bootstraps, impossible but true’. Dalal is discussing how generative sequence needs the, ‘something comes from nothing’ feature in order to make sense, citing both Gödel’s incompleteness theorem (‘that the system has to take something outside and beyond it as a given ... that if a system aims to be complete then it will have an unresolvable contradiction within it’), and how, ‘of before the Big Bang we can say nothing, as there is no space, time or things. After the Big Bang there are two basic things, matter and energy.’ (1998: 182). The usefulness of these metaphors for relating constructions will be obvious.

with/for/as ‘Weaving’ of *n*dimensional textualising. It is a figure for how the process of living as being/knowing, or becoming goes-on. It is also the basic rationale for all the extensive differentiation or asymmetry that *takes place*, embodying the practicing of learning and organising.



*Figure 0-1 - Bootstrapping as a Figure of Life*

To play with the figure a little we can also note that the movement most valued in how organisational learning practice is commonly imagined is that from 'T' to 'D' (and vice-versa) – the topical (or themal) linked to the forming logic or rationale, the ‘dialogic-in-use’. The more difficult move to attend to in common organising practice seems to be the other movement (going-on always) from 'E' to 'P' (and vice-versa) – the ecologic (rhematic) linked to use or empirical-given, the ‘pragmatic-in-use’. Placing reflexive enquiry primarily along the contours of this movement as a way of imagining how to ‘stay connected to the complexity’, and knowing how to ‘live at the edge of chaos’ (Oliver, 2005: 120). We see with *Figure 2* that the deuterio or second description (which is a ‘double’ movement) is a ‘climb’ or a choice, at least initially, borne of commitment for continually becoming responsible, for and about the effects (and affects) of our knowing processes.



*Figure 0-2 - Climbing the Reflexive Ladder*

Taking into account that any practice (and the rationale working/worked with it) carries practical inclusions and exclusions – benefits and vulnerabilities (Oliver, 2005), a second pragmatic question for public organisation is important as suggested at the opening of the Chapter. How much feedback is necessary, how much description, how much reflexivity? How much attention to context is practical – given that ‘deciding’ is the thing that commonly matters?

The determination has been made that Irish Aid, like many public organisations, generates an ‘incomplete’ form of learning (when judged on these terms) by attending first and foremost to the exigency to give account, thus weaving a pattern of ‘upward’, ‘unilateral’ or hierarchicalising accountability – as the ability that *connects* as (if) ‘Irish Aid’. It is a fundamentally non-dialogic patterning that is becoming increasingly contextualised into the on-going processing and discoursing of development-aid organising. I have characterised this as a ‘reaction’ more than ‘response’ to the dominant ‘aid’ and ‘organising’ discourse of the day – labelled with the practice as *Results Based Management* and *Management for Development Results*. Discourses that ground ‘evidence’ as ‘rationale’, and are embodied about and with the series of International Protocols<sup>11</sup> following-on from the Millennium Development Goals Declaration – now ten years old. The

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<sup>11</sup> Millennium Declaration, 2000; Monterrey, 2002 (Finance for Development); Rome, 2003 (Harmonisation and Alignment); Marrakech, 2004 (Memorandum on Managing for Development Results); Paris, 2005 (Aid Effectiveness) and Akra, 2008 (Mid-Term Review of Paris 2005).

consequences of such a 'reactive' mode of learning as a way of going-on with the development-aid project are understood to be repeating interpretations of lack and incoherence about practice, and the continual exclusion of voices from the processes of aid and development that matter. It is methodologically judged a tautological circuit, ultimately 'incomplete' for the ethical 'matter to hand' of 'poverty reduction' as relative goal; or even 'more praxis' as a secondary, organising indirect and indefinite-goal. The determination is made that a technical and overly defined approach, although offering powerful resources for action and accountability, is ultimately decadent if in a very pragmatic way the social, political and ethical threads of the knowing, practicing and learning process are insufficiently accounted for. There is no 'genuine dialogical whole' (Shotter, 2008: 40), hence the construction of 'incompleteness'. This form of 'accountability' has been presented here as a task of attending to 'practical learning' – which returns us to the question, 'How much reflexive enquiry is practical?'

'How much?' is the wrong question. To hold the complexity always emerging (as we practice) in view as a functioning 'matter to hand', the question needs inverting, 'How practical is reflexive enquiry?' When constructed as living enquiry that keeps organising in touch with the complexity (Oliver, 2005) then it is a very practical matter, as practical as life itself. Still, whatever or however is considered 'enough' for a particular setting, embodies and materialises how that situation is becoming fixed or flexed.

A frame for understanding and reading organising learning has been developed here with the terms 'imagining' and 'deciding'. In categorising the learning process as a cycle of several dialectic movements that can be summarised under these two interpretive and discursive practices it has been further asserted that Irish Aid, like many other organisations, attends primarily to 'deciding' as the 'good', as the thing that matters – deciding and being able to show how that deciding took place. During the CSP Review Workshop the talking practice about strategic planning, in order to align CSP processes, continually tended towards language-uses (for position/purpose – practice) which enabled members to define; and thus decide about a decision that had already been taken<sup>12</sup>. In this sense members of public organisation can only 'react', generating autonomy with their resources of technical prowess and practical connection to the 'peripheral' fields they share with 'clients', 'partners', 'stakeholders' or 'users'.

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<sup>12</sup> The Logical Model Approach (OECD and Worldbank, 2005) was already officially indicated when the CSP Review Workshop took place, although in a strange elipsis this seemed to 'have happened' without explicit decision markers – a topic implicit or lightly contextualising the situation when the 'Whole of Programme Approach' was discussed CD[1/2/51-59]SA/M1, CD[1/2/60-63]SA/M1, or the status of the 'Guidelines' questioned CD[1/2/23-30]SA/M1, CD[1/2/43-50]SA/M1.

In response to these predicaments a relational approach seeks to ‘shift the goalposts’, or to move away from the gaming metaphors that so dominate our language-use, to ‘knit another pattern’. A generative patterning that can help us better respond to the critical challenges of our times, which includes as ‘most important’ the need to ‘create an ethics of global responsibility through social interaction’<sup>13</sup>. Like for the woman of the Aran Islands (off the West Coast of Ireland) whose utterance is quoted at the opening of this Chapter, satisfaction comes with knittting (it) yourself – this is the knowledge of a thatching, weaving and rope-making culture, a culture for which the environment has been ever-present and pressing upon the unfolding ecology. It is reminiscent of the words and metaphors taken up by Heidegger when imagining our thinking as ‘building’ for ‘dwelling’ (1971).

The question of organisational learning is therefore more than a predicament of skill or efficiency, of ‘sufficient reason’<sup>14</sup> and ‘coherence’<sup>15</sup>. Responsibility for social good and inclusion must be taken up into practical method and matter and not assumed, even or especially when the organisational purpose is easily portrayed as laudible and celebrated – as might be the case for an organisation such as Irish Aid<sup>16</sup>. The proposition has therefore been made here to move from what Easterby-Smith et al., have called an ‘epistemology of possession’, or indeed an ‘epistemology of practice’ (2000) to the ethically-attending situation of an ‘epistemology-of-participation’; what Bateson’s daughter has called his ‘ecological epistemology’ (1972). The practical outworking suggested as a starting place, along with many other starting places of social constructionism (eg. Mc Namee, 2006), ethnomethodology (eg. Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 1999) is the practical, performed or enacted enquiry with ‘imagining’, as the mainly implicit movement of

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<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey Sachs in his presentation, ‘That the Thanks of the Society are due to the Auditor for his paper, *Economics in Global Sphere*’, given during the 240<sup>th</sup> Inaugural Meeting of the College Historical Society, Trinity College Dublin, 27<sup>th</sup> January 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Mehta notes Heidegger worked to show how *insufficient* such reasoning is, ‘Implicit in the way Being revealed itself to the Greeks is the conception of Ground, which became explicit later in the European attitude to essents and in the definition of man as the rational animal; it has culminated in the complete domination of our lives by the Principle of Sufficient Reason in the form of the omnipotence of technology in the Atomic age of today. “Is this the last word that can be said about Being,” Heidegger asks in conclusion, “that it is Ground?” Does the nature of Being not need deeper reflection and a more adequate formulation?’ (1971: 93) For Heidegger a ‘more adequate formulation’ would be a further unfolding of *dasein*, therefore not a purely propositional statement.

<sup>15</sup> A logical impossibility if change (i.e. becoming) is going-on – which it is, because of ever-presencing ‘noise’. Coherence, like praxis is a tendency, a practical attitude, not a state.

<sup>16</sup> The recent critique of Irish Catholic Church Management on the part of the Irish State could be viewed in light of the same dynamic in which a supposed ‘good’ institution became utterly blind to its degenerative normalising practices – in this case with terrible effect (Murphy, 2009).



learning with current practice shaped here as a *Figure of Practical Learning*. This ‘phenomenology of contextualising’, practiced reflexively with this research project and rendering understanding of some of the how-features of relating processes has also generated grounds for focussed reflexive enquiry with development-aid practice. Such a practical phenomenology or *describing* practice attends to the surface of the text – to its textualising as a ‘communication about communication’, or the ‘learning of context’.

### *Imagining Changed Accountability – ‘Giving Account’*

Taking up the patterning of accountability determined here as a connecting character, as ‘Irish Aid’, as a practical ‘identity’ or textualising-pattern and ‘turning it on its head’<sup>17</sup> – as one might for a double-description – a new imagination is suggested. John Shotter explores the knitting of the social pattern as an on-going movement of ‘giving account’ for which we are continually and contingently attentive to each other (2001, 2008). This understanding evoked for me a description I heard (when bird-watching) of the social-life of the Brent Geese that live on the estate of Lissadell in Co. Sligo, Ireland<sup>18</sup>. According to a very informed friend, they call out to each other continually with a sort of  $\mu$ -function communication<sup>19</sup> along the lines of, ‘I’m here, we’re ok’ – which generates security and the knowledge of position. Further, my friend has observed (and he could name a particular pair by their ring numbers) that each time the flock rises up en-masse and flies-about (as when danger seems imminent), the constant communication of position enables them to situate each other in seconds. As an aside, he told me that the pairs are faithful companions for many years.

This image of the social-life of Brent Geese echoes the insight that ‘for animals it is completely natural to wait or be aware, but [that] human beings seem to be lost when waiting and encountering unpredictable interaction with the world’ (Koivunen, 2006: 99). This is the predicament for organisation that we are considering. Bateson learnt a lot about communication and cybernetics from the communication of animals – for whom there is no syntactical language nor messaging. Their figurative and dependent forms of communication offer some insight towards a relational accountability that can *work-with* our syncopated communications of a doubly complex nature. Shotter has called this sort of accountability, ‘seeing the face’ and ‘hearing the voice’ of the social situation as a participative form of thinking that is continually responsive, a

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<sup>17</sup> Heidegger notes that ‘from the point of view of sound common sense, Philosophy, according to Hegel, is the “world stood on its head” (1949c: 355).

<sup>18</sup> A place famous for its connections to Constance and Eva Goore-Booth, and William Butler Yeats.

<sup>19</sup> As noted by Bateson, relating with his cat (1972: 372)

‘social poetics’ (2001) that we might liken to the movements of dancers in motion. It is to live attentively with the surfacing of the text. We are now moving towards an understanding of accountability that takes its ethics and common humanity seriously, and for which the traditional hierarchical imagination with accountability seems inept.

The ‘lacks’ that were continually talked as Irish Aid during the data generation period might be captured with the terming of a ‘lack of confidence’ that emerged in the CSP Review Workshop during the ‘organisational learning’ session. The exigency of the situation for comprehensive agreement about how CSPs were to be done<sup>20</sup> seemed to generate many unhelpful interpretive practices – and all about a lack of confidence. Confidence for what, and for where and when? For making changes in practice that felt counter-intuitive (quite literally in this case) or onerous? For enhancing a voice and a presence among other donors? For the DAC Review that was coming up? When ‘giving account’ means attending in responsive ways there is a challenge for hierarchicalising-accountability. There is a certain ‘inhospitality’ which seems necessary – to play with a word from Derrida. As a term for relational-reponsiveness (Shotter, 2008) ‘unconditional hospitality’ is interesting for the organising realm since Derrida points out it is ‘practically impossible to live; one cannot in any case, and by definition, organize it’ (Borradori et al., 2003: 129).

### *Praxis as Organising for Confidence*

To live reflexively with a predicament of hospitality, organisation and confidence is to shift the focus from first to secondary processes as a way to go-on, a sort of stepping back from ‘organisation’ for organising. When we ask, ‘How does this notion of responsive accountability connect with the lack of confidence that was talked by members of Irish Aid?’, it is possible to take a deutero-view of the question. Maybe it is precisely the generation of reactive positioning – with language-uses that are technical in nature and always tending to *somehow* already defined elsewhere<sup>21</sup>, and when to compound matters the generating-locale and temporal status of a decision seems ambiguous and unclear – that makes for mis-understanding. Not-knowing where the other stands or is positioned becomes common (normative) experience. A way to manage this unknowing as a second-order conjecture is the interpretation and generation of ‘lack’ – whether of communication, confidence or coherence. We live contingently, but without learning to know these practical unknowns as we generate them, we always throw out *somehow* to go on. A different conjecturing requires attending to the difference that we learn with at the surface of our interactions. This kind of accountability has to disregard in some sense the hierarchy of the

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<sup>20</sup> And with many other organisational ‘doings’ at the time.

<sup>21</sup> As described with Chapter Five.

‘subject state’ whether made by law, citizenship or organisational structure. Derrida, talking about the international realm imagines a ‘democracy to come’, not as a state but as a ‘condition’ for ‘continually approaching perpetual peace’ (Borradori et al., 2003: 130). The accountability that can conjecture a ‘participation to come’ will generate organisational (and organising) confidence on the basis of reflexive positioning, which of course requires ‘an alliance that goes beyond the “political” as it has been commonly defined’ (2003: 130) – or the ‘organisational’ as commonly defined.

### *Praxis as Reflexive Enquiry*

The most difficult is dealing with difference. But difference is the primary context of all organising practice – whether for profit, service or fulfillment. We commonly deal with difference by means of classification, by naming and thus knowing and thus generating redundancy and control. By our boundarying practices with common talk, the graphicalisation of our imaginations of the future, the devices that form and materialise our actions, we essentialise. This makes the difference. The diverse, surprising and incongruent, the unknown is made along-with the essentialising practices of knowing and organising. The only initiative possible for moving from a ‘subject-state’ (if, as with the proverbial ‘Office Christmas Drinks’, it is not to be ‘plastic’ or ‘faux’) is a praxial working environment where those features of communication, reflection, liberation and general *acknowledgement* with practical actions become commonplace (actions of inclusion, multi and polyvocality, openness and exploration, engagement with ‘alien’ languages and epistemologies).

Showing that this type of engagement is useful and productive is challenging (although, for a relational approach, generativity – to coin a word for creative, ecologically-sound production – will be a slowly turning cycle) otherwise, even for development-aid, ‘ethics’ is not enough. The Appreciative Inquiry approach (Cooperrider et al., 2000) as an example of an ‘opportunity-centric’ rather than ‘problem-centric’ way of generating organisational advantage (Bushe and Marshak, 2009) seems at times to ignore the complexity of the discursive situation (Oliver, 2005) – it may also be a more culturally challenging frame for European practitioners than may be the case for Americans for whom the ‘can do’ discourse is apparent and accessible, and out of which appreciative inquiry has come. A praxial conversation that embodies the rights of all members to participate on the grounds of that very common conversation, and thus generating common histories and ways of going-on, in a particular situation – offers resources for stepping-on from/with ‘subject-states’ that can become talked positions. It is a question of softening the differentiation boundaries getting made (Hosking, 2007). The praxis question is the ‘so what’ question (as a friend expressed it to me) so that whatever ways can be imagined in common practice for praxial ways of going-on, they will always be ‘learning-for’, with conversations

provoking actions that members are clear with, and participate in making known *how* and *why* that matters.

These ideas may seem incredible when considering the highly normalised bureaucratic forming of public organisation, as well as the rise and rise of sufficient-reason as *the* way to go-on. Despite apparent situations of intransigence and fixidity, transformational change happens. An analogy with sailing helps me understand how to manage my incredulity. Adaptive learning and change is akin to ‘going-about’ by which means a boat changes direction setting its bow through the ‘eye of an on-coming wind’. As the movement goes-on, the on-coming wind flows from the point of tension out along the fullness of the sail as the bow moves through it – it is ‘gradual’ in nature, even when it happens with speed and one is in full control of the move. Transformational learning and change is different, it is akin to ‘gybing’ whereupon the boat sets its stern through a following wind – it is not the *direction* change that is difficult but the care that must be taken for the process. All the while the stern is shifting through the wind blind, so that the change of sail-setting comes with a snap – a flip of the boom and a well-known danger to sailors of small craft.

Conjecturing such a monumental shift as would be an organising practice truly relationally-responsive (Shotter, 2008) is to continually hold the stern in a following wind – a dangerous position, but as sailors also know, the sail-setting for ‘reaching’ or ‘running’, faster and more pleasing points of sail. In order to keep the stern safely in the wind (a useful metaphor for second-order attending) we must recognise where, when and how our essentialising practices are becoming fixed at single-points or views and for who’s purposes or advantage. To recognise ‘preferred realities’ (Gubrium and Holstein, 2008: 9) when they become pervasive and normative. Using whatever syntactical<sup>22</sup>, graphic, or topographical means we can muster; whether symbolic, with metaphors such as the heterotopia (Foucault, 1984); metaphysical, as with the logs and instruments used for planning and business organising; or praxial, finding the spaces with language-uses and shared practices for real political conversations, for participative deciding (or ‘discernment’ as a fresher and ‘third order’ term) the ‘matter to hand’ is a challenge of imagining *twice at once*. If we can imagine this sort of organising practice or ways of organising learning then we can make them.

### *An Economy of Knowledge?*<sup>23</sup>

An ‘economy of knowledge’ is a very different concept to the ‘knowledge economy’ – a construct functioning as leitmotif to the on-going scientifically modelled and technologically driven

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<sup>22</sup> Or ‘syntactical’

<sup>23</sup> A limiting contingent learning praxis for getting-on.

paradigm for unending growth and development, albeit on the basis of a higher-order set of skills to those required for manufacture. To return to first-use, the word ‘economy’ is rooted in the Greek, οἶκος (oikos), a noun meaning ‘house’ or ‘dwelling’, and νεμῶ (nemo from the verb, nemein), meaning ‘to deal out, to distribute, to apportion, assign, allot’. These items compose the term, οἰκονομία (oikonomia) meaning, ‘the management of a household or family’ (Liddell and Scott, 1891). There is a sense of ‘right-distribution’ or ‘balance’ between flows of resources and needs; the proverbial ‘making ends meet’.

We can build on this ‘resourceful’ reading of ‘ends’ in order to foreground the ‘purposeful’ management of ‘ends’ that is also implied. This is a move, beyond a simple measurement, towards the dynamics of judgement that guide the prioritisation inherent and necessary in the order of economy based on the premise that it is always the case that resources are limited and needs infinite. From here we can make the step to a notion of an ‘economy of knowledge’, a term which draws attention to the teleological forces at play in the making of knowledge and knowing processes.<sup>24</sup> What might limit access to the resource for knowing and learning that is the going-onness of life? Several candidates can be presented including little or no access to the basic needs for living and opportunity to grow and change; but probably the most important for organising practice are situations of fixed positioning, which by definition are disconnecting from the analogue-surround or flow – whether by habit, ignorance or will. But even a situation of singular or reductive willfulness, what might be called of ‘bad faith’, is susceptible to teleological process – since that is how any purpose is worked out. Such a situation is therefore, at some point, open to change – even if only when the conditions for material or identity protection shift.

For an economy of knowledge, ordered to generation (of its own process as well as its fruits), infinite ‘need’ is based on the fact that life goes on. Beyond these simple principles, the concept itself of an ‘economy of knowledge’ is useful in particular for organising practice according to prescribed purpose or goals. Knowing that all the possible resources for learning are never available, and that the situation of life means learning is always going-on as an infinite need – suggests that designs for learning be particular and focussed (as they are according to the scope and method of all disciplines). The concept is useful mostly as a reflexive deuterio-learning tool, a way of foregrounding the fact that learning and organising practice is already an economy of knowledge that functions for certain goods (and for those with access to those goods and their continuance) and that such an economy can be changed. This includes the intertextualising

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<sup>24</sup> In the theological discourse a similar notion is taken-up with the term, the ‘economy of salvation’ in the branch of systematic-theology. This ‘economy’ is the formal and practical relating of experiences of creation, fall, salvation, and redemption, ultimately including a form of ‘completion’ in the language of eschatology, or ‘end things’.

power of discourse to ‘make some aspect of material reality meaningful’ and thus constitute ‘an object’ by ‘reference to prevailing discourses’ (Hardy and Phillips, 2004: 302). An ‘economy of knowledge’ or learning is a construct for talking with and about epistemology, or knowledge-making practices. Like all economies this process functions contextually – intertextually and transtextually – generating the fabric of surround that we call paradigm, culture, society or environment.

## Part II: An Unfinished Text

### *Contributions*

Having explored and excavated some of the relating processes and practices that generate the fixing positions of organising practice as ODA, the contribution is in relation to the principles, parameters, methods and tools generated for new forms of organising learning, or *practical learning* for development-aid organising. The consideration of ‘organisational learning’ as development-aid practice has required the knitting of *a* view – as a method of methods, a way of appraising development-aid organising practice *as* learning, in order to enable the imagination of another epistemology and practice. This includes my own imagining practice, as well as offering methods and tools (as fruits of research praxis) for changing the practices of imagination elsewhere. The assumption all through is that changing imagination will generate its own learning and changes with *deciding* practices. This might be characterised as a shifting conversation – a deutero shift to another imagined ground that we can conjecture with (differently).

Whether the context of this conversation *becomes* in the research milieu or with particular organising contexts, and hopefully these places become dialectically relating in double-describing (*twice at once*) for the predicaments at hand, the contingency hoped for is to explore possibilities with organising groups – especially along the terms of development-aid practice. I am conscious that bringing some of this thinking towards public organisation is a deep challenge that must begin with new relationships – since it will always be the members of any situation that make the changes that matter, even when a role for a ‘relational practitioner’ can be described. The way forward may be with a re-orientation of the term ‘organisational learning’ itself as already suggested. Throughout this thesis I have been tending towards modal iterations rather than nominative – so the ‘ing’ has been centred, as with *relating* processes. By shifting to a formulation of ‘*organising* learning’ the possibility of imagining learning-work as integral and practically surfacing the rhetic (thematic/rhematic) nature of common and everyday goings-on becomes easier. This frame of ‘organising learning’ in different ways offers paths towards a reflexive enquiry for ODA that might become ‘common’ – starting with the *Figure of Practical Learning* as a guide, as well as the notion of learning as a practice of imagining/deciding. It is an approach to learning

that centres the practical features of the processes of knowing/acting, and locates their movements and forcing at the surface of the textualising flow, changes the focus from primarily proto or single-looped learning cycles, and offers resources – ways of seeing and a language for the deutero-perspective that is necessary for sustainable processes and development.

Working through my own research journey towards a changed appreciation for ‘imaginability’ and many of its outworkings and channels, I have discovered a range of methods for practical learning which I believe have scope beyond this thesis. They are practical, experienced insights that have emerged from the exigencies, forcing and constraints of the particular economy of knowledge that is a PhD textualising process. I believe there are overlaps with the challenges faced by those organising who must produce their text in timely fashion and in doing so make a useful contribution.

There has been the praxis of disciplining my language-use. Throughout these textual steps I have ‘discovered’ shifts emerging and new possibilities for thinking by ‘policing’ my language for its hard subject/object differentiating syntax. I have sought to ‘change my mind’ at the surface of the textualisation. The shifts are generated with changing uses of key terms that emerged as the contextualising process went-on. Talking of ‘relating processes’ rather than ‘relational’, coining terms that became practical to purpose such as the ‘matters to hand’ arising from Heidegger’s dwelling metaphors and the *Dasein* (1971, 1973); or indeed the typographical gymnastics with slashes (‘/’) and dashes (‘–’) and the like. The power of syntax has also been recognised, especially according to the ways we use prepositions to generate so much of the sense of direction and relation with our language and frames of reference, to position ourselves (Austin, 1979a). Large sections of this text have been written choosing ‘as’ ‘for’, ‘from’ or ‘with’ instead of the ‘in’ that naturally came to mind, an example of which is the shift in meaning generated when the term, ‘X happens *in* Irish Aid’ is reconstructed as ‘X happens *as* Irish Aid’, or ‘X happens *for* or *with* Irish Aid’. I realised with new force the difference of relational constructionism as a future-facing *practice* to research approaches that are primarily reflective in order to learn-from data-generated. Adverbs that mark the nuance and expressive moding of use (1979a) are also useful for practical learning. This has been particularly challenging when referring to the dynamic whereby *use* or *action* conditions and generates itself (‘bootstrapping’) – in most cases I have chosen a polymodal textualisation such as ‘in/with/for/by’ – awkward, but holding the position open with a sort of ‘Aorist’ logic.

Chapter texts have emerged iteratively generating an inductive process as their production went on. As a process of many ecological-pragmatic/topical-dialogic relations and movements, progressions with method and the ‘matter to hand’ as shifts can be noticed. I have sought to

show how this phenomenology of textualising practice has taken shape with the complex, centripetal, centrifugal and chaotic forces that the process engenders. I believe that the features of relating process and the ‘hows’ of textualisation occurring are practical in these ways, and I have noted them in order to learn responsively. Full *showing* (mimesis) is impossible but *telling* (diegesis) to ‘talk about’ tells its own tale for generative purpose (Rimmon-Kenan, 2001). Gabriel García Márquez evocatively marks this phenomena with his autobiographic title, *Vivir para Contarla* (*Living to Tell the Tale*) (2002).

The process has increasingly become a practice of reflexive enquiry. What will also be apparent is how changing language-uses enables shifting constructions and creations of thoughtful practice. Using a topographical language as a method for maintaining a pragmatics sensitivity to language-used, context and the particularity of relating processes. The topographical way of seeing is close to language as *used* that continually imagines according to the dimensions of space, place and time. Imagining or describing topographically, noticing our sense-making as language-used is one trustworthy path for attending to the processes of contextualisation going-on. As an extension of language-use, especially with development-aid organising practices, the many matrices and graphic instruments-in-use are fruitful instances of ‘spaces’ for exploratory learning work that can offer reflexive insight. This is a strategy that was not taken up for this project, but offers a possible way forwards for research with practical learning.

The practice of etymology here too has been a method for ‘flattening’ the context. At times the deconstruction of a word-item or composite term becomes possible for ‘not-following’ when the description of early uses (the contexts in which such words were coined) enables a loosening up of the term, or the means for a fresh iteration in a new context by way of looking at it ‘strangely’ for awhile (Austin, 1979b). In many cases a word-used has become ‘redundant’ in the cybernetic sense of working in ways that we no-longer notice. A term may stand as a hard-differentiation that has fixed a typical meaning in place. The Greek text that I have used from time to time (possibly an indulgence) but also a small way of disturbing the text in order to break our *following* or thinking pattern. I am aware that the context of Ancient Greece bears little resemblance to current predicaments of organisation. But I am also aware that many contemporary contexts are constructed with these foundational words whose histories shape our understandings. It is just one thread of our current context, but I believe a relevant one.

The dialectic and dimensional figuration with a practical map of learning movements (*Figure of Practical Learning*) offers a way to begin attending to what and how that which comes to matter, or to hand, becomes contingent. It therefore also offers a method of opening up a conversation about and with such contingencies, how they are shaping the quality of development-aid



organising going-on. The process of abductive description has become a method of 'travelling the territory', and phenomenologically coming to fresh understandings by means of the deconstructive/constructive patterns that flow from such abduction – or 'taking apart'. This is not a mechanical 'naming of parts' but a 'setting apart' that enables insight as to the describing process going-on as well as the description itself. As that described 'pushes back' with the discipline some view of the 'thing itself' becomes apparent. The data generated becomes a bridge – a relating text itself – for the hermeneutical task (and desire) of getting to somewhere new.

Finally, I note some more of the games of syntax I have attempted to play with this text. Strange formulations such as elliptical phrasing, verbal uses without objects, or items used simultaneously as nouns and verbs – all the beginnings of trying to imagine a relational syntax that could offer new forms of knowing/acting/making. English grammar is ordered to proposition, other languages of which I have no knowledge may be less so. The language of 'organisation' is currently and I imagine for some time to come predominantly 'English'. This is due to the origins of organisation science in England and the United States emerging with industrial and military technologies. Marked also by a social science discourse and the close links to the organisational-form of the 'corporate firm' and the technologies that drive it and conditioned increasingly according to the flow of information. The United States, arguably with Japan at a certain point, has been the place where 'organisational learning' has been described and goes-on in important senses. There are signs that a relational approach is beginning to find a space in the discourse of organisational development (Addleson, 2006, Bushe and Marshak, 2009). As the dominant language English and therefore its living-syntax matters for how we imagine organisational processing.

Emerging from all of this is an attention to a form of 'situational thinking' or imagining that may be more useful than the often characteristic 'Systems Thinking' informing many social constructionism articulations (Gubrium and Holstein, 2008). A situational thinking approach would remain with the particular details *informing*, the language *used* as item, semantic and syntax; the geography of movement and place; the sounds and pictures and figurations apparent and getting made, and all as phronetic, pragmatic and profoundly undetermined opportunities. This kind of approach would value the unique *sensing* of each place, recognising that any generalisation is an abstraction that is *useful* only insofar as it is useful for those who generate the matter. Any abstraction is just 'another map' towards possibility. Many generative approaches do this already<sup>25</sup> but I have not come across the term which might be useful for moving away from 'closed system' notions that could generate senses of inevitability or powerlessness (Star, 1995). A

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<sup>25</sup> Psychoanalysis comes to mind as one domain of particularising generative practice, 'appreciative inquiry' as another for the organisational domain.

situational approach invites responsibility to be taken recognising how the textual, interconnected and teleological ways in which we sense the world and our practices in/as and with it are the conditions that mark many people's lives including our own.

### *Unexplored Topographies as Next Steps to Take*

A line of exploration that I have been conscious of since early in the project but have not formally taken up is the articulation of a feminist discourse of organisation. Ianello's text, examining hierarchical organising forms and presenting a series of case studies where 'flat' structurings are explored with practice, was very helpful to my thinking at a certain point (1992). She notes the linking of the 'professional' with 'depersonalisation' as a result of the fragmenting and divisive practices of hierarchy which scale the responsibility for decision-making and scope technical specialisation in ways that disconnect contexts. Fletcher's terming of those practices of women managers that 'get disappeared' has also been a leitmotif throughout this work in noting that much of the processing of learning process indeed does commonly 'get disappeared' (Fletcher, 1998, Fletcher and Jacques, 1998) with management practices that isolate the 'private' sphere of the home, categorise and de-value 'empathy' as women's work.

While the notion of a feminist, post-structuralist critique of common organising practice is attractive there is a sense in which this type of deconstruction might be more complex than a simple division between 'women's' and 'men's' ways of working or a question of 'difference'. In fact the predicament of gendered relating processes that make knowledge and practice seems more deep seated (Lee Ashcraft, 2000). This is, I believe, why I did not go the path of feminist exploration up till now – I have always been conscious that it would be a place to go later when I had better understanding of the ways in which our language-use and imagining/deciding processes formulate our organising practices.

Taking up the literary criticism route briefly, Toril Moi, who has explored *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985) and used the 'ordinary language' philosophers in a movement towards the formulation of the feminist question as one of "access to the universal", which means that they [women's voices] should be part of any political, social, cultural or intellectual practice' (Payne and Schad, 2003: 134). Moi holds that there is a case for making another map, taking up Hosking's metaphor (2007), wherein the opposition between, or binary formulation of 'difference' and 'equality' needs to be overcome, 'we need to reformulate the whole thing ... to look at this opposition ... to come up with another way of describing feminism'. She has recognised that the issue is not about how women and men's practices are alike or unlike, but a question of human rights, 'we are not talking about what human beings are like, but about social and political rights'. This is also a question of how to 'get beyond the terms of [one's] own argument' (all Moi in, Payne and Schad,

2003: 149) – which it seems to me is precisely the conundrum of radical reframing, or deutero-learning.

If the terms that matter from a feminist perspective are equal human rights to be sought not on the basis of ‘difference’ as an ontological category, but rather on the basis of the right to participate and talk from how one sees the world, then the experience of exclusion of any voice, ‘feminist’, ‘queer’, ‘disabled’, ‘poor’ ... when posited as intertextualised epistemologies, needs to be heard for the weaving of an epistemology-of-participation as organising practice to become. But the essential shift for another map or reformulation away from oppositional binaries or interminable paradoxes, comes with understanding in practice that ‘difference’ is the general context of *everyone* and not the particular position of ‘women’, or any other bounded category of being that we might make. Relational constructionism offers frames for fresh contextualising of the ‘universal’ as how such a space is getting made and mattering. These topics are not irrelevant to public organising practices nor development-aid itself.

As ‘another epistemology’, the literature of the aesthetics of organisation is also untouched here in any formal way – although often threaded with the lines of the text. The recourse to poetics as an extension of the descriptive or ecological movement as learning process is the basis for counting the aesthetic sensibility that can be foregrounded for a holistic or more ‘complete’ learning practice, the sort of ‘genuine dialogical whole’ that Shotter imagines (2008: 40) in suggesting a ‘socio practical ethical movement’ of dialogal accountability (2008: 48). Inevitably, a greater descriptive space expands the aesthetic domain of organising practices with drama (eg. Clark and Mangham, 2004, Mc Carthy, 2004), ritual and myth (eg. Ritti and Silver, 1986) poetry (eg. Ramsey, 2006) music (eg. Barrett, 2006) or movement and dance and communication as performance (eg. Buzzanell et al., 1997). The poetic as a sphere of less fixed differentiation enables creativity and playfulness as generative resources (Küpers, 2002). Although a literature current for organising practice in general, as organising practice for development-aid aesthetic or poetic approaches are uncommon. As a topography of future research I see potential for the disciplines of organising and artistic practice in the generation of a juxtapositional conversation. This would amount to another intertextualising process whereby the assumptions that guide the differing practices are related in a new phenomenology of textualisation. The processes of artistic production offer a critical focus for a practice less concerned with ‘result’ and more with ‘evocation’, while the exigencies of organising practice offer an interesting context from which to explore what does or does not become the valued or hegemonic ‘art’ of the day.

As a final example of unexplored perspective what might be called the ‘hypertextual culture’ is noted. A passing phrase heard, ‘the death of adjacency’<sup>26</sup>, marks the significance of virtual and distributed worlds. The many new forms of relating processes made possible with new information and communication technology are surely profoundly shifting the ways in which people can and are imagining interaction, powerfulness and organising practice (Star, 1995, Holmes et al., 2002). To note just one of the ways in which the landscape is changing, a recent sequence of utterances between my sister and father on the topic of ‘Twitter’, a new platform of virtual communication, marks how issues of order, sequence and terms of narrative or syntactical comprehension are on the move. My sister (in her 30’s) was explaining to my father (in his 70’s) how to get into ‘Twitter’. He had already made some attempts and was asking her what the long list of seemingly arbitrary comments he had been reading on her website might mean (each comment is 146 characters in dimension). The conversation then took the following two turns:

Sister: They’re just answers

Father: But what are the questions?

This texting process captures for me one of the crucial thresholds that the new technologies of distributed communication, knowledge and identity (Hosking, 2002) are generating, that is the unboundaried nature of any narrative, and how for the new users this is not a problem, including the ways in which identity becomes a shared space in such a milieu. Without analysing this sequence in any depth, at surface or ‘face-value’ it is relatively clear that different assumptions about answers and questions background the exchange. The ‘answers’ imagined with the first utterance are ways of going-on, means to an unending conversation – along the lines of the deuterio-rationale that holds the end of praxis to be more praxis (Groome, 1980b). The ‘questions’ of the second utterance are imagined as the adjacency pairings, the pointed enquiries to which corresponding ‘answers’ are made in response.

The ‘threshold’ here is also cross-generational, not always the case of course – but not irrelevantly so. With this emergent differencing or differentiating pattern the reflexive positioning/field to explore are the effects that hypertextual relating enables. Derrida noted early on that when the form of the book, the grammè boundaried with manual production and an inherent narrative structure, was surpassed, new forms of thinking would be generated with textualising practices flowing and weaving (*as if*) their own paths (1976). It is a description of a time now come where loose boundarying practices are apparent. Since the generation of the social texture has always the characteristic of ‘as if’ (Shotter, 2008) it will surely be the case that as this generation of globally networked users, significantly ‘unboundaried’ by time and place, come

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<sup>26</sup> *The Forum*, BBC World Service, 21<sup>st</sup> February 2010

to the positions of power for defining the framing of organising practice, expectations of order and accountability will change on the basis of a different, 'hyper' experience of social texting.

Taking a different track, new topographies for exploration include those organising contexts where 'organisational learning' from a relational constructionism perspective has not been utilised as an approach for practice. One example are large International Non-Governmental Organisations working for development-aid. Considered with participatory frameworks (Korten, 1980, 1987), economic contribution (Meyer, 1995) or learning practice (Edwards, 1997) more discursive methods are less apparent. The results-based formulations that have characterised this engagement with organisational ODA may not be as pressing for these organisations as for those who must give constant public account. This may be only a question of time since increasingly such organisations are threaded into the budgetary streams of ODA. The participative and praxis tradition also seems to hold greater sway for INGO practice, considered closer to the 'ground'. Looking at organisations according to size is probably a clear factor for shared concern across the board. As International NGOs become increasingly included in the bilateral and multilateral development-aid conversation – as can already be seen within the framework of MAPS I and II for Irish Aid this distinction may become less relevant.

Another example of a different context for 'organisational learning' with enormous potential as 'research' and 'practice' are the practices of the established churches, a domain that has been recognised as under researched (Berthoin Antal et al., 2003). With a tentative move I presented (with a former colleague) some of the ideas emerging from this research work at the 2009 annual conference of BIAPT, the British and Irish Association for Practical Theology<sup>27</sup>. Possibly an unfamiliar category, 'Practical Theology' is currently understood as an open and publically relevant perspective, 'public theology is now seen as integral to practical theology ... practical theology ... is concerned with practice and it is an academic discipline; it seeks to serve the mission of the Church and the needs of the world; it touches that which is most personal and engages with that which is most public. Perhaps the truth of the matter is that practical theology cannot be defined too precisely – nor should we try to do so' (Lyll, 2009: 157).

By making the links between social science methods, formalising-faith, church practice and social concern, this general approach offers a connecting frame for research with church groups and

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<sup>27</sup> 'Is praxis possible in hierarchically ordered communities? An ecology of learning in organisational practice approach' Topic presented for workshop at *Public Theology: Dialogue in the Public Square*, Ushaw College, Durham, 14– 16<sup>th</sup> July 2009 (Barry and Codd, 2009).

communities that can deepen understanding on more general topics for organisational learning and change. Functioning in ways similar, but framed differently to ‘business’ as ‘organisation’ ecclesial community can become generative on its own terms on a basis of relational and reflexive enquiry. As a praxis with its role and contribution to society reflexive enquiry with ‘position’ suggests itself as an important topic for such communities. One difference with church organisation is that a tradition and epistemology of institutionalising belief, ritual and practice are overt in ways that may not be so evident for other organisation types. Beyond the practical, there are also interesting questions of a more ‘systematic’ nature for a theology of incarnation. The deep-seated world view as interpreted from the Prologue of John’s Gospel, ‘In the beginning was the Word’, traces towards many philosophical and ontological questions.

The notion of the ‘Word’ itself as λόγος (logos) has been philosophically deconstructed on various terms including Heidegger’s λέγειν (legein) the spoken-nature of the word (1973), or the postmodern situating of the word-spoken within the text, and not *idealised* in Platonic fashion. Of interest here as a possible next topography is the exploration of understandings of how the ‘Word’ works through Ecclesiology, the theological understanding of church structure and organisation. Ecclesiology is formally described with many texts, historical and systematic, and lived as church structures, from designated roles to territorial mappings. ‘Church’ as discursive organising practice is a labyrinth of rich abstraction that I believe is largely unexplored as a landscape for learning about significant ways by which we order ‘society’. At the workshop presentation for BIAPT 2009 it is interesting that people across the spectrum of the churches present – Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Catholic etc. – attended and identified the hierarchical structuring of their churches as inhibiting praxis and limiting, or even stultifying, the ecology of learning that could be imagined from a faith perspective.

The list of potential organising contexts for further development of the topics and concerns of organisational learning and change from a relational constructionism perspective include many public service spaces such as the library and the museum, as well sites of contentious resource allocation and good functioning such as the Health Service, Education or the Administration of Justice.

### **Knitting for Con(cluding)Text**

If we were to imagine ourselves as a pair of extraordinary knitting needles looking upon all the woollen threads that we could take up for knitting ourselves as garment we are now in a position to give some names to the colours and textures of those threads. I began this Chapter affirming that what matters is ‘how we knit’. Now I wish to close by gathering in some of those ways,

imagined as ephemeral, although endless, woollen threads that *become* as we knit a garment good to live.

We knit *textually* – con/inter and transtextually, making meaning our matter and material for going on. We knit *categorically* – acknowledging that all differentiation is asymmetrical, that knowing is the outflowing of being, but also aware that our classifications *essentialise*, and that that which we mark as ‘essential’ is a construction of our social, historical and with *use*, adaptable, negotiable and always variable living-boundary. We knit *from within* – ‘not-knowing’ as a function (more than a feature) of our knowing. There has to be randomness, noise, nothingness, a ‘flatness’ or ‘ground’ of surface imagined – the ‘word’ that we have no word-for – if knowing anything is to be possible. But, we also knit *exigently* – the ‘word we have no word for’ is none other than our speaking itself. We have no choice but to respond to the givenness of our situation, and so we ‘speak’ or tend. Therefore, we knit *contingently* with un-worked but working purpose we position ourselves, continually attending to the recognition that does or does not come as we tend towards another *situation*. We also, according to syle, knit habitually re-using useful or attractive uses that generate feelings and senses of cohesion and convention with familiar words and connections and patterns that satisfy us, but only up to a point. We can become blind to their processes and feel despair and find it difficult to knit another pattern. Our knitting can entrap us with processes becoming useless when once they were apt. We knit *unwittingly* at time as we never know the next fact or event or response. But we also knit *stochastically*, shooting our arrows with a sense of futurity, a possible horizon based on things we know, things we can feel we can predict. We take risks with things we know and sometimes we knit with abandon forgetting that we know. We might sometimes happen upon a target, not really understanding how we got there. For all of this, we often compete and have learnt well in the most pragmatic of fashions and styles to use such resources, always to hand to manage our process. We are experts.

But for all of this knitting, it is bigger than any picture, frame, boundary, order or practice that we can encompass – any organisation. It seems as if to *knit us*. The knitting engenders a telos, a force that we participate with; well or badly I suggest. The only reason to judge our ‘knitting that makes the knitting’ as such, is ethical – a care that we go-on together and that each one and each place (including our planet) matters<sup>28</sup>. Our imagination (even formalised as method) conjectures our way with surround, syntax, device and signal; it becomes pragmatic, material, steps that make.

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<sup>28</sup> Recently Jeffrey Sachs identified three concerns common to all human beings as a basis for global initiative; we all live on this planet, we all hold precious the future of our children, we are all mortal – at the presentation, ‘That the Thanks of the Society are due to the Auditor for his paper, *Economics in Global Sphere*’, given during the 240<sup>th</sup> Inaugural Meeting of the College Historical Society, Trinity College Dublin, 27<sup>th</sup> January 2010

These practical placings make conditions and consequences for people and our planet – and we are responsible in such determined ways. A relational approach to these predicaments ultimately tries to remember at each time, in each place, for every situation that, ‘the end of the road ... the limit toward which this process tends, is *that* where anything can be substituted for anything else’ (Matte Blanco, 1975: 165 emphasis added). We can never *be* ‘that’ or ‘there’ since *that* does not exist. But we can learn, even organisationally, to learn with possibility ever to hand. Maybe ‘organisationally’ is the most critical ‘place’ to learn. This is organising learning with (a) difference.

### **A glossary of terms to contextualise relating processes:**

**Analogue-surround** – the on-going and given situation of a continual present (to respond to)

**Coherence** – the received attunement experienced when categorical and figurative knowledges are reflexively relating

**Con/textualising** – the process of being/known going-on (topical, ecological, dialogic, pragmatic)

**Contingency** – practical-a-priori constructing, responsive to situation (form, exigency, media, matter) and oriented towards imagined or desired states

**Decadent** – a diminished or life-inhibiting situation that can be tended towards with hard fixed S/O and fixing practices

**Dialogic** – through logics and interlogical

**Differentiation** – the process of knowledge-making, all learning is a process of differentiation and syntax

**Digital-signal** – qualitative, categorical syntax generating message

**Ecologic** – the ‘rationale of relating’ going-on between features of the environment – including people, groups, materialities, contexts and the like – also between constructions-made

**Figure** – the face-value as a graphic or other dimensionality that generates  $\mu$ -functions as setting context for categorical dialectics

**Force** – δύναμις or dynamic, the tendency of the situation always directional in some complex sensing process

**Functional** – the nature of any relating process that is proper to its ‘end’ as defined by use – so that the function of knowing or learning is defined by use-itself as its ‘goal’ – i.e., ‘learning’ or ‘going-on’

**Good practice** – practice that is also reflexive attending, generates confidence, leadership etc. as conscious and open position or identity



**Incomplete learning practice** – learning practice that is overly focussed on single or reduced movements of the learning cycle

**In/formation** – the generation of information by way of the forming process that makes it

**Practical** – common, always going-on, used, useful

**Practical learning** – learning that is common, useful, attuned to its own functioning

**Practical-a posteriori** – common ways of appraising organising practice

**Practical-a priori** – common ways of conjecturing organising practice

**Pragmatic** – that which is given, the deed done, to which we arrive always after the fact – the ground of being/knowing

**Praxis** – a shared, reflective practice that accounts for the complex textualising processes that make for on-going practices and considers the liberation of all participants by way of practice

**Relating processes** – all syntactical activity that generates the weave of context, order, interpersonal relationships etc.

**Teleology** – the forcing of intertextualising processes that carries contingent and unending goals which adapt and transform in process and embodiment

**Topic** – that which becomes the focus of attention – a theme, a predicament, a proposition etc.

‘Unending Quote’

ἀλλ’ ἀποπαύετε μηδ’ ἐπὶ πλείω  
θρῆνον ἐγείρετε.  
πάντων γάρ ᾿χει τάδε κῦρος.

But cease now, and nevermore

Lift up the lament:

For all this is determined.

Sophocles, *Oedipus in Colonus*

*As quoted by Martin Heidegger*

*What is Metaphysics? Postscript*

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