A multi-positional and pragmatic reflexive approach to organizational consultancy

Andreas Granhof Juhl
Registration no. 0615955
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Abstract

This thesis researches how the consultant can participate in the creation of successful processes in organizations using multiple theoretical and practical traditions and a pragmatic reflexivity. The research shows how the consultant can do this using a heuristic model developed in the thesis called the consultancy room consisting of three dimensions: distinctions of position, distinctions of system, and distinctions of time.

The thesis shows 6 different and distinct positions that the consultant can use in practice: the OD, systemic, solution-focused, appreciative, narrative and strategic position. To show their practical usefulness multiple examples of developing teams are described. The research shows that positions are firstly to be understood as theories that the consultant knows from experience and literature and brings to the organization and secondly the research also shows how such positions are created and coordinated with the customer before and during the consultancy process.

The thesis further shows how the consultant can work with multiple distinctions of system. Three prototypical distinctions of system are introduced: the individual, the group, and the organization as part of the consultancy room to help the consultant increase his orientational abilities in practice. And a further distinction between the conversational and the linguistic system is made to help the consultant reflect in and on practice. The conversational system addresses the design of the process by reflecting with the customer about who should talk to whom in order to develop the situation. The linguistic system addresses how the system in focus is being talked about. The thesis shows how the different positions look at and give different possibilities for action in relation to the different distinctions of system.

Finally the thesis shows how the consultant can work with multiple distinctions of time. Three prototypical distinctions of time are introduced: the moment, the meeting, and the process as part of the consultancy room to help the consultant navigate in practice.
Again the different positions give different ideas of how to act in the moment and how to design meetings and longer processes.

The research is done using the researchers own practice as data. A pragmatic research method is created and based in particular on the work of John Dewey (Dewey 1916 1938, Brinkmann 2006) and Gregory Bateson (Bateson 1972 1984) looking at similarities and differences between multiple examples from the researchers practice.
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Chapter 1: Introduction and motivation for the thesis


I will use this to make two important points in this chapter. Firstly, each theoretical approach gives the consultant unique possibilities to work in practice. Secondly, each theoretical approach runs the risk of becoming “the end rather than the means”, and thus the theory uses the consultant instead of the consultant using the theory when it is useful. I will use this to motivate my two research questions to be presented in the second section of this chapter. And in the third section of this chapter I will give an account of each chapter in the thesis and how they help answer the two research questions.

My professional journey leading to the research

The purpose of this section is to show how my professional journey led me through three different theoretical approaches and practical traditions. From the systemic approach working with relations and interactions, to the appreciative approach of introducing an appreciative
language of possibilities and hopes, to the strategic approach of clarifying organizational goals and action planning.

The systemic approach

Before beginning my studies of psychology I studied mathematics at the University of Aarhus for two years. Coming from a world of axioms and propositions it was a shock to me to begin studying psychology. The fundamental learning experience was that the field of observation had to include the observer in the field being observed. This directed me towards the systemic approach and the work of Tom Andersen (Andersen 1996), Gregory Bateson (Bateson 1972 1984), the Milan group (Boscolo et al. 1991, Cecchin 1987 1992, Cecchin et al. 1993, Palazzoli 1980), Peggy Penn (Penn 1988), Rolf Sundet (Sundet 1988), Karl Tomm (Tomm 1992) and Paul Watzlawick (Watzlawick 1967 1974). I will present the first time it became clear to me that the observer had to be included in the field being observed and then present two learning reflections of importance for this thesis.

Example 1

My first encounter with the systemic ideas was getting supervision from my previous leader. I had just started studying psychology and after that also started working in a psychiatric institution. One morning I was in charge of the patients in one of the houses, and I was to especially help one depressive and schizophrenic patient to get out of bed and prepare food for the other patients in the house she was living in. Being behind schedule, I ran into her room telling her “it’s time to get up”. Her response was silence. I removed some cups from her table and started telling her about what tasks she was responsible for that day. Still lying in her bed facing the wall, her only response was “I can’t”. I left her room having other responsibilities to attend to, but when I had not seen her within 10 minutes, I went back to her room saying: “You have to get out of bed. Now”. She yelled: “Leave!”. I remember thinking of the different stories of her being violent, so I kept a distance from her bed. This episode took place two more times in more agitated tones, and not knowing what to do, I consulted my
leader. She asked some simple questions like: What do you do? What does she do then? How do you respond to this? How do you think she’s making sense of it all?

I can’t remember my exact answers to these circular questions, but I remember the effect they had on me. I started moving my focus from the patient, as a depressive, schizophrenic and violent woman, to our relationship. How I was part of co-creating her anger. Realizing this, I saw new possibilities for action and went back to her room. This time I said: “I see that the way I have entered your room has left you angry at me. This was not my intention. I came to help you but now I realize that this was not what happened. I’m sorry for that”. Having said this I left her room not waiting for her response. 3 minutes after she came out to talk to me. We talked about the situation and how to go on together for the rest of the day.

The first reflection concerns the learning experience. I remember being filled with satisfaction from achievement. But I also remember feeling puzzled. What had happened? How could I understand it? And where could I learn more about this relational perspective where I had to include myself in the field of observation? Gregory Bateson became the first to introduce a useful systemic language to me talking of context, relations, interactions, and differences (Bateson 1972 1984). I will go into the theoretical assumptions in chapter 2, 3 and 4. For now the important story to tell is that this experience had a huge impact on my way of working. After this example the systemic hypothesis focusing the practitioner’s attention towards differences in relationships and interactions between people in different contexts (Bateson 1972 1984, Boscolo et al. 1991) became my preferred way of observing. In the following chapters I will go into more theoretical details and further show how a systemic perspective of relationships, interactions and contexts can be used in developing teams.

The second reflection concerns my research methods that will be described and discussed in chapter 2. Here I will argue that this example retold by memory is a piece of data, because it gives a possible answer to the research questions. So data in this thesis will be presented as examples and new theory will be developed using a pragmatic research method using Bateson’s method of double description looking at similarities and differences between the examples (Bateson 1972 1984).
The appreciative approach

Working as an organizational psychologist with systemic ideas, I encountered a more language-oriented way of viewing organizations in appreciative inquiry as presented by David Cooperrider (Cooperrider & Srivastva 1987, Cooperrider 1990 2000, Cooperrider & Whitney 1999) and Peter Lang (Lang et al. 1990 1994 2002). Here the organization is seen as a heliotrope system. I will explain the heliotrope system approach in chapters 3 and 4. For now the important story to tell is that the key concern in appreciative inquiry is to make a shift in language. Away from a problem saturated language focusing on problems, deficits, mistakes, and lack of success. Towards an appreciative and value adding language focusing on successes, strengths, positive intentions in people’s actions, possibilities and on creating positive experiences and scenarios of the future. And this is significantly different from the systemic focus of patterns of interaction. I will describe the theoretical assumptions and their usefulness for developing teams in chapter 3 and 4. In this section I will present an example, from which I learned the effect such an approach have on an entire organization.

Example 2

An organization working with patients having a particular chronic illness had for a long time used a problem fixing approach to their patients. In short the employees used their vast experiences to diagnose problems and then conduct training programs with the patients to help patients overcome their problems. This problem-oriented approach was present in every aspect of the organization’s work. One example is that the patients were asked to answer some questions based on a problem defining approach before their stay in the organisation. The patients’ answers were used by the organization to plan a 4-week training stay in the organization.

**Explain – What symptoms from [the chronic illness] bother you the most and describe in what way they bother you in your every day life**

The organization was very successful in creating and documenting results in this 4-week period, but they had difficulties helping the patients sustain the results for a longer period of
time. In order to succeed with creating a long lasting effect in the patients’ lives, the organization wished to shift towards an appreciative approach creating a higher degree of motivation in the patient by organising the 4-week stay around the patients’ own hopes and goals for the future. In order to do this, every aspect of the organization was worked through and an appreciative approach was introduced. For example the question was changed, and now the patient is asked:

**Please state – What do you hope to achieve from a rehabilitating stay in [the organization]? What would you like to master better or more easily?**

**On a scale from 0 to 10 – how do you see your possibilities to succeed with this? (Where 10 is ”very good”)**

I will make two reflections about my learning from this example. The first learning was immediate. Both patients and employees said they had struck gold. Patients satisfactory scores rose to unbelievable 100% and employees found motivation in patients they had previously thought wouldn’t benefit from a training stay in the organization.

The second learning was important in relation to this research. It turned out that the appreciative approach could not stand by itself. Even though appreciative inquiry had successfully introduced new ways of working in the organization, questions of how to succeed with cross-disciplinary work and new ways of organizing teams had not been addressed sufficiently. In example 7 I will show how in this example the appreciative approach had to be combined with more classical strategic thinking about organizational structure. So the second learning from example 2 and 7 in combination is that even though the appreciative and strategic approaches are based on different assumptions, they are not mutually exclusive. In example 12 I will show how the different approaches can be used in combination. This directs me towards the third approach to organizational change that I came to appreciate: the strategic approach.
The strategic approach

By the strategic approach I point to classical strategy work as presented by people like Richard Lynch (Lynch 2003), Michael Porter (Porter 1985) and John P. Kotter (Kotter 1995). What they have in common is a concern with connecting organizational means and ends in effective business processes and an approach to change in organization that, compared to the systemic approach, is linear. In chapters 3 and 4 I will go into details about what they have in common, but for now the important point is that they share a focus on classical organizational issues like strategic planning, decision making processes etc. I learned about the strategic approach in a very interesting way, since the example I will present was also the first time I really came to appreciate the multi-positional approach that is a result of this research¹.

Example 3

I had been working with the appreciative approach for a longer period and experienced its usefulness. Customers began to invite me because of this, and one day a leader hired me to work with her team, which had a conflict. The team talked of “lack of trust” both in the team and in relation to the leader. They had tried different solutions, but none of them had made a difference. The conflict remained. The leader had heard me talking of “approaching the problem in a different and appreciative way” and thought that this approach could be what the team needed. Instead of fixing the problem the team should do more of what already worked.

When I first met the team, they were silent but seemed interested. I interpreted this as “let’s see if this works”. The team of 8 and the leader were present. To prepare for the meeting, everybody had prepared one or two “positive examples”. The examples should illustrate what they hoped to get more of. My role was to interview everybody and invite them to look for shared hopes and shared expectations of how to collaborate in the future.

¹ In real time example 3 came after example 2 and before example 7.
Initially the room became full of energy. Everybody was silent, but now it was from curiosity and focused attention to what was being said by colleagues. Clearly this appreciative approach created something new. But not for long. After interviewing the first 3 or 4 employees, the energy and shared focus left the conversation. The interviewees started answering in shorter and more general statements like “I agree that we need a more respectful way of collaborating, but I do not think we will succeed”. Suddenly one employee that hadn’t been saying anything leaned forward and said: “This is where we always end. We can say the right words, but we don’t do the right things afterwards”. I started interviewing her about what she saw as “the right thing to do”, but she had very little to say about this and she didn’t have any “positive examples” either.

The leader was clearly frustrated and said that she expected everybody to show a positive attitude in the teamwork. The team didn’t respond. Time was coming to an end. I tried to end the meeting by inviting each of them to choose one thing that they would do in order to develop the collaboration in the team until we should meet 3 weeks later. Everybody did so and the meeting stopped.

Returning three weeks later, I was curious about their progress after the first meeting. Since we had agreed on an appreciative approach to the process, my first question to the team members was: “Where have you succeeded in creating the collaboration in the team that you are hoping for?” Immediately it was clear that this question didn’t make sense to them. One said that things had gone from bad to worse and another agreed and said that a process of redistributing the tasks in the team had worsened the situation. The leader was silent but seemed to agree. The conversation went on like this for 15 minutes where they described how redistributing the tasks in the team had increased the conflict. Employees shifted between accusing each other of selfishness and of asking the leader to step in and take the decision. The leader responded that the team ought to be able to take such a decision on its own. That this was a team responsibility.

How could I understand what was going on? Just a few days before I had been in a conversation with a colleague, who had said that psychologists working with organizations...
didn’t fully appreciate traditional strategic organizational literature looking at themes like defining a burning platform to create motivation for change and working with decision making processes defining leadership and team responsibilities. In the conversation with the team it suddenly struck me that the strategic position had a clear perspective about what was going on. The whole organization had just made a move towards working as teams. The decision to organize in teams was taken by the top group of leaders in an organization with 5000 people, and this team didn’t have a clear purpose or motivation to work as a team. Neither did they seem to have a picture of what working as a team means in relation to team roles and team leader responsibilities. But this problem-saturated approach to their situation was not what we had made a contract about. So what should I do?

I decided to go with my new and strategic way of seeing their situation and said: “The way I see your situation is that your difficulties as a team are primarily connected with decision taking processes as for example redistributing your tasks. It seems to me that you haven’t found new and functional ways of taking decisions after having been defined as a team. You as a leader expect the team to be able to redistribute the tasks on its own. As a team you seem to me to respond by going into conflict. Not growing from increased responsibility. I think you need to work through how decisions are being made in the team and what roles each of you are having”.

A sigh of relief came from several of the team members. I looked at the leader and said: “Looking at the team I believe that this is where we should redirect our attention. Do you agree? And is it possible to make this shift?” From here on the process was on track. I followed the team in two more meetings, where they developed and implemented their decision taking routines as a team.

I will make two reflections about this example.

Firstly, it is an important example because it is a prime example of the results from the research. The consultant is able to work using multiple positions reflecting on what each position offers from perspectives on the organization, the situation and the role of the
consultant. And further that the consultant is able to reflect pragmatically about what will work in the situation and not be bound by one particular position.

Secondly, it is important because it shows one example of how re-positioning can be made. I change position in the process from the appreciative position to the strategic position. In this example this shift is made due to a process that is not progressing. Schön would call this a “reflection in action” (Schön 1987) because the consultant reflects in action about what is going on and how to engage differently in the situation. But the shift is not coordinated with the customer in advance. It is made because the consultant believes it to be relevant. I will discuss this in chapter 5 going into the question if the position of the consultant is a skilful choice made by the consultant or constructed in dialogue with the customer.

At this point in the thesis, I will draw attention to three important reflections based on all three examples and use these to formulate my research question.

The first reflection is that each theoretical approach as a paradigm offers both a language and a practice for organizations and consultants. Wittgenstein says that “to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life” (Wittgenstein 1994 § 19). Each theoretical language gives the consultant the possibility to participate in certain ways in the organization. In each of the three examples this participation contributed to create success by contributing to a form of life. Each theoretical narrative can be read as a paradigm of perspectives and behaviours that the consultant can use in practice.

The second reflection using the three examples is that no one position can in itself account for how to create success. As example 3 indicates, sometimes a shift in theoretical and practical approach is necessary in order to succeed. By introducing the strategic position in example 3, a new language is introduced in the conversation giving a new and helpful perspective on their situation. In this case the new language helped improve the situation. This connects to Wittgenstein who argued that the meaning of a word is how it is used (Wittgenstein 1994). Words like decision and roles as used in example 3 are not objective descriptions of organizations. They are words used be people to “do something”. In this situation the words are used to develop the team.
I will dwell on the two Wittgenstein reflections since they are of importance for the thesis and the construction of my research questions. Using von Krogh and Roos model building on Wittgenstein’s idea of “meaning as use”, what happens in all three examples can be described as follows (von Krogh & Roos 1995, Roos & von Krogh 1996):

![Fig. 1: von Krogh & Roos.](image)

In example 3 the idea presented that *I think you need to work through how decisions are being made in the team and what roles each of you are having* introduced a new set of words and concepts in the organization. As the model shows, this can lead to one of two situations. Either the meaning remains the same indicated by the low square at the right. In this situation no new perspectives or possibilities for action are created. But the other possible situation is that the meaning changes as indicated by the top square at the right. In example 3 the new words turned out to create new meaning, as indicated by the arrow. A change in language became a change in reality, because the new language offered the team and leader a new and clearer perspective on their situation and they saw new possibilities for action. And so did the consultant. In the thesis I will use Wittgenstein to argue, that each theoretical approach is unique, when and only when it allows the consultant to use a unique vocabulary of words and
a unique set of practices. In this thesis I will call such a set of unique vocabulary and practices for position. So far I have shown that the systemic, appreciative and strategic positions are unique.

Thirdly, my professional journey left me both inspired by each theoretical approach giving me unique possibilities to act. Knowing more theoretical approaches helps the consultant work with clarity about own assumptions. But this journey also left me frustrated about how each approach was accompanied by a normative language, dictating “do’s and don’ts” on behalf of the consultant’s behaviour. Looking back on my journey I found it difficult to stop making systemic hypothesis once it had become my preference. It had become a habit and a norm. Both inspiration and frustration was what led me to formulate my research question.

**Formulating the research question: What is to be researched?**

I’m now ready to formulate the research questions to guide my research and create the foundation for the construction of a practical research method that is both grounded in and useful for practice.

*Research question 1: How can I on the basis of my own work as a consultant create an account of how to succeed as a consultant?*

To formulate a second research question I use the inspiration from Burke: “A good research question needs to be supported by a clear rationale, as it will by necessity have to leave out aspects considered important to a systemic thinker” (Burck 2005 p. 240). The three examples already presented in this chapter illustrate that more theoretical traditions are useful, if they create different possibilities for action. So based on my professional journey an additional question can be formulated to sharpen and guide the research:

*Research question 2: How can the consultant use multiple theoretical and practical traditions in order to create success?*
The structure of the thesis: a presentation of each chapter

The purpose of chapter 2 will be to show how a research approach was created to research into the research questions. Where the research questions pinpoint what is to be researched, I will draw on the inspiration from Coolican (Coolican 1999) and Kvale (Kvale 2002) to argue that I additionally need to address why the research is worth making and how the research is done, in order to create a research approach. I will use the inspiration from John Dewey (Dewey 1916 1938), Vernon Cronen (Cronen 2000), William James (James 2000), Richard Rorty (Rorty 1989 1997), Ludwig Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein 1989 1994) and Gregory Bateson (Bateson 1972 1984) to argue for a pragmatic approach to research saying that “everything is potentially data”. As already shown in this chapter I will refer to this argumentation in order to use a wide range of examples in the thesis. In chapter 2 I will especially draw on the inspiration from Bateson to design a research approach looking at similarities and differences between the examples from my own practice to create new knowledge about how to succeed as a consultant.

The purpose of chapter 3 is to begin the presentation of the results from the research. The consultancy room as shown in the model below will be presented as a metaphor illustrating the results from the research showing how the consultant is able to simultaneously make three dimensions in practice: distinctions of position, distinctions of system, and distinctions of time. In chapter 3 I will present the first dimension: distinction of position. First I will discuss the term “position” and show two possible and useful uses: “position as theory” and “positioning in conversation”. “Position as theory” highlights the theoretical assumptions and traditions of practices that the consultant is bringing to the organization. The three traditions shown above in this chapter are examples of “positions as theory”. “Positioning in conversation” highlights that the consultant is always coordinating both process and own position with the customer. Example 3 show one example of how positioning is done in conversations between consultant and customer. Both understandings of position help the consultant reflect both in and on practice about:

- What do I see now about the organization and situation from the position, I have taken?
• *What could I see if I looked at the organization and situation from a different position?*

Additionally, the results from the research show how I use six different and distinct positions in practice: the OD, systemic, solution-focused, appreciative, narrative, and strategic position. I will go into detail with each position and show how each position can be used to develop teams.

![Fig. 2: The consultancy room](image-url)
The purpose of chapter 4 will be to continue presenting the results from the research going into distinctions of system and time. With distinctions of system I will present how the results show how the consultant is simultaneously able to work with the conversational system, meaning designing who should talk to whom, as well as the linguistic system, meaning who is being talked about and in what way. I will further show how the different positions give different perspectives on how to understand distinctions of system and how the consultant can orientate in practice by focusing on three prototypical systems: the organization, the group, and the individual.

With distinctions of time I will present how the results from the research show how the consultant is simultaneously working with multiple distinctions of time. Using the inspiration from Barnett Pearce I will show how making distinctions between “in the moment” facilitation, “meeting” and “process” design can help the consultant orientate and create success in practice.

The purpose of chapter 5 is manifold and therefore the chapter is called Perspectives on the research and the results. Firstly, I will present the conclusion of the research, which is that the consultant is able to work from a multi-positional approach based on a pragmatic reflexivity of what will work in the organization as presented in chapter 3 and 4. Secondly, I will use William James (James 2000), John Dewey (Dewey 1916 1938, Brinkmann 2006), John Austin (Austin 1997), Ludwig Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein 1989 1994) and Gregory Bateson (Bateson 1972 1984), Gianfranco Cecchin (Palazzoli et al. 1980, Cecchin 1987 1992, Cecchin et al. 1993, Boscolo et al. 1991), Pearce (1992 1999 2001), John Shotter (Shotter 1993 2010), Kenneth Gergen (Gergen 1982 1997, Gergen & Gergen 2008), and Daniel Goleman (Goleman 2000) to show why the results are a satisfactory answer to my research questions from a theoretical perspective. Thirdly, I will additionally show why the results are a satisfactory answer to my research questions from a practical perspective. In designing a pragmatic approach to the research in chapter 2 I will argue that a coherent research must place multiple critical perspectives on both research and results. I’ve done this in different ways. In chapter 5 I will show how colleagues, customers and my research supervisor have given both confirming and critical statements and questions. I will dwell on four prototypical critical questions and how
the research has given answers to these questions. Finally I will end both chapter 5 and the thesis by addressing the implications of the research to the training of consultants showing how a multi-positional approach helps designing training exercises. And I will address implications for further research showing three different ways to continue the research presented in this thesis.
Chapter 2: Research approach - a practical method

The purpose of chapter 2 is to construct a clear and coherent research approach. I will use the term “a practical method” to emphasize that the main purpose of the research method will be twofold:

- That the research is grounded in my own practice.
- That the research is to be useful for my own practice and for practitioners in general. I will discuss this in the section about the pragmatic validity of the research below.

As Coolican (Coolican 1999) and Kvale (Kvale 2002) point out, the researcher should address three questions to construct a research approach:

1. *What* is to be researched? In chapter 1 I described my professional journey until the doctorate program and used this description to motivate my research questions and thereby *what* is to be researched.
2. *Why* is the research made? Part of this is already described in chapter 1, and in this chapter I will place the research in a wider theoretical and practical context and pinpoint my personal motivation for the research.
3. *How* to do the research. I will be working with three questions.
   I. The general question of what kind of research is to be made: qualitative or quantitative?
   II. How the research is accounting for what counts as data.
   III. And finally how data is used to create a research result. The results will be presented in chapter 3 and 4.

Having answered these questions, I will take a step back from the research approach constructed. In order to construct a clear and coherent research method, I will critically reflect on the choices made. This will be done by looking at *if and in what way* the research approach is accounting for both validity and reliability. Further I will look at the research approach from an ethical perspective. Using the inspiration of Coolican (Coolican 1999) and
Kvale (Kvale 2002) the first questions to address in order to construct a research method are: 
*Why is this research worth making? And how will the research be done?*

**Why is the research worth conducting?**
The question of *why* was addressed briefly in chapter 1. In this section I will present two different kinds of arguments to answer why this research is worth doing. The first line of argument is at a theoretical and a practical level. The second is at a personal level.

**Answering the question of why at a theoretical and a practical level**
In this section I will present how I see the theoretical and practical field of organizational consultancy created both in the literature and in organizations in Denmark. Such a general description will of course focus on some similarities and leave out some differences. But it is this reading of the current situation that has been a motivator to conduct the research and thereby is part of answering the question of why this research is worth making. I will argue that the field of organizational consultancy and development is dominated by three approaches:

- An idealistic approach giving normative accounts of what the consultant ought to do
- An intuitive approach arguing for a “gut feeling” approach to consultancy
- A reflexive approach arguing that the consultant should reflect on his own role and behaviour.

In this section I will present each approach to show the theoretical and practical background that contextualizes the research. In order to argue why the research is worth doing, I claim that a useful account of consultancy should take the best parts from each approach and leave their weaknesses behind.

By an *idealistic approach* I mean those who argue in a normative way about what the consultant *ought* to do, making a dualistic description between their own position that is the
right way to see organizations, and another position that they see as “the problem”. I read Cooperrider as such an idealist with the appreciative approach as “the right way to work as a consultant” and the problem saturated approach as a problem in itself (Cooperrider & Srivastva 1987, Cooperrider 1990 2000, Cooperrider & Whitney 1999). I read Schein as an idealist arguing that a process approach to consultancy is superior to that of a classical expert approach (Schein 1999). I see Gergen as an idealist arguing for the superiority of social constructionism approach to that of modernism (Gergen 1985 1997, Gergen & Gergen 2008). As the examples with Cooperrider, Schein and Gergen illustrate, I use the term idealistic to mean those who, by making a dualism, claim that one approach is superior to that of another.

I see the strength of the idealist approach to consultancy as conquering new theoretical and practical ground by giving the consultant new ideas of what to do. As example 2 above shows, an appreciative inquiry approach is helpful. I would not have been able to work in this way, had I not known appreciative inquiry. The not so often seen weakness is, as I see it, that theories have a tendency to become regimes of thinking or what de Shazer calls storytelling industries (de Shazer 1994). The telling of narratives began because they were helpful in overcoming some difficulty or achieving some goal. But the narratives ended up having a life of their own (ibid.). Being told and re-told in a way that makes the narratives normative more than helpful. Presenting the results from the research in chapter 3 I will show how an account of consultancy can keep the strengths of an idealistic approach by giving ideas of what to do in different situations when used with a pragmatic reflexivity; but without ending in a dualistic trap, where certain positions are not regarded as useful.

By an intuitive approach I mean that the professional isn’t necessarily able to give an account of what to do. And he shouldn’t necessarily try to either. The professional knows what to do based on experience using what has developed to become “a gut feeling”. When talking to customers and other practitioners and asking them why they take a certain line of action and what assumptions they base this on, they often answer “I don’t know, but I know that it’ll work”. And they often turn out to be right. Also in the literature in the work of John Shotter (Shotter 1993 2006 2008 2009 2010), the brothers Dreyfus (Dreyfus & Dreyfus 1999), and
Lave & Wenger (Lave 1999), this kind of argumentation is well known, moving away from abstract theorizing and towards situated and relational understandings.

John Shotter, with the inspiration from Wittgenstein, argues that certain difficulties are not solved by thinking or the use of scientific method. “They [are] orientational or relational difficulties, to do with how we spontaneously respond to features in our surroundings” (Shotter 2009 p. 6). The brothers Dreyfus argue that experts in a field use tacit knowledge to make subtle discriminations in practice. “They need to almost exclusively trust their intuition and make almost no comparative analysis of alternatives” (Dreyfus & Dreyfus 1999 p. 6). Developing learning theory Lave and Wenger are known to criticize abstract teaching and suggest that learning happens in communities of practice (Lave 1999).

For me the strength of this position is captured in Shotter’s discussion of different approaches to inquiry:

“Thus, the major difference between practitioner initiated and oriented inquiry and academically initiated and oriented research, i.e. coolly rational research, is that such research aims at reliable, repeatable, publically criticisable results, results that can be generalized to apply in many different contexts, while practitioners are concerned in their inquiries with gaining an orientation, a sense of “where” they are placed in relation to their immediate surroundings, and the surrounding field of real possibilities open to them for their next step” (Shotter 2009 p. 6).

In practice the aim is not to achieve generalized knowledge but to be able to find one’s next step or, using a Wittgenstein quote, “Knowing how to go on” (Wittgenstein 1989 1994). Both Dreyfus & Dreyfus (Dreyfus & Dreyfus 1999) and Lave & Wenger (Lave 1999) argue that knowledge is based on the situated experience of the individual. I see this to be both the strength and the weakness of this approach. The strength is that any choice taken in practice is based on personal experience creating a feeling of strength in the individual and a basis for action. In this way the idealistic and intuitive approach are alike, because security in action is

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2 My translation from Danish.
valued. The idealists are finding security in a theoretical narrative whereas the intuitive are finding security in their own lives and experiences.

But at the same time I see such an intuitive and experience based argument as a weakness. Using a quote from Rorty: “In my Wittgensteinian view, an intuition is never anything more or less than familiarity with a language-game, so to discover the source of our intuitions is to relive the history of the philosophical language-game we find ourselves playing” (Rorty 1979 p. 34). So pointing to “intuition” in an argument is saying, that I know how to follow this language-game, because I have done it before. This echoes how I see the potential weakness of the intuitive approach: where new ways of acting are needed the individual runs the risk of using and reproducing old habits and redundant solutions. So in practice the intuitive often have security. But they do what they normally do. They do not seek new ground exploring new possible language-games.

By a reflexive approach I mean those who favour a reflexive stance towards one’s own practice. Cecchin argues that one should never fall in love with just one position, but keep an irreverence towards one’s own assumptions and think more about “becoming” a consultant who is useful in the situation more than “being” a particular consultant (Cecchin 1993). Cecchin’s work is in many ways similar to the results presented, and I will present his ideas in more detail in chapter 5 to support the results from the research. Schön argues that being a reflective practitioner is the ability to both reflect-in-action where “we may reflect in the midst of action without interrupting it… our thinking serves to reshape what we are doing while we are doing it” (Schön 1987 p. 26) creating on the spot experiments as well as being able to “reflect on our reflection-in-action” (ibid. p.31) as a kind of meta-reflexive ability.

I see the strength of what I call a reflexive approach as an ongoing reflection on the doing and being of the consultant. By doing this, the consultant frees himself from the risk of reproducing old habits. The potential weakness is that this approach gives no ideas about what to actually do. According to Schön “a skilled performer can integrate reflection-in-action into the smooth performance of an ongoing task” (Ibid. p. 29) but Schön says nothing about what to actually do.
To summarise the three approaches: the different idealistic approaches give a lot of different ideas about *what to do*. But each dualism runs the risk of establishing a regime of normative thinking that does not help the consultant connect to the specific situation. The intuitive approach shows that a successful practitioner is able to make subtle choices about what to do in actual situations and conversations with others. But working on a largely intuitive basis runs the risk of reproducing old language-games where new ones were needed. The reflexive approach shows that the idealistic and intuitive strengths can be combined, when the practitioner successfully is able to reflect both *in practice, about practice* and *about how reflections are done in practice*. So my argument in this section is that research is needed on a theoretical and practical level to take what is useful from each of the three categories and to leave behind the weakness. To create an account of consultancy that has the clarity of the idealist, yet also the mindfulness from the reflexive category. And also the security and feelings of strength that come from intuition. In chapter 3 and 4 I will present how I see that such an approach can be accounted for based on practical examples. And in chapter 5 I will present how two of my customers argue that such an approach is needed.

**Answering the question of why at a personal level**

In this section I will add my personal motivation. Together with the theoretical and practical arguments presented above, this will be my argumentation of why this research is relevant. I will present two types of personal motivation. The first is a personal move of attention from organizational development to working as a consultant. The second is to develop a research method that I can use after the completion of the professional doctorate to continue both research and professional development.

The move from organizational development to consultancy was one of my motivations to do the professional doctorate. As shown in appendix 1 listing my previous publications, they focused primarily on developing team-based organizations and working with leadership development. Working in practice with a very wide range of tasks from mergers to downsizing to conflict solution, my curiosity began about how to understand the work as a consultant.
Getting more and more experienced, I felt both more capable and more secure in my job. But how did I understand what I was doing and why? I felt a need to create a context, where my own practice could be the focus of reflection, analysis and further development.

This connects to the second of my personal motivations for doing the research. I had started reading pragmatic authors like William James (James 2000), John Dewey (Dewey 1916 1938, Brinkmann 2006), John Austin (Austin 1997), Ludwig Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein 1989 1994) and Gregory Bateson (Bateson 1972 1984), and reflected on Dewey’s ideas about inquiry saying “systematic advance in invention and discovery began when man recognized that they could utilize doubt for purposes of inquiry by forming conjectures to guide action in tentative explorations, whose development would confirm, refute or modify the guiding conjectures” (Dewey 1916 p. 121). At a research level I could see, that I could use this idea as part of constructing a research approach in the professional doctorate, as I will show below. The personal motivation to do this was to create a way of researching that would be useful after the completion of the doctorate to both continue research and continue my personal and professional development. Since Dewey’s notion of inquiry is therefore both a key motivator on a personal level and part of my research approach, I will give it some attention before addressing How to do the research?

Vernon Cronen was the one how draw my attention towards Dewey’s work and his work on inquiry saying

“The scientist, seeking episteme or truths about the natural world, does not change the objects of study by his or her inquiry. However, as the Greeks well knew, the study of rhetoric led to the development of new practices in oratory. If today new forms of intervention change practices in families and organizations, the objects of our own inquiry are changed by the act of inquiry. Thus, in the arts of praxis the relationship of the knower to the known is never an objective one. The knower is always a participant” (Cronen 2000).

As Vernon Cronen formulates, an inquiry approach had the implication of changing both the field being observed and the observer. Using my learning from example 1 finding a language
to describe the knower as a participant has been important. Going into the substance of Dewey’s work on inquiry, Dewey defines inquiries as

“The intentional endeavour to discover specific connections between something, which we do, and the consequences, which result, so that the two become continuous. Their isolation, and consequently their arbitrary going together, is cancelled: a unified developing situation takes its place. The occurrence is now understood” (Dewey 1916 p. 119) and “Experience as trying involves change, but change is meaningless transition unless it is consciously connected with the return wave of consequences, which flow from it” (Ibid. p. 113).

In Denmark professor Svend Brinkmann is recognized as a Dewey expert. He describes Dewey’s approach to inquiry like this:

(1) All experimentation involves action, to arrange change in our surroundings or in our relationship to it. (2) Further, experiments are not arbitrary, but build in hypothesis, ideas and the like, that appear relevant to the specific focus of inquiry. (3) Finally, the results of the experiments are the creation of a new situation, in which the objects are in a renewed relationship with each other, and where we can claim to have knowledge because we have experienced relationships between our active doing in the world and the consequences of that doing. All scientific knowledge is therefore knowledge about relationships (and not knowledge about isolated substances or elements) (Brinkmann 2006 p.79).

I will make two reflections about Dewey’s notion of inquiry.

Firstly, it helped me see how to work with my research questions. Dewey gave me an argument to answer my questions based on research into own practical experiences. My work is based on creating hypotheses about how to create change and acting on these hypotheses in order to improve the situation in the organization. By consciously connecting the return wave of consequences, which flow from the process, each of these situations would create a process of inquiry that helps answer my research question. Reading literature helps formulate

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3 My translation from Danish.
hypotheses about what to do, but in the end any hypothesis must be put into action in order to be tested.

Secondly, the inspiration from Dewey helped me create a simple 4-step method illustrated in this model:

![4-step inquiry method](image)

**Fig. 3: 4-step inquiry method.**

**Step 1: Decision to “do something”**: As Brinkmann says, of course *experiments are not arbitrary, but build in hypothesis, ideas and the like, that appear relevant to the specific focus of inquiry.* Step 1 is about meeting the world with what Dewey called an “experimental attitude” (Cronen 2000) looking for unseen connections. Most importantly though, in this step the decision is made about what question is to guide the inquiry.

**Step 2: Experiment**: With Brinkman’s words *all experimentation involves action, to arrange change in our surroundings or in our relationship to it.* So having decided on a question for inquiry in step 1, step 2 is experimenting and doing.
Step 3: Experience: With Dewey’s words *the intentional endeavour to discover specific connections between something, which we do, and the consequences, which result, so that the two become continuous*. Experience is seeing connections between “doing” and “consequence of doing”. In relation to my research question this is important, because if using different approaches (the systemic, the appreciative, the strategic, etc.) does not lead to different consequences, then by William James’ definition of the “pragmatic method” (James 2000), they are not different.

Step 4: Reflection and analysis: With Brinkman’s words *the results of the experiments are the creation of a new situation, in which the objects are in a renewed relationship with each other, and where we can claim to have knowledge because we have experienced relationships between our active doing in the world and the consequences of that doing*. So Step 4 is about using reflections and analysis to create a new situation. What I lack in Brinkman’s definition is that this new situation will again be one of doubt that can be utilized for inquiry purposes. So step 4 is also about creating the foundation for formulating new questions for inquiry.

Step 5/1: Decision to “do something” - again: this step is mentioned to indicate that this method does not end but continues. Based on previous experiments the inquiry will be different. With new questions and new actions. This way of working has become a build in way of working for me that help me work with a research perspective in my everyday practice.

*How is the research conducted?*

So far I’ve argued from a theoretical and a practical perspective as well as a personal level, why this research is worth conducting. And I’ve started working with how to do the research by using Dewey to construct a very general model to facilitate inquiries in my own practice to use in the doctorate and after the doctorate.

Going back to Coolican’s (Coolican 1999) and Kvale’s (Kvale 2002) criteria for constructing a research method, what is needed is an additional focus on “how” the research can be
conducted. To construct a coherent and clear research method, I will be addressing three questions:

- What kind of research is being conducted: quantitative or qualitative?
- What counts as data?
- How is data used?

By doing this I will have completed the construction of the research method.

**What kind of research is being made: quantitative or qualitative?**

By taking a practical approach to research I mean that the research approach is chosen because the approach helps to achieve the “what” and the “why” described above. This is what Silverman calls a pragmatic argument (Silverman 2005). Burck supports this saying “we can think of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies as best suited to different kinds of research questions posed at different levels, for different audiences, but crucially interlinked” (Burck 2005 p. 238). The choice of method should never be based on personal favourites, expectation from a research supervisor, or because it is a dominating story at the University.

Looking at the research literature, a first choice has to be made about a quantitative or a qualitative approach. I use Karpatschof (Karpatschof 2000), Silverman (Silverman 2005) and Burck (Burck 2005) to make this choice. According to Karpatschof, the quantitative approach is preferable, when the researcher is aiming at de-contextualised and de-personalized knowledge in order to create more objective and general knowledge. Therefore the researcher should use a larger population to secure generability. Burck supports this arguing that quantitative research is useful when conducting “outcome studies” (Burck 2005) looking at measurable data.

Karpatschof argues that a qualitative method is preferable, when the field to be studied is context-specific going into the detail of what is being researched (Karpatschof 2000). Silverman argues in similar ways stressing that the two approaches should not be seen as
dichotomies, but in research processes with sufficient time and money to go hand in hand so that the qualitative method is used to look at detail and the quantitative method is used to look at variance (Silverman 2005). Burck supports this saying

“The types of research questions which qualitative research methodologies address are often open-ended and exploratory, aiming to generate hypotheses rather than to test them. Systemic clinicians often pose questions of this kind, asking how therapeutic change comes about, and exploring subjective experience, meanings and processes” (Burck 2005 p. 238)

Using Karpatschof, Silverman and Burck looking at my research questions, the quantitative method could be useful if I wanted to measure success, find out how often I used different theories or if I wanted to look at a wider “population” of consultants. But the purpose of my research is aiming to generate hypotheses rather than to test them about how the consultant can increase his practical abilities: how do I know and decide about what to do next in order to create success? And do this by looking at similarities and differences at a practical level since “depth rather than breath is what characterizes a good research proposal” (Silverman, 2005, p. 80). With this purpose and using the arguments from Silverman (Silverman 2005), Burck (Burck 2005) and Karpatschof (Karpatschof 2000), I’m best served using qualitative methods.

This raises the question of which qualitative methods to use? Going into the details of constructing a research approach I will address the two pending questions described above: What counts as data? How is data used? I will approach these questions with the inspiration from the pragmatic literature and the work of Dewey, James, Wittgenstein, Rorty, Cronen and Bateson.

**What counts as data?**

Taking a practical and pragmatic approach to research leaves the researcher with the fundamental question: How do I collect data about practice without disturbing the practice being researched? I start off this section presenting two theoretical perspectives showing why
this question is important, and then I will describe how the question is being handled in this research.

The picture below illustrates the point I want to make, showing how the observer influences what is being observed\(^4\). When the observer is moving his eyes, the observer sees rotation. When the observer focuses the picture “stands still”.

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\(^4\) The picture called “rotating snakes” is created by Akiyoshi Kitaoka from the Department of Psychology at Ritsumeikan University in Japan.
Madsen 2011). In his original studies Rosenthal showed that by manipulating psychology students’ expectations to how clever the rats were that they were to use in experiments, he could influence the performance of the rats. Similarly he proved in a the famous subsequent study “Oak School experiment” that by manipulating teachers’ expectations to pupils’ performance by manipulating test scores from the students, he could induce a particularly positive expectation in the teachers to 20% of the pupils. As it turned out these 20% subsequently had a statistically better result in their exam one year later.

Rosenthal experimentally shows that the student and the teacher, not knowing that they have certain expectations, influence the field being studied. I’m stretching the argument even further in two ways.

Firstly, putting a tape recorder, video camera or extra researcher in the room changes the situation and the conversation. In short: I will not get the every day kind of data I’m looking for. I will use Rosenthal’s work to argue that the examples presented in this thesis would not have taken place like they did, had they been called "part of an experiment" or had there been a camera in the room recording the interaction.

Secondly, researching into my practice as consultant the trouble would be in advance choosing what situations to accept as data and which not to. I will argue that a pragmatic approach to research helps address the question of “what counts as data” by taking a practical approach to research meaning “everything is potentially data”, as Schein puts it (Schein 1999). This pragmatic approach to data has the obvious and practical advantage that the researcher can use field notes, memories, mail correspondences, etc. to create stories from practice and for use in practice. In this thesis these data are labelled “Example” and in chapter 1 three examples have been described.

In the following I will first present four arguments for this definition of data and fifthly make a critical reflection on this choice, reflecting on what to include and exclude in the research.

Firstly, Silverman’s rule number 1 is that the researcher should “Begin in familiar territory” (Silverman 2005 p. 39). My own practice is familiar even though developing due to the
research. A critical perspective could be that I’m not taking other consultants’ work into account. But as Wolcott argues, the researcher should “Do less more thoroughly” (Wolcott in Silverman 2005 p. 85). In this research I use this argument to support my choice about using my own practice and not that of other or more consultants. I will return to this question in chapter 5 where I show 3 different ways to continue the research with a wider focus in the future.

Secondly, deciding that “everything is potentially data”, every episode is of importance. This has the implication that deviant examples become part of the research. They would not have been, had I insisted on documenting the situation with video or tape recorder. This also has the implication that the research question is part of every situation in my work creating the position of the reflexive practitioner (Schön 1987) that was part of my motivation for doing the research.

Thirdly, my choice that everything is potentially data raises the question if this is a case study. Punch defines a case study as:

“The basic idea is that one case (or perhaps a small number of cases) will be studied in detail, using whatever method seems appropriate. While there may be a variety of specific purposes and research questions, the general objective is to develop as full an understanding of the case as possible” (Punch in Silverman 2005 p. 126)

If one sees me as a consultant as “a case”, this definition is valid for the research. If one sees each of the examples mentioned in the thesis as a case, the example will be viewed as a case in the sense that I will be using whatever method seems appropriate from mails to memories to field notes. But each case is not treated as a case study to develop as full an understanding of the case as possible. Rather differences and similarities between the examples will be the focus.

Fourthly, Pawson et al argue in favour of a wide range of sources of knowledge and additionally not to create a hierarchy in this classification of knowledge:

“Our chosen classification is based on the different sources of social care knowledge,
identified as: Organisational knowledge, Practitioner knowledge, User knowledge, Research knowledge, Policy community knowledge. Several decisions informed this choice of classification system. Three key intentions, however, were that (...) the classification should send out the message that:

• all these sources have a vital role to play in building up the social care evidence base, there being no hierarchy implied in the above list
• it is important not to neglect sources of knowledge that are tacit, that currently lack prestige and seem less compelling
• information needs are variable, and there is flexibility and diversity within the recommended schema in order to help users find appropriate evidence for their particular requirements

(Pawson et al. 2003\textsuperscript{5})

I use Pawson’s article to argue that taking an “everything is potentially data” approach is both legitimate and not of less value.

Fifthly, a critical perspective on this definition of data is necessary. When everything is potentially data, how do I make distinctions between what to include and what to exclude from the research? Since obviously not every case is used, where do I draw the line? And how is this choice made? Below I will show how I worked with the data using three questions:

• What can be learned from the example about how to create success and to behave professionally?
• What are the similarities and differences between the examples?
• What examples are deviant and how can they be used in the research?

I will return to these questions and to what happened working with them. The important reflection about choosing that “everything is potentially data” is that examples regarded as “the same”, not being “different” or “deviant” in some way, was left out of the research.

\textsuperscript{5} Working paper without page numbers.
How is data used?
In this section I will present how a 2-step method was designed based on pragmatic ideas and methods to turn examples and data into richer and useful narratives of consultancy. In step 1 data and examples are turned into narratives of consultation using Bateson’s method of double description looking at similarities and differences. Step 2 is validating and enriching the narratives by putting them into use in various contexts: texts to examiners at the professional doctorate, books about the consultancy translated to two (perhaps three) languages, discussing the results with customers and colleagues and using the results in my own work. This is the part of the research building on pragmatic ideas from John Dewey (Dewey 1916 1938, Brinkmann 2006), Vernon Cronen (Cronen 2002), William James (James 2000), Richard Rorty (Rorty 1997), Ludwig Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein 1989 1994) and Gregory Bateson (Bateson 1972 1984). In the following I will show how they influenced the construction of the research approach, and I will describe the work done in step 1 and 2 in detail.

Step 1:
Bateson’s idea of double description is that new knowledge is created when “two or more information sources come together to give information of a sort different from what was in either source separately” (Bateson 1984 p. 21) His often used example is seeing where depth emerges in the combination of two eyes. “The two-eyed way of seeing is itself an act of comparison” (Ibid. p. 87). Comparison means taking account of both the similarities and the differences of the examples.
In order to make such a double, or in my case multiple, description, three questions have guided the collecting and use of examples. Each question had its own purpose and as it turned out two out of three were very useful. I will describe one question at a time looking at why I asked the question and what came out of it.

Question 1: What can be learned from the example about how to create success and to behave professionally?
Immediately this question had two learning effects. First of all, it supported the position as reflexive practitioner both reflecting in the situation and looking back on the situation. As mentioned above this action learning based approach to my own work accelerated my personal and professional learning and could have become a thesis in its own right.

Secondly, the question supported the aim of the research making clear how different consultancy positions were brought into the situation and what other positions could have been used. So two types of knowledge were created. One connected directly to Dewey’s idea of inquiry, where knowledge is created “because we have experienced relationships between our active doing in the world and the consequences of that doing” (Brinkmann 2006 p. 79). But also knowledge of a more imaginary kind thinking of “what could have happened, if I had done…?”. Or what I earlier called meta-reflection with the inspiration from Schön (Schön 1987).

**Question 2: What are the similarities and differences between the examples?**

This question also had two learning effects. Firstly, the focus on similarities strengthened the hypothesis that in my practice, I had a tendency to choose between a “set” of well-known positions. Even though I at a theoretical level would say that “every situation is unique” drawing on Heraclitus’ idea that you are never stepping into the same river twice (Næss 1965), this was not reflected in my own practice. For example the idea of working with best practices from appreciative inquiry showed itself in many examples. So using the three approaches presented above I had both an idealistic and intuitive tendency to do what I thought would work. But as mentioned in example 3 earlier, reflections helped me see that this didn’t need to be the case.

Secondly, the focus on differences made me see something more clearly that I hadn’t seen before. What I will call distinctions of system and distinctions of time in chapter 4 had not been a part of my initial motivation and awareness about doing consultancy work. I will go into this in chapter 4 presenting the results.

**Question 3: What examples are deviant and how can they be used in the research?**
The intention with this question was initially to secure that everything would indeed become data. To secure a rigour in the research method created. In practice this question did not add anything new that was not already looked at in the question about differences in question 2.

To summarize step 1, a Batesonian analysis of the example is made looking at differences and similarities in the examples. But going into the pragmatic literature, I realised that more actions were necessary and useful, if the research method was to be in touch with the pragmatic ideas. I will elaborate on this in step 2.

Step 2:

In this last part of presenting how data was used, I show how I used pragmatic ideas to both test and develop the data even further by putting the results into use and creating new and deviant cases. Further I initiated both critical and supporting conversations with colleagues and customers about the work being done. This work was built on two pragmatic ideas.

The first idea is that “theories become instruments” (James 2000 196). An idea James shares with Dewey, who called his own position one of instrumentalism (Egeblad & Høgh Laursen 2000). What Dewey and James share is an understanding that theories in any domain should be evaluated by their usefulness to create something: solve a problem, achieve a goal etc. James calls this the “pragmatic method” (James 2000). If the theory does not have practical consequences, the theory hasn’t “said” anything. The theory is never to be seen as a final truth about the world. I will return to this below addressing the validity of the research and now go into how the idea of theory as instrument was applied in using the data in the research.

If the researcher sees theories as instruments, the researcher must put the theories into use as part of the research in order to validate the theories. In order to build the presentation of the research on the idea of theories as instruments, chapter 3 and 4 will also look at the practical consequences of the results in relation with developing teams. It will be clear that taking different positions leads to different ways of consulting in practice.

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6 My translation from Danish.
The second pragmatic idea was Rorty’s notion that “truth is a word that we use about those convictions that we can agree upon” (Rorty in Haack 2000 p. 54\(^7\)). This is a very practical notion of truth, because it implies that the researcher needs to “test” his results through conversations with others asking: Does this theory help us create what we hope to create? The term agreement is not to be understood simply as consensus, but that the theory has the intended consequence. In order to make this move with the results from the research, three different types of conversations were initiated as part of step 2 in using the data.

One context of conversations was conversations to do with research. These conversations took place with research supervisors, examiners and colleagues at the professional doctorate programme at University of Bedfordshire. The intention, and hence consequence, of these conversations was to create a research approach that was both useful and had a clarity and rigour to it.

Another type of conversations was conversation to do with practice and the usefulness of the results. In chapter 3 I will show how the results of the research became “the consultancy room”. To get into conversations with colleagues and customers about both critical and supporting perspectives on the results, I began writing and publishing about working with the use of the consultancy room. This was done initially with the article “The professional process consultant”\(^8\) and then by publishing the book by the same name\(^9\).

The publications had the intended consequence and initiated conversation with both customers and professional colleagues. Some of the comments were positive and supported the model. Others were critical raising important questions to reflect about. I will present the questions and how the research answered them in chapter 5.

A final type of conversations took place in training courses and had a theoretical perspective. As a consequence of the research and the results from it, I initiated two types of education. One was a course at the University in Aarhus. One was an open course at diploma level for

\(^7\) My translation from Danish.
\(^8\) My translation from Danish.
\(^9\) Published in Danish, on contract to be published in Swedish and in ongoing negotiations to be translated into English.
leaders and consultants from both public and private organizations about “the professional process consultant” based on the book.

I give these conversations some space because an important element in working with pragmatic ideas in research is that working with and validating data is not done in the study chamber reading and re-reading the examples. Validation is done by looking at how the theories are useful in creating a desired outcome in collaboration with others. This leads to the last section of the research description: a critical perspective on the construction of the practical approach I used in my research.

**Critical perspectives on the constructions of the practical approach to research**

In this chapter I've so far been constructing a practical approach. I've been doing this by working with three questions: What is to be researched? Why is this to be researched? And lastly how is the research being done going into themes of data and how data is used.

But to make a strong and coherent research approach I additionally need to take a critical perspective on this construction and the choices made. To do this I will address what Coolican (Coolican 1999) points out to be the most important questions: the questions of validity and reliability and how this is accounted for in this research. Further I will show how ethics is being accounted for.

**Validation and how it is accounted for in this thesis**

Validity is viewed differently from a quantitative and a qualitative tradition. In a quantitative tradition of measuring, the theme of validation is asking the question, if data in the research is measuring and addressing, what they are intended to measure (Ibid.).
Working with qualitative methods “validation becomes a question of choosing between competing and falsifiable interpretations” (Kvale 2002 p. 23510). Kvale points to three different perspectives on validity in qualitative research, and they will serve as my way to critically reflect on the research approach constructed in chapter 2 in order to develop a valid research approach.

**Validity defined as “quality in the research process”**

Kvale’s first perspective on validity in qualitative research is to secure *quality in the research process*. In this section I will show how I secured quality in the research process in four different ways in this research.

Following Kvale, the first way to secure quality in the research is by the researcher taking a self-reflexive and self-critical position in order for the researcher not to believe too much in just one interpretation of the data. This self-critical position has been built into the research. This section is one example. Above I described how putting them into use and discussing them with research supervisors, colleagues, students and customers tested the results. This was done in order to secure a quality in the research process by creating a continued critical position in relation to the research being done.

The second way Kvale addresses quality in the research process is by securing an “internal coherence”. With a quote from Smith:

“Rather than being concerned, for example, with the representativeness of the sample used in the qualitative research project, you should concentrate on whether it was internally consistent and coherent. Does it present a coherent argument? For instance does it deal with loose ends and possible contradictions in the data?” (Smith 1996 p. 192)

Smith’s idea was one of the inspirations to formulate the Question 3: What examples are deviant and how can they be used in the research? As mentioned above in step 1, the

10 My translation from Danish.
purpose of this question was that _loose ends and possible contradictions in the data_ would be built into the data collection and analysis. Not left behind.

The third way to create quality in the research process is continually looking at if the _what, why and how_ of the research are connected in a meaningful way. This chapter displays my arguments for this connection and makes it possible for other researchers to both support and criticize the choices made.

The fourth way Kvale is defining quality in research is the ways theoretical reflections are drawn upon to strengthen the argument. In this thesis this will happen in all chapters where several theorists will be drawn upon to build a strong argument about the theoretical foundation for the results.

**Communicative validity**

Kvale’s second perspective on validity in qualitative research is to secure a communicative validity (Kvale 2002). Communicative validity is understood in two ways in this thesis.

Firstly, as the ongoing conversation with research supervisors, colleagues, students, and customers mentioned already.

Secondly, communicative validity is understood as my communication with the reader of this thesis. I’ve been writing the examples in such a way that the reader should be able to follow what went on and see what theoretical ideas inspiring me to do, what I did. Further the comments about the examples are intended to let the reader see what theoretical and practical reflections came out of the situations. This is done to secure a _communicative validity_ with the reader of this thesis.

**Pragmatic validity**

As a third perspective Kvale points to pragmatic validity. Of the three perspectives that Kvale says that the researcher should account for in qualitative research to secure validity, this is
the one that appeals the most to me. In short: qualitative research is only valid, if it’s useful. The important point in pragmatic validity is that research is not “just” grounded in practice but the research must also be useful for practice. Meaning that the research is leading to new actions for either the person being researched (myself), the person researching (myself) or people reading about the research. In this section I will return to my reading of pragmatic authors, present their arguments for this approach to validity and show how it was used in the research.

Reading pragmatic literature and looking at the view, pragmatic authors’ take on validity shows a clear focus on practice that was intended in the construction of the research approach. Rorty using the inspiration of William James says:

“Let us see truth as, in James’s phrase, “what it is better for us to believe”, rather than as “the accurate representation of reality” … “accurate representation” is simply an automatic and empty complement which we pay to those beliefs which are successful in helping us to do what we want to do” (Rorty 1979 p. 10).

As with the earlier quote from Rorty, that “truth is a word that we use about those convictions, that we can agree upon” (Rorty in Haack 2000 p. 5411), one could misinterpret Rorty to say that truth is only a matter of seeking consensus. But Rorty builds on Dewey’s work, so this is not the case. Theories are neither true nor not true but are instruments that people do things with, as I showed earlier with Dewey’s position as instrumentalism (Egeblad & Høgh Laursen 2000). Where the term “truth” might give us an idea of something stable and independent of human action, Dewey preferred the term “warranted assertability”. “Warranted” indicates that a theoretical claim has to be grounded in practice and experience, and “assertability” indicates that the same claim has implications for our further thinking and doing (Brinkmann 2006). In the end a theoretical idea should help us know how to go on, as Wittgenstein frames it (Wittgenstein 1989 1994).

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11 My translation from Danish.
In this thesis pragmatic validity has been dealt with in two ways.

Firstly, the data in the thesis are actual cases from my practice. By using success examples the presentation of cases is both accounts of what happened and indications to future practices. By doing this the examples strengthen the pragmatic validity of the thesis.

Secondly, the model created, the consultancy room, is again both rooted in practical cases and gives the practitioner both ideas to “what to do” as well of giving a way to reflect in and on practice. This connects to the theoretical and practical motivation for the research mentioned above.

Reliability and how this is accounted for in this thesis

Reliability is traditionally defined as the demand that other researchers should be able to reach the same result based on the same set of data (Coolican 1999). I have deliberately not associated my research with any particular research approach, even though I above discussed some similarities and differences between my research and that of case studies. In this section I will discuss the reliability of the research by looking at the reliability of my research in relation to two research traditions: case studies and grounded theory.

Coolican draws attention to the obvious dilemma of reliability in case studies, since “No two cases are the same… indeed their uniqueness is usually the reason for their being carried out in the first place. Their strength is in richness, their weakness in lack of generalisability” (Coolican 1999 p. 127). The examples chosen are chosen exactly for their richness. But it makes no sense to say that all my day-to-day work counts as a classical case study.

Using the language of the case study tradition, Coolican argues in favour of creating reliability triangulation by getting multiple views on the examples by using for example respondent validation (ibid.). In my research I chose not to do this for two reasons. The multiplicity of cases would have made this activity very time consuming. And some of the cases go 8 years back, which would give even more practical problems. Instead I made the choice that the
examples are presented in some length in order for other researchers to make their own judgements of how to make sense of the examples.

One of the ideas of doing the research was that the results should not validate existing theories but generate new theory that would be useful. This reflects the basic ideas in grounded theory, where “the researcher should approach the data with a completely open, if not blank, mind. No pre-conceptual explanatory scheme should be imposed on the data” (Coolican 1999 p. 453). A further connection to grounded theory can be made with the inspiration from Burck.

"A grounded theory approach, developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in opposition to hypothesis-testing research, was designed to help researches elicit and analyse qualitative data to identify important categories in the material with the aim of generating ideas and theory 'grounded' in the data” (Burck 2005 p. 244), and Burck further argues that

"The approach is particularly appropriate for the discovery-oriented research in areas which are under-theorized. The approach is suited to the analysis of accounts which include diversities as well as similarities" (ibid.).

This connects to the intentions in this research. But since my practical work obviously draws on theoretical inspiration, it’s hard not to see the examples with this theoretical perspective. Pidgeon and Henwood suggest a constructivist revision of grounded theory, where the researcher “flip-flop between known background theory and organisation of new data” (Coolican 1999 p. 453). Burck sees the same need since “it seems important as a researcher to attempt to make explicit one’s hypotheses, often developed from personal and professional experience and the literature” (Burck 2005 p. 245).

This is a more fair description of my research. From this perspective reliability can be seen as “to leave very few, if any, ‘awkward’ or ‘rogue’ raw data out of the final analysis” (Coolican 1999 p. 453). This sort of research recommendation was exactly what led me to ask question 3 as already mentioned above.
An ethical perspective on the research

The Danish philosopher and Dewey interpreter Hans Fink argues, “ethics is just one aspect of human life, but at the same time no aspect of human life is withheld from ethics” (Fink in Brinkmann 2006 p. 40). So reflecting on ethics is indeed relevant in every human activity and therefore also in research. I will argue that the researcher needs to address three aspects if he takes a pragmatic approach to ethics.

Firstly, the pragmatic approach being based on the pragmatic method has the implication that all knowledge should be evaluated on its usefulness (James 2000, Brinkmann 2006, Dewey 1916 1938). Following this line of thought I will argue that ethics becomes a matter of showing how the knowledge can be used for something good. This question has already been addressed above and in chapter 3, 4 and 5 the practical implications of the results will be shown to strengthen the argument that the results can be used to “something good”.

Secondly, the pragmatic approach to ethics implies a particular ethical stance that “holds open the possibility of creative elaboration of our “lived experience” (Dewey 1934) and the radical reconstructions both of our “stories lived” and of our “stories told” (Pearce 1989)” (Lang, Little & Cronen 1990 p. 40). I will argue that for a research to be ethical from a pragmatic perspective, the results need to make such an ethical stance possible. And this is indeed what the consultancy room helps doing. Each lived experience, stories lived and told can be retold in a multiplicity of ways using the three dimensions of the room and the multiple distinctions of position, system and time.

Thirdly, Dewey’s notion of ethics implies that there is not one unchanging criteria for ethics that the researcher must follow. Ethics becomes “a question of recognizing and regulating multifarious problematic situations in a sensible way” (Brinkmann 2006 p. 28). Below I will address three such problematic situations and show how they have been dealt with in a sensible way: confidentiality, stress and discomfort and involuntary participation.

12 My translation from Danish.
13 My translation from Danish.
Confidentiality
The first possible problematic situation is how to secure confidentiality of the participants. As Coolican comments this confidentiality is only to be broken by consent from the participant or “where there are clear dangers to human life” (Coolican 1999 p. 477). In my research and thesis confidentiality is secured in two ways:

- All examples in the thesis are totally anonymous and no information is given in the examples pointing to the exact customer. In chapter 5 names of two people are used giving confirming statements about the research to show that “real people” support the results. Here consent has been given by the implied.
- Many examples are used and therefore it should be virtually impossible for any other than myself to make a connection between example and actual living people.

Stress and discomfort
The second possible problematic situation is the amount of mental stress and physical discomfort placed on the participants. Coolican says that “the difficulty comes in trying to decide what kind of stress or discomfort, physical or mental, is unacceptable” (Ibid. p. 481). I will argue that no stress or discomfort was placed on the participants due to the research. As described earlier most of the examples were chosen retrospectively because they were successful. If the research had any effect on the participants it was for me to pull myself together.

Involuntary participation
The choice of involuntary participation is, as I see my own research, by far the most radical choice made. So I will discuss both practical and theoretical perspectives in order to look at and account of ethics.

At a practical level I’ve already discussed this matter in the section about what counts as data? To recapitulate the arguments a pragmatic approach to research is critical to the ideas
of placing a tape recorder or video recorder in the consultancy room, because this might change what is being researched. And at a theoretical level I’ve already, using the work of Robert Rosenthal, discussed how manipulating expectations might change the outcome of the research.

Coolican supports this by presenting a research from Doob and Gross. They looked at the possible difference in behaviour when people were involuntary participating by Doob and Gross observing natural behaviour in traffic and voluntary participators answering questionnaires about the same behaviour. Doob and Gross concluded that “the ‘as if’ findings were so different from actual behaviour that the defenders of field research seemed vindicated in their claim to more realistic data” (Ibid. p. 484). I will use this research to support my choice about not asking for permission before using the example as part of my research.

With the reflections about validity, reliability and ethics in the research, I’ve been taking critical perspectives on the construction of a research approach. Using Kvale I’ve shown how the research method is accounting for validity. And by using the case study and grounded theory as established traditions of research, I’ve discussed how the research method is accounting for reliability. I’ve taken three pragmatic perspectives on the question of ethics and shown how the research is accounting for confidentiality, the possibility of stress and discomfort for the participants, and the choice of using involuntary participation researching into my own practice and using examples as data. By doing this I end this chapter that had the purpose of constructing a clear and coherent research method. In chapter 3 and 4 I will shift focus and look at the results of the research done.
Chapter 3: Presenting the results from the research –

distinctions of position

The purpose of this chapter is to begin the presentation of the results from the research. Put succinctly the results from the research are that the consultant is capable of working with three types of distinctions:

1. Distinctions of position: A multi-positional ability meaning an ability to make clear distinctions between different positions in practice. This means the ability to see and approach organizations in different ways and to have multiple possibilities for action in any situation. This is different from working from one theory or paradigm. A multi-positional approach to organizations means that the consultant is working with a double gaze:
   a. *What do I see now about the organization and situation from the position I’ve taken?*
   b. *What could I see if I looked at the organization and situation from a different position?*

2. Distinctions of system: I will show how the consultant is simultaneously working with the *conversational system*, designing *who should talk to whom* in order to improve the situation, and the linguistic system, using the positions to reflect on *who* is being *talked about* and in what way. Three prototypical systems: the organization, the group, and the individual, will be presented to help the consultant navigate in practice.

3. Distinction of time: Using the inspiration from Barnett Pearce I will show how the consultant is simultaneously working with multiple distinctions of time. Three prototypical distinctions of time: “the moment”, “meeting” and “process” will be presented to help the consultant orientate and create success in practice.

Further I will show how the three types of distinctions are combined with a *pragmatic reflexivity* meaning the ability to make qualified decisions about all three distinctions in dialogue with the customer reflecting about *what will work with this organization?* This means an ability to shift position in order to change way of observing, acting, and making sense of
what is going on. When the consultant shifts position, he will start seeing other things leading to other actions, which makes it possible for the organization to respond differently. When a shift is made in dialogue with the customer about distinctions of time and system, the entire process is looked upon differently leading to alternative ways of approaching change.

To help support a pragmatic reflexivity in relation to distinctions of position, time and system, I developed the consultancy room\textsuperscript{14}. The purpose of the consultancy room as a model for consultation is to make a multi-positional ability and a pragmatic reflexivity possible. To create a model and a vocabulary to help the consultant orient himself in practice. The first dimension of the room will concern multiple positions that the consultant can work from. I will show how different positions inspire the consultant to different views of the organizations, organizational change and the consultant role in such processes. Further I will use the examples to show how the consultant can use a pragmatic reflexivity in order to choose between and combine the positions. Further more I will present how each position gives ideas of how to work with developing teams and how the different positions can be combined to develop teams successfully.

\textsuperscript{14} First published in Juhl & Dahl (2008).
Fig. 5: The consultancy room.

The first dimension of the room: Distinctions of position
First of all I will discuss what is meant by position. As example 1, 2, and 3 presented in chapter 1 show, the consultant can approach situations in many different ways based on different assumptions. By position is meant how the consultant sees what is going on in the organization and how the consultant does something. I will present and discuss two perspectives on positions: position as theory and positioning in conversation. When the word “position” is used in this doctorate, both aspects described below are thought of.
Position as theory

The word theory comes from the Greek word *theoria* meaning “a beholding at, viewing, beholding”. As Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela point out, seeing is never objective and neutral, but rather done by an observer (Maturana & Varela 1992) holding beliefs, having had certain experiences, having certain hopes, etc. *Position as theory* has two implications.

To see theory as “a beholding at” links theory to Morgan’s argument “all theory is metaphor” (Morgan 1997 p. 5). Paradoxically a theory “implies a way of thinking and a way of seeing that
pervade how we understand our world generally” (ibid. p. 4), but at the same time “always produces this kind of one-sided insight. In highlighting certain interpretations it tends to force others into a background role… a way of seeing created through a metaphor becomes a way of not seeing” (Ibid. pp. 4-5).

Morgan’s emphasis of multiple metaphors or “images of organization” is echoed in my results. No one theory can stand alone. A multiplicity of theory is needed to help the consultant orientate in organizational complexities and daily practices. A change in theory by the consultant therefore means looking at the organizations in different ways, seeing what goes on differently. I will be using this pragmatic definition in this thesis: positions are different, if they allow the consultant to see the organization and the situations in the organization in a different way. Where Morgan captures the pragmatic spirit of my research, he only points to the temptation of certain positions as theories to capture our thinking. He argues that

“One of the most basic problems of modern management is that the mechanical way of thinking is so ingrained in our everyday conception of organization that it is often very difficult to organize in any other way” (Ibid. p. 6).

Harlene Anderson building on the work of Kuhn uses the term paradigm in the same way saying: “Each paradigm defines what issues are to be seen as problems within it and is designed to address those issues. Paradigms shape problems; problems shape paradigms” (Anderson 1997 p. 11).

I agree with this. But I want to stress it even further. In organizations, groups, or individuals certain cultural narratives have become the dominant way of seeing and creating sense of what goes on. Sometimes these cultural narratives are implicit stories. Other times they are formulated as an organizational codex. For example the Danish forces drawing on Cameron and Quinn give privilege to the leader that masters the art of balancing competing values in organizational change and their own leadership (Cameron & Quinn 1988, Lüscher & Lewis 2008). By telling the same story again and again organizations, groups and individuals develop cultural narratives that become a “storytelling industry”.
Theories as storytelling industries are the second way I will work with *position as theory*. Steven de Shazer describes how both psychoanalysis and the systemic tradition have become what he calls “a storytelling industry”.

“*Being a physician, Freud built his stories upon the scientific, positivistic model of his day with diseases, categories, causes, mechanisms, forces, displacements, repressions, and resistances*” (de Shazer 1994 p. xii). And later on, describing the work of Bateson, Jackson, Weakland, and Haley in Palo Alto:

“The new scientific paradigm was born - a new, competing storytelling industry. The form of these new stories reminds the listener of Einstein’s story of relativity: Event “x” is seen differently by the various observers” (ibid. p. xiii).

De Shazer’s point is that each vocabulary gives rise to certain types of stories. Each story started being told, because they helped the therapist create some results. The story was productive. Being told and retold over and over again using the same words two things happened. The retelling helped therapists continue to create results. But also shaped the seeing and thinking of the therapist making other observations difficult. De Shazer’s own personal break through came when he and colleagues were looking at their own work: “We were amazed that we had invented something so astonishing… We saw a therapist who was talking with the client” (Ibid. p. xvi). This “astonishing observation” directed de Shazer in the same direction as I’m suggesting. No one story telling industry is sufficient. And rather than the consultant imposing his own narratives on the organization, the consultant must see himself as a conversationalist, since consultation is essentially conversation or “*nothing but a bunch of talk*” (de Shazer 1994 p. 3).

So de Shazer looks at theories as storytelling industries that initially help people accomplish something: solve a problem, reach a goal, etc. But by telling and retelling these stories they end up having a life of their own (ibid.). As I described in chapter 2, this is exactly my observation in organizations. When theories become normative accounts of reality we end up in a situation, where theories are using people. Not vice versa. As an alternative I suggest to people that they use theories as strong traditions for sense making and practice. The
A pragmatic definition in this paper will be: storytelling industries are different, if they allow the user to introduce a different language leading to a different outcome in the organization or the concrete situation.

Looking at the examples presented in this thesis, I could see a strong influence on my practice by a set of strong and well-known theories. Inspired by the systemic tradition and the work of Gregory Bateson (Bateson 1972 1984) and Humberto Maturana (Maturana & Varela 1992, Maturana 1988) among many, I can see from the examples that I have a tendency to ask circular questions looking for connections and interactions in contexts. Inspired by the tradition of appreciative inquiry and the work of David Cooperrider (Cooperrider & Srivastva 1987, Cooperrider 1990 2000, Cooperrider & Whitney 1999) and Peter Lang (Lang 1990 1994 2002) among many, I can see from the examples that I have a tendency to look for positive variance and visualize positive scenarios based on hopes and dreams for the future. Inspired by the strategic position and the work of Richard Lynch (Lynch 2003), Michael Porter (Porter 1985) and J. P. Kotter (Kotter 1995) I can see from the examples that I have a tendency to design change processes, so that they are integrated in and add value to organizational strategies. Inspired by the narrative position and the work of Michael White and David Epston (White 1992 2000 2006, White & Epston 1990, Epston White & Murray 1992) I could see from the examples that I have a tendency to look for and confront cultural stories dominating the construction of individual identities in the organization. Inspired by tradition of organizational development and the work of Schein (Schein 1999) I can see from the examples that I have a tendency to believe in building "a helpful relation" as the foundation of any consultancy process. Inspired by the solution focused tradition and the work of de Shazer, Insoo Kim Berg and William O’Hanlon (de Shazer 1994) I can see from the examples that I have a tendency to make text focused work more than reader focused work using both customer definitions and words about the situation and very quickly turn our focus towards looking at the future. These six positions kept returning in different ways in the examples I looked at. The appreciative position for example was used in many different ways. In some examples it inspired me to make inquiries into best practices; in other examples (example 2) the appreciative position inspired me to work more generally with the language used in the
organization. And example 12 illustrates how I used it as a way of building in positive self-reflexive feedback loops in a team I worked with. But all examples show how appreciative inquiry inspired my practice by working with appreciative language and focus. Since describing the positions and how they can be used requires some space, this will be done in this chapter.

So theory as metaphor highlights that the consultant is always actively creating meaning by using certain perspectives and can never be regarded as being neutral and objective in his observations. And theory as storytelling industry highlights that certain theories become normative by being told and retold using a particular set of concepts. But de Shazer also points to the need of something else. When consultation is looked at as conversation, positions are never fixed identities but constructed through dialogue. This is not captured by seeing positions as theories. I will call this positioning in conversation, highlighting that a key consultant skill is the ability to smoothly navigate in the multiple and different conversations that is the organization.

**Positioning in conversation**

Seeing position as theory helps clarify how the consultant is always approaching any situation with assumptions about what to do and what not to do. But defining position as theory has the possible negative implication that the consultant sees his position as an individual choice independent of the given context and the unique circumstances that are created in a particular conversation. Taking this approach to positions means defining position as emerging from dialogue leading the consultant to understanding his own position from a social constructionist perspective (Gergen & Gergen 2008, Bronwyn & Harré 1990). Positioning in conversation is to highlight that positioning is a way of being in the conversation, and using the –ing form of positioning highlights that positions are not something the consultant has independent of the situation. It is something the consultant does together with others. This draws on the work of Rom Harré:

“We explore the idea that the concept of 'positioning' can be used to facilitate the thinking of
linguistically oriented social analysts in ways that the use of the concept of 'role' prevented. In particular the new concept helps focus attention on dynamic aspects of encounters in contrast to the way in which the use of 'role' serves to highlight static, formal and ritualistic aspects” (Bronwyn & Harré 1990 p. 43).

So positioning in conversation helps the consultant look at the dynamic aspects of his own practice.

“With positioning, the focus is on the way in which the discursive practices constitute the speakers and hearers in certain ways and yet at the same time is a resource through which speakers and hearers can negotiate new positions. A subject position is a possibility in known forms of talk; position is what is created in and through talk as the speakers and hearers take themselves up as persons” (Ibid. p. 61).

So positions are not something fixed that the consultant brings to the conversation. The conversation and the speech acts made in the conversation create the position of both consultant and customer. Positioning is what the consultants do to navigate in the multiple streams of conversations in the organization.

Both position as theory and positioning in conversation are clearly displayed in the examples. Looking at the examples presented in this thesis I could see how a key skill in my practice is positioning and re-positioning myself in dialogue with the customer. An ongoing process where my position was producing the conversation by introducing certain themes in the conversation but at the same time the product of the conversation by being coordinated and created in the conversation. As example 12 shows I could see from multiple examples that I was continuously re-positioning myself in order to find out how to continue in the process. So the first dimension of the consultancy room distinctions of position should be read and used in two ways. Firstly, it is to give the consultant an awareness of what theories in the shape of experiences and traditions of practice the consultant brings to the organization. This can help the consultant reflect both in and on practice about:

- What do I see now about the organization and situation from the position I’ve taken?
• What could I see if I looked at the organization and situation from a different position?

Secondly, it gives the consultant the awareness that positioning is not to be thought of as a choice made in solitude. Positioning is done in episodes of conversations with customers coordinating how to create something together.

In this chapter I will present the first part of the results: distinctions of positions. To support my pragmatic approach to validity, I will present each position by giving examples of how to use them to develop teams. Having done this I will look at the usefulness of a multi-positional approach to developing teams. In chapter 4 I will present the rest of the results looking at distinction of time and system. And finally in chapter 5 I will develop this by presenting both supporting and critical statements and reflections from the conversations I’ve had with colleagues and customers about the multi-positional approach.

The systemic position

In this section I will present the systemic position and examples of its usefulness. By systemic I mean the work done by Gregory Bateson (Bateson 1972 1984) and Humberto Maturana & Francisco Varela (Maturana 1988, Maturana & Varela 1992) creating the theoretical foundation, and people like Paul Watzlawick (Watzlawick et al. 1967 1974), Gianfranco Cecchin (Cecchin 1987 1992, Cecchin et al. 1993), Peggy Penn (Penn 1988), Karl Tomm (Tomm 1992), Christine Oliver (Oliver 2004, Barge & Oliver 2002) and Patrick Hoverstadt (Hoverstadt 2008) showing how to use it. An example from Watzlawick can help show what they have in common:

The fox population of a certain area of northern Canada shows a remarkable periodicity in the increase and decrease of its numbers. In a cycle of four years it reaches a peak, declines to near extinction, and finally rises again. If the attention of the biologist were limited to the foxes, these cycles would remain inexplainable, for there is nothing in the nature of a fox or the species that would account for these changes. However, once it is realized that the foxes
prey almost exclusively on wild rabbits, and that these rabbits have almost no other natural enemy, this relation between the two species provides a satisfactory explanation for an otherwise mysterious phenomenon. For it can then be seen that the rabbits exhibit an identical cycle, but with increase and decrease reversed: the more foxes there are, the more rabbits are killed by them, so that eventually food becomes very scarce for the foxes. Their number decreases, giving the surviving rabbits a chance to multiply and thrive again in the virtual absence of their enemies, the foxes. The fresh abundance of rabbits favours the survival and increase of foxes, etc. (Watzlawick et al. 1967 p. 19)

As Hoverstadt puts it: “Systemic practitioners see connections that others don’t” (Hoverstadt 2008 p. xi). The example from Watzlawick illustrates that taking a systemic position means looking at relationships as interaction between organisms over time in particular contexts. Not looking at fixed entities like the rabbits or the foxes in isolation from each other. In example 1 I showed how being helped by a previous leader to look at my own interaction helped me create what Boscolo calls a circular description of the situation (Boscolo et al. 1991). Looking at circular descriptions naturally leads, as Bateson shows, to a focus on the contextual surrounding of the situation showing differences and similarities between different contexts (Bateson 1972 1984)

This circular and contextual approach is useful for the practitioner to create circular description. The systemic position regards such circular description as more moral since it is “cultivating awareness of the contribution one might be making to the patterns and processes of which one is a part” (Oliver 2004 p. 128). Looking at different contexts and differences in the different contexts, the practitioner sees differences, as I discussed in chapter 2. These differences make a difference if they create a new meaning and thereby give rise to new actions. I will present an example, where looking at different interactions in different contexts was a help to develop teams.
Example 4
A leader for a team in a nursing home invited a colleague and me to help overcome some trouble. They had for a period experienced one older woman as especially difficult, naming her “the witch”. They all tried to avoid going to her house. There was a remarkable increase in sick-days, when it was their turn to go to her house. And this had, naturally, given rise to tension in the group who shifted back and forth blaming the old woman and blaming each other for the trouble. My colleague and I were invited to consult the team and find some kind of solution to the problem.

After some initial introductions, we started working with the systemic ideas of context asking: “Is there any situation, where she is not a witch but is just a nice old woman, like all the rest you are working with?” The systemic assumption is clear: identity is defined by the interaction. This interaction might or might not be different in different contexts. They thought the term “nice” was too much, but one of them remembered a day that was different in the sense that she hadn’t been yelled at. Working systemically, this difference is important and worth looking closer at, so we asked: “What was different that day that made this possible?” In the following conversations the team, my colleague and I in collaboration created the hypothesis that what had made a difference was that she had entered the house differently saying: "Good morning Mrs. Director Jensen, it’s Alice” acknowledging the old woman’s background as having lived a very wealthy life. Working with the systemic ideas of context, relationship, and difference, we created the hypothesis that the team were having two different loops with the old woman. Using Cronen's terms (Cronen Johnson & Lannamann 1982), one of them was strange and the other was charmed. The loops were drawn as follows:
“The strange loop enables clarity to be felt about unwanted patterns of experience but also facilitates speculation about how best to intervene” (Oliver 2004 p. 132). Building on the example, a different set of relationships was also present, but in different contexts.

This made sense to the team. Although they still saw this woman as difficult, they could see that there were differences, and more stories were being told to support both loops. This first meeting ended with an agreement in the team that they would all try to meet this old woman differently and, if possible, show a respect for her previous life.
When we came back some weeks later, the change was dramatic. All had new experiences to share. Working systemically, we used circular questioning (Tomm 1992, Dahl & Granhof Juhl 2009) to ask questions like: “If we asked the Mrs. director Jensen, what particular episodes would she mention from this period as particularly important?” The question is circular because we invited the team to take another person’s perspective (in this case Mrs. Director Jensen’s perspective) on what has happened in this period. One of the employees told that she had one day been cleaning some trophies that had belonged to Mr. director Jensen, and this had made the old woman make an appreciative gesture with her head. This was previously totally unheard of. The conclusion from this second meeting was clear. They had achieved what they had hoped: to strengthen the charmed loops.

So working systemically means never to accept any description that explained any phenomenon as inherent to a person or group or other entity, but always looking for in what relationships the phenomenon could make sense in order to create a systemic hypothesis (Bateson 1972 1984, Boscolo et al 1991, Oliver 2004). Besides illustrating central systemic ideas and tools like systemic descriptions, strange and charmed loops, and systemic questioning, the two examples with Mrs. Director Jensen and my work in a psychiatric institution illustrate an important difference. In the example with Mrs. Director Jensen and with foxes, I (or in more general terms the observer) am looking at and making descriptions of the interactions of people “out there”, meaning not myself included. In the systemic literature this has been termed a 1st order perspective (Warhuus et al. 1998) and can be illustrated as follows:
This perspective allows the observer to make descriptions of the interaction between people in order to both understand and intervene in this interaction, as the case with Mrs. Director Jensen illustrates. The risk of this approach to work systemically is noticed by Shotter, who states that this might lead us to “thinking in systems” (Shotter 2010) where we expect the world to be nicely ordered as stable loops or patterns that are either charmed or strange. This might not be the case.

But in example 1 from the psychiatry, my focus is not on “interactions out there” but on my own interaction with another person and how I orient myself in these interactions, looking for a way to go on. Shotter calls this “thinking systemically” (ibid.) and Warhuus called this a 2nd order approach in systemic theory and practice (Warhuus et al. 1998). This can be illustrated as follows:
This 2\textsuperscript{nd} order approach is particularly important for the development of a multi-positional approach. Training and developing a second order approach to my practice, “thinking systemically”, as Shotter phrases it, naturally lead me to a curiosity about my own positions in my work. To work in a reflective way I developed the following questions to continually work with my own position:

- How do I make sense of the situation and my own position in it?
- What experiences, theories etc. do I draw on in order to make this sense?
• What other stories could be told about the situation and my position in it, by drawing on other experiences, theories etc.?
• What difference would this alternative story mean to the people I work with?

I mention this to highlight that the inspiration from the systemic tradition is double. It gives a unique way of looking at and working with organizations based on interactions between people in different contexts, working with connections between teams or between organization and environment. And it is a heavy inspirational influence in reflecting on different positions taken by the consultant.

The appreciative position
In this section I will present the appreciative position and examples of its usefulness. By appreciative position I mean the work from people like David Cooperrider (Cooperrider & Srivastva 1987, Cooperrider 1990 2000), Diana Whitney (Cooperrider & Whitney 1999), Bliss Brown, Peter Lang (Lang et al. 1990 1994 2000), Martin Little and Marcus Buckingham (Buckingham 2005 2007). As shown in example 2, what they have in common is a focus on language and how to move from a language based on deficits and problems to a language based on appreciation focusing on successes, strengths, and positive intentions in people’s actions, possibilities and positive scenarios for the future.

Primary to the appreciative approach is research to do with the influence of expectations and language. Rosenthal’s famous experiments mentioned in chapter 2 serves as a research basis for the appreciative position showing how high expectations lead to high performance whereas low expectations lead to low performance (Rosenthal 1963 1968, Juhl & Madsen 2011). Using this inspiration, Cooperrider and Whitney formulate the key assumption in the appreciative approach: Human systems grow towards what they persistently ask questions about (Cooperrider & Whitney 1999). Building appreciative inquiry on the power of expectation, Cooperrider wrote the article “Positive image, positive action” and coined the term heliotropi to describe the appreciative assumption of how development is created. Helio means “sun” and tropi means “turn”, which makes laymen sometimes call this “the principle of
the sunflower", since the sunflower is constantly turning its head towards the light.
Cooperrider argues: "Human systems are largely heliotropic in character, meaning that they exhibit an observable and largely automatic tendency to evolve in the direction of positive anticipatory images of the future… The primary executive vocation in a post-bureaucratic era is to nourish the appreciative soil from which new and better guiding images grow on a collective and dynamic basis" (Cooperrider 1997 pp. 117-119). Sometimes the appreciative approach is accused of leaving behind the important problems, but as Peter Lang is saying: behind every problem is a frustrated dream (Lang personal communication). Or as Cooperrider and Whitney frame it: "We can’t ignore problems – we just need to approach them from the other side" (Cooperrider & Whitney 1999 p. 8). In 2007 the municipalities merged in Denmark. I saw how deficit stories were created in a split second telling how a small municipality would become “eaten” by the larger neighbour. This strong negative expectation of the future had very real consequences for the collaboration between the municipalities. Both Cooperrider and Lang direct attention towards expectations, hopes, and dreams for the future. This inspired my role as a consultant to help create different and more appreciative stories about the future and the merger.

As described in example 2 the job of the consultant in this approach is to support nourishing the soil from which positive images can be created. To facilitate the creation of heliotropic movement, Cooperrider developed a 4D model where each D gives the consultant a tool to work appreciatively. I will use the model to show how the appreciative position can be used to develop teams:
The first move in the 4D model is to create an affirmative topic choice. Working with a team of leaders they first decided on the affirmative topic: *How do we become a high performing team of leaders?* This question is for sure affirmative, but additionally what is important is to give the affirmative topic choice an edge that makes the conversation even more fruitful. Reflecting on this the team decided to reformulate:

*How can we collaborate as a team in order to*

- *Get influence in the municipality by being in control of the economical situation in the organization?*
- *Break new and innovative ground for organizational practice?*
The work with the affirmative topic choice initiated many reflections in the team about the importance of focus and the use of language. The second formulation was both affirmative but additionally created a sense of organizational importance and perspective on their work.

The second move is to begin using the 4D’s to engage people in dialogues around the affirmative topic choice. Discovery is typically chosen as the next step. Here the consultant supports the organization discover and learn from best practices building the organization by strengthening positive variance. A research example that is often used comes from the world of bowling, where two groups were recorded while playing. Group 1 saw their mistakes, had time to “plan a problem reducing response” and continued playing. Group 2 saw their success, had time to “plan how to do more of what works” in order to strengthen positive variance and continued playing. Interestingly group 1 improved but group 2 improved twice as much (Cooperrider 2000). From this and similar research the appreciative assumption is that whatever goal the organization is trying to reach or whatever challenge the organization is trying to overcome, there are always successes that can be built upon. Using this assumption with the team of leaders we worked with two questions:

- **What are your key success experiences in collaborating as a team in order to be in control of economy and thereby getting influence in the municipality?**
- **What are your key success experiences in collaborating as a team in order to break new and innovative ground for organizational practice?**

The reflection on this work was interesting. They usually talked of *not succeeding* with both controlling economy and innovative work but found new and refreshing abilities based on success experience that they could use in the future.

Dream is typically chosen as the next step. Here the consultant supports the organization to dream and build positive images and expectations of the future. For some the word “dream” is artificial. Working with the team of leaders one commented “I will leave dreaming to the Americans” and another said, “I’m only dreaming at night”. Of course this initiated conversations about the word “dream”. Instead we decided to talk about “very strong and positive expectations for the future”. What matters is what is done in this phase. The
important point is that the heliotropic principle shows the unique appreciative assumption about systems turning the typical understanding of causality up side down. In the appreciative position the assumption is that in living and social systems it is not past experiences determining actions in the present. It is expectation of the future: “Mental anticipation now pulls the future into the present and reverses the direction of causality” (Erichjantsch in Cooperrider 1990). Social and living systems as the organization is not determined by the past but oriented towards the future. This shows the connection to Gergen’s work on social constructionism and the assumption that “generative theorizing is radical in its focus on generating new reality – by “telling it as it might become” rather than “telling like it is”” (Gergen and Thatchenkery in Zandee and Cooperrider 2008 p. 192). With the team of leaders we used these ideas to work with the question: Imagine that our organization gets an award in 2013 for our work with economy and innovation – research is done to describe how we succeeded in doing this. What does the researcher describe? How does this organization look?

In the design phase the consultant supports the organization to work with questions like: What the organization would look like, if it were designed to maximize the positive core and accelerate realizing the dreams in the organization? (Cooperrider & Whitney 1997). In the case with the team of leaders we worked with a range of subjects from how to exchange employees between teams in order to save expenses on temps to initiating new and innovative projects to creating reward systems for innovative ideas.

Destiny is typically chosen as the final step using the 4D-cycle. Using the term “Destiny” Cooperrider suggests a move away from a classical strategy approach where action planning plays a key role. Rather, Cooperrider suggests that transformation looks like an inspired movement where people use their will and motivation to try out new solutions. This shows how appreciative work is both founded in social constructionism paying attention to language and also based on action research founded in learning by doing. This connects the appreciative position to the pragmatic tradition and the work on inquiry presented in chapter 2.

15 In article downloaded at http://www.stipes.com/aichap2.htm
16 Even though the appreciative position in this way does account for questions of restructuring and other classical strategic considerations, for practical purposes I find it insufficient in this regard which I will also be discussing in example 7. This is one of the reasons to have the strategic position as a position in its own right.
In the example working with the team of leaders, this was done by using the “law of the two feet” from open space technology\(^{17}\) (Dahl & Juhl 2009). Each leader chose what part of subjects defined in the design phase they would both be able to turn into a success and had the highest level of motivation to work with after the workshop. Each leader was responsible for continuing the work after the workshop.

In the example just described I showed how the appreciative position is used to work with developing teams. In example 2 I showed how an entire organization used the appreciative approach as a way of working with its patients. In order to show the range and usefulness of the appreciative approach, I will describe an example of working appreciatively with an individual.

Example 5
A leader invited me to talk to her son. The son was 14 years old and had been an archer for many years and had been one of the best in Denmark. Turning 14 had the implication that he was to fire his bow in a new way. Earlier he had used a trigger and therefore primarily used the muscles in his fingers, when firing the bow. Turning 14 he started shooting with adults and had to fire his bow like them by pulling the string with his back muscles. This new way of firing had dramatic consequences for him. Being used to win, he suddenly had medium scores and therefore lost the tournaments, in which he participated. This had significantly lowered his motivation and he thought of stopping. Of course this also had an effect on his normal competitors. For the first time in many years, they could suddenly win. Their smiles did not improve his mood.

It was an interesting case to be working with. I was used to consulting with adults working in organizations not a youngster using arrow and bow. Furthermore our contact was to take place by mail because he lived 1 ½ hours away. Normally I meet people face to face. But

\(^{17}\) All inspiration about Harrison Owen and Open Space Technology is downloaded from http://www.openspaceworld.com/
being interesting in his situation and in applying appreciative principles in new situations, I accepted.

We had one initial meeting to get acquainted and I reflected about how to being this meeting in an appreciative way. I remember thinking of Peter Lang saying that the most important question was the first question asked, since this question would set a direction, either appreciative or problem saturated, for the conversation and the process. I could ask him a classical appreciative question: when do you succeed the most? But this would properly lead him towards telling about his old way of firing the bow. I could also ask him another classical appreciative question: What are your hopes and dreams? But from my talks with his mother, I had the feeling that he could not see the end of his trouble, so asking this question could also lead to frustration talk. So how could I ask an appreciative question that would help him find his resources and abilities? I decided to ask him: When you use the new way of shooting with your bow, there are shoots that are more successful than other shoots. What are you doing differently in these shoots?

I realized how much I rely on people’s abilities to know and be able to tell about their successes. And I was fascinated to listen to his descriptions of what he did differently in his successes. He described how he could block out the surroundings in order to focus on himself. And then he kept talking of “staying on the line”. Even though I did not know what this meant, I could hear that he could do it and doing this, his play improved. He even had a clear sense that this was what he needed to do more of. After our conversation, our mail correspondence began:

Dear "archer"\textsuperscript{18}

Thank you for an interesting conversation last Thursday. I was especially impressed with your abilities to concentrate, and how you use this ability to block out the surroundings, to keep your focus on yourself and to stay on the line.

\textsuperscript{18} All mail correspondence is translated from Danish into English.
I look forward to hearing more about your experiences with the new way of shooting. I’m especially curious to hear what new things you find out work for you. I’m also curious about what parts of the new way of shooting that are becoming so natural for you that you are no longer thinking about them.

All the best wishes

Andreas

A few days after he replied:

Hi Andreas

After I talked to you things have just gone better and better. Today I achieved 1:12 or something like that.

I just need to focus on the line and imagine that I’m looking on my back and see that I use that muscle.

A.T.B

"The archer"

One month later he wrote to me:

Hi

I think that it goes well with the shots on 70 meters. But when we came to the shots on 60 meters where it really counts, I became too focused on my score and started tipping it of\textsuperscript{19}. But today at practice it went great. I feel that I’ve become better to keep the right focus. WHEN I PRACTICE.

All the best

\textsuperscript{19}“Tipping it of” was his way of describing the shots that failed.
And four months later he wrote to me:

Hi Andreas

Last weekend I became Danish champion in the age group 16 – 18 years of age…. I shot damn well in the final. Pure good shoots. In the gold final it was like that when I pulled the bow there was like a tunnel between the bow, the target and me. I did not hear the audience or anything. I only thought of my movements and my shots….

All the best

“The archer”

I will make two reflections about the appreciative approach and the example presented.

Firstly, I go into details with this example to show that where example 2 was an example of how appreciative inquiry can be used at an organizational level, this example shows that the same ideas of moving into an appreciative language can add value on an individual level. So the appreciative position usefully connects to different distinctions of system.

Secondly, having presented both the systemic and the appreciative position it naturally raises questions about how the consultant decides which of these positions to use and why the appreciative position was chosen in this case? In this example I will argue that two elements influenced the decision about using the appreciative position. At first I didn’t talk to the young boy about how to consult him, but his mother had heard me describe how appreciative principles could be used to speed up learning processes and at the same time build motivation when people were to learn new activities and practices. She responded to this by asking me to use such a way of consulting. In chapter 5 I will call this the contract of the consultancy process. Later on it turned out that the use of the appreciative position did indeed help him improve shooting. I will return to this question of finding a useful position in chapter 5, since this was the bottom line in the critical questions that my colleagues, customers and
research supervisor have asked in the research process. In chapter 5 I will do this by showing the theoretical arguments for a multi-positional approach based on pragmatic reflexivity and how the research answers two critical questions: *I understand each position, but you do not give any instructions to the practitioner of “which position to choose when” – how come?* And *Are the positions used a skilful choice made by the consultant on his own? Or are they socially constructed through dialogue with the costumer?*

**The OD position**

By organizational development (OD position) I’m pointing to the work done by Edgar Schein drawing on traditions from Kurt Lewin and action research, the humanistic psychology by Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow and the Human Relations School (Schein 1999). Schein defines process consultation as “*the creation of a relationship with the client that permits the client to perceive, understand, and act on the process events that occur in the client’s internal and external environment in order to improve the situation as defined by the client*” (ibid. p. 20).

By this definition Schein draws attention to the point that *how* things are done is more important than *what* is done. Schein makes distinctions between three basic models of consultation.

**Model 1: Selling and telling**

The first two models are based on what Schein calls an expert model of consultancy. In the *selling and telling* approach to consultancy, the organization has defined a need and then engages the consultant in order to fulfil that need. Using team development as an example, the leader might have defined team as a goal and then hired the consultant to make it happen. In order for this model to work, Schein points to the several preconditions that must be met. The leader needing to have made the right diagnosis, being able to communicate those needs to the consultant, hired the right consultant being able to do the job, thought
through the consequences of doing the intervention and finally whether or not the reality studied by the consultant can be transformed into a knowledge that is of use for the client (ibid.). This list should make it clear why Schein is critical of the expert model. In short: the conditions for success are seldom present.

Model 2: doctor–patient model
In the doctor–patient model of consultancy the consultant “diagnoses, prescribes, and administers the cure” (Ibid. p. 20). Again Schein is very critical of this model in spite of its popularity. The consultant might not get the right information, the client might be unwilling to accept the diagnosis or unable to implement the cure. The process of diagnosing might in itself change the system being observed and, perhaps most critically, the client does not learn to handle similar situations in the future.

Schein argues that a consequence of leaders and consultants believing in these two models, even though the conditions for its successful use are not present, is a core reason to change processes not being successfully implemented (ibid.). Based on these two models, Schein gives the process consultation alternative.

Model 3: The process consultant alternative.
In Schein's model of process consultation, the aim is “building a helping relationship” without ending in an expert position vis-à-vis the customer. Essentially working from an OD position means to help people learn. In a short sentence: “instead of giving people fish, teach them how to fish” (Schein 1999 p. 19). The aim of process consultation is not “just” to fix one here and now problem but also to increase the organization’s ability to diagnose its own situation and improve its ability to solve these problems itself. In order to achieve this aim,

“The consultant must be prepared to operate in whatever mode is most appropriate, given the realities of the moment. At the outset in any client relationship, the consultant must start in the process mode to discover what the client’s realities are and what the consultant’s relevant
skills are for dealing with those realities. New roles evolve as the relationship evolves and as the client system changes” (Schein 1999 p. 26).

I will give an example of how to use this position in order to develop teams.

Example 6

The leader of a municipal dental care called me to get help to develop how the organization created and developed new visions and strategies. In our initial meeting it became clear that they had two needs. They were currently working with a 2015-strategy but also knew that change in circumstances would mean that a new strategy was to be created within a few years. So just as importantly the leader saw a need to develop and increase their general ability to develop strategies. The invitation was to “sit in” on strategic work done by a team of eight leaders and support them in both aims.

My role was initially to listen to their conversation. To the visions and strategies they developed and how they collaborated as a team of leaders. And I was to ask them questions and give them feedback on their work. Around lunch the strategy had been worked through and based on their way of working we had developed a model for future strategy work in the team. The pace had been high for which several of them had given their appreciation. In a break during the work one of the leaders had said to me that developing strategies was not their problem. Problem solving was their problem. I did not hear any more and we returned to our agenda.

Going to lunch my contact asked me to step aside. She was very satisfied with our work and felt that a shift could be made. One leader in the team was absent due to long-term illness and her department suffered badly from poor communication. It had done so before for a long time, but the leader turning ill had not helped the situation. My contact could not do anything and had decided to switch staff between departments. She knew this was both a necessary and unpopular decision. Seeing how strategy work came along nicely, she asked for my
perspective on changing subject to this both important and acute problem. Thinking of the previous comment in the break I thought that this could be a good move.

After lunch the leader and I introduced the idea of changing focus. The context for this was both to solve the problem but also to develop the ability in the team to solve such problems as a team. The team agreed to this. Again I took the observing role. My contact introduced the theme by telling about the situation to which everybody nodded. It was well known. Then she told about her decision to replace staff. Observing the team I saw them freeze. One leader said: It will not be possible for me to be part of this replacement. I’ve just spent 6 months training my employee in the same role”. Another replied in similar terms saying, “I’ve worked very hard to develop my department into a high performing team. Everybody knows each other, so replacement in my department will set us back one or two years”. My contact looked at me and this was my cue to say “stop, I’d like to take a time-out in your work. They followed you in your diagnosis of the situation but they didn’t follow you in your solution”. From this came many interesting reflections about approaching problems as a team. Most importantly a shared decision was made to approach a problem in one department as a problem for the whole organization for the team of leaders to work with. Even though the leaders were uncertain about how to introduce the decision, they were certain that the fundamental message about being “one organization” would be appreciated by employees.

I will make four reflections about the OD position and the example presented:

Firstly, the examples illustrates how an important part of the OD position is that the customer always owns his own problem/situation, and what can be learned by the customer is

1. An ability to diagnose the situation and
2. Make vivid plans to improve the situation, as defined by the customer

Secondly, the example shows how it is a key element in the OD position to build a helping relationship. In the OD position this is always done by participating in the organizational activities and helping to develop skills and practices by continual feedback and reflections on the work done. The following model illustrates this (Dahl & Juhl 2009):
Thirdly, it is important to begin reflecting on the differences between the positions, since this was my pragmatic argument in chapter 1. I will point to 3 elements that are distinct for the OD position:

1. The aim of any consultation is always to help the customer learn, not “just” to fix a simple problem. This learning is always to do with customer’s ability to make sense of and diagnose the organizational situation and initiate appropriate activities to improve the situation.

2. The emphasis on the consultant participating in the primary organizational activities is important. In Denmark process consultants are frequently engaged as facilitators of workshops or coaching sessions. Participation in organizational activities gives the consultant a possibility to work with habits and grounded assumptions in a different way. Where the systemic position works with the interview and questions as a fundamental way of staying curious and keeping a neutral position to the organization, the fundamental tool in the OD position is that of feedback and feed forward.

3. A similarity to the systemic position is worth mentioning. Both share an understanding where the position of the consultant must be created through coordination and negotiation. A difference between the systemic and OD position is that the systemic position looks at the question in an interactional perspective, whereas Schein presents three distinct models that the consultant can use.

Fourthly, the example, as in the section about the appreciative position, raises the question why the OD position was used in this situation and how it was decided. Since the day ended up having two steps, my reflections will so to.
While planning the work one element confirmed me that the OD position would be preferable. They did not just want to create a strategy, the leaders saw a need to develop and increase their general ability to develop strategies. This ability to diagnose and improve the situation made me think of the OD position. In the planning process we never used the term “OD position”, but we did talk about my role of “sitting in” and how this could help them see and develop their strategic abilities.

Coming back from lunch I thought of the necessary and unpopular decision. I remember thinking that it was important for me not to try to remove the problem from the leader but allow her to “own it”. And since the context for this was both to solve the problem but also to develop the ability in the team to solve such problems as a team, it made sense to continue in the same way as we had worked in the morning.

I go into details with how the OD position was chosen because in chapter 5 I will address what position to use when. My main argument will be that it is not possible to provide final guidelines of which position to use when. Had it been the case, change in living and social systems would follow a predictable method. Rather we need to give examples of when and how to use the positions. Using Shotter’s arguments this gives us “an ‘order of possibilities’… from which we must choose in deciding upon our next actions” (Shotter 1993 p. 7). When the consultant knows and uses multiple positions, he is capable of making such choice by reflecting pragmatically about what will work with this organization?

**The strategic position**

By the strategic position I point to classical strategy work as presented by Richard Lynch (Lynch 2003), Michael Porter (Porter 1985) and John P. Kotter (Kotter 1995). What they have in common is a concern with connecting organizational means and ends in effective business processes and an approach to change in organization that, compared to the systemic approach, is linear (Dahl & Juhl 2009). These people have two things in common. Firstly, they share a linear and sequential view of change. Secondly, they share an analytical approach to organizations and organizational change. I will describe both below.
Nadler and Slywotsky describe the sequential management model as follows (Nadler & Slywotsky 2009):

![Fig. 13: The sequential management model.](image)

In my experience this model of change is the most dominant in both textbooks and even more so in practice. Nadler and Slywotsky criticises this model for two reasons:

“First, it is ill suited to the pace and intensity of change in the modern marketplace. Second, it fails to recognize the inherently messy ways in which real-life management plays out. The model was ideally suited for a world of five- to ten-year product life cycles… [And it] also falls short by embracing the traditional wisdom of “structure follows strategy”. That wisdom might have been true at a time when most changes in strategy were really nothing more than refinements of the existing business model. Today, however, strategy and organization are interdependent” (Nadler & Slywotsky 2009 pp. 82).

Despite this critique with which I agree, many change processes draw on this framework. When politicians create new legislation, organizations are expected to adapt in both organizational strategy and design. And even when environmental change drivers are not so clear, often the metaphors used in organizational change lead in the same direction. Just recently a leader said to me: “Change is like washing stairs – you begin at the top”. By this the leader meant that top leaders were to create a strategy and an organizational design matching it, before involving the next level of leaders in implementing the change by for example creating new local performance measures. Even though I challenged the leader using this metaphor in the example, the model is sometimes very useful.
The second shared assumption in the strategic position is that of working analytically. By analytically I mean that the consultant introduces a model that the customer can use in order to make sense of the organization and its current situation. Just to mention one often used model, I will briefly present McKinsey 7S. Robert Waterman, Tom Peters, and Julien Philips working at McKinsey in the 1980’s came to the conclusion that “Intellectually all managers and consultants know that much more goes on in the process of organizing than the charts, boxes, dotted lines, position descriptions, and matrices can possibly depict. But all too often we behave as though we didn’t know it - if we want change we change the structure” (Waterman et al. 1980 p. 14). Diagnosing and solving organizational problems means looking not merely to structural reorganization for answers but to a framework that includes structure and several related factors. From this assumption springs the 7S model consisting of 7 foci all beginning with S, as shown in the following model:

![McKinsey 7S Model](image)

*Fig. 14: McKinsey 7S.*

The purpose of the model is to help leaders approach change processes as something more than changing organizational structure. The idea of the model is to show how the “hard elements” of strategy, structure and systems are interdependent with the “soft elements” of
skills, shared values, style of organisation and staff by showing that changing one will influence the rest\textsuperscript{20} (ibid.).

Using both the sequential model and 7S, I will present a case to show how the strategic position can be used to develop a team. The example is a continuation of example 2.

Example 7

The organizational strategy mentioned in example 2 was to create a long-term effect for the patients using appreciative methods to work with the hopes and dreams of the patient. The assumption was that this would strengthen motivation and will in the patient and thereby create better and longer lasting results. As mentioned in example 2 this work had an immediate positive effect. Patients formulated hopes that they hadn’t talked about before and employees initiated activities they would usually turn away from. The new skills worked! But this was not without trouble. Following Maslow’s quote that “He that is good with a hammer tends to think everything is a nail”, it turned out that each professional saw patients’ dreams as located in their own profession. Not in that of other professions. As a consequence patients still had multiple goals formulated in professional language. The 7S model was used to reflect on how to improve the situation.

Skills: Appreciative inquiry had been introduced. Continued training and use was decided. To further strengthen patient motivation and involvement in their own rehabilitation, it was decided that staff should learn coaching methods to move the focus away from their own professional judgment towards patient needs and hopes. This was connected with:

Shared values: Each profession seemed based in their own professional values. It was decided to create an organizational shift in values towards seeing the patients’ own goals as the basis of all primary activities. The catching phrase “the patient as centre” was developed

\textsuperscript{20} From many conversations I learned that such arguments about interdependencies bring some practitioners to look at 7S and similar models as “systemic”. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, I define systemic as related to the tradition of cybernetics.
and introduced as a guideline in all work. But this still did not give an answer of how to ensure increased coordination among professionals.

Structure: To support the shared value of “the patient as centre” a new structure was tried out. Where the patient had previously been going in and out of each team in training sessions, each patient now had a cross disciplinary team associated for the four week stay. This team was created from the professions needed to achieve patient goals. When the patient left the organization, the team would dissolve and staff would move on to other ad hoc teams. Even though this team structure required intensive planning from both staff and leaders, in the end this turned out to bring the professionals close enough together to coordinate and collaborate around patient goals.

Staff: With the new structure no new staffs were needed. But in each team a “guide” was appointed by the leader to take special role of responsibility towards the patient and to secure team coordination. By doing this normal hierarchy among professionals was left behind, which also gave rise to several discussions.

Systems also had to be changed, since the cross-disciplinary ad hoc team needed a shared goal based on patient hopes in order to get started. New systems to clarify patient goals and systems to speed team development were designed.

Style: In order for staff to engage in more coaching behaviour facilitating patient strengths, leadership style was changed in the same direction. As an example the annual leader-employee-conversation was turned into an “employee strength-conversation”. The idea for doing this was for leader-employee-conversations and employee-patient-conversations to look alike.

I will make three reflections about the strategic position and the example presented.

Firstly, the example is important because team development in this example is not developing one particular team but designing a team based organization with a clear purpose of securing long-term effects for the patients. This points to the part of the results that I will call distinctions of system in chapter 4: Does the process focus on developing one team? Or does
it focus on the organization in which several teams develop? Of course the answer to this question can be “both-and”, and in chapter 4 I will argue that the consultant needs to pay just as much attention to *distinctions of system* as he is paying attention to *distinctions of position* when designing the process with the customer.

Secondly, and continuing the focus on distinctions of system, an interesting reflection is that employee involvement in the process described in example 7 was kept at a minimum. In chapter 4 I will call the group of people in conversation with each other in the consultancy process for the *conversational system*. Even though the whole of the organization is the focus, it is not possible or preferable to put 180 people into a room discussing how to organize teams using 7S. In chapter 4 I will argue that the *conversational system* is designed answering the question formulated by Tom Andersen: “*Who should be talking with whom, when, where and about what?*” (Andersen in Anderson 1997 p. 69)

Thirdly, I will again reflect on the choice of using the strategic position by drawing attention to two aspects of the situation. The reason for changing position was in order to get out of a stuck situation. I will return to this in chapter 5, because my research using the inspiration from Watzlawick (Watzlawick 1967 1974) points to “the stuck situation” as one typical situation where changing position is necessary in order to create a successful process. But why change to the strategic position? The process using the appreciative position had been driven with high employee involvement. But doing this the organization apparently had not been able to move the old structure. The director decided that this part of the process called for more classical strategy work where leaders made the analysis and took a decision about what structure would support their strategy the best. So in this case the strategic position was used based on a request from the customer that I accepted.

**The narrative position**

By the narrative approach I primarily mean the work done by Michael White and David Epston (White & Epston 1990, White 1992 2000 2006, Epston, White & Murray 1992). What they have in common is using the theoretical inspiration of Foucault and Jerome Bruner in a
context of therapy and social work. The narrative position resembles the appreciative position by having a strong focus on language, and both can be seen as part of what Richard Rorty has called the linguistic turn in psychology and the field of communication (Rorty 1989 1997). Both share a focus on language, but do so with two different sets of assumptions. Where Cooperrider uses Gergen’s version of social constructionism and Lewin’s version of action research to understand language as a means to build “positive images” that lead to “positive actions”, White and Epston use Foucault’s and Derrida’s work of deconstruction to free the individual and organization from dominating stories of identity capturing the individual and organization. An example from Michael White can show the unique narrative approach:

Example 8

*Michael White worked at a hospital in Australia and consulted children with encopresis. What struck White was that the families did not only seem to have one problem – the encopresis – but multiple problems. The children seemed sad, blaming themselves for lack of control. The mothers were feeling guilty, believing that they had done something wrong in their parenting. And the fathers felt shameful, and did not feel they could tell other family members or colleagues about the problem. All in all the encopresis had the family in a string ruining their lives. This gave White an idea: What if we do not internalize the encopresis into the children, but externalize it as something the whole family is fighting? To do this White started labelling the encopresis “Sneaky Poo” to give it a life of its own trying to trick the family. He began asking externalising questions like: “When did Sneaky Poo enter your life?” as if Sneaky Poo was an agent with a will of its own. And then asking for the unique outcome: “Do you have situations, where it’s you tricking Sneaky Poo and not the other way around?”*

I will use this example to point to two major theoretical influences in the narrative tradition: the narrative metaphor and the work of Foucault. They constitute the fundamental assumptions in the narrative position.

The narrative as a metaphor was suggested by Cyrol White and David Epston (White 2006) and guided White and Epston towards the work of Jerome Bruner:
“Experiences in life are richer than the conversation. The narrative organizes and gives meaning to our experiences, but there are always feelings and experiences that are not contained in the dominating story. When we speak, we re-live, re-create, re-tell, and re-shape our culture…. We create episodes of meaning from the stream of life. Any narrative gives to this stream of memories an arbitrary meaning by highlighting some plots and rejecting others. This means that any narrative is an interpretation” (Bruner in Marner 1994 pp. 27 – 28\textsuperscript{21}).

I use the following picture to show how Bruner sees how narratives order experience into meanings of identity and at the same time show that life is richer than the stories told.

![Fig. 15: Narrative, experience and identity.](image)

As Bruner argues, any story is an interpretation and therefore meaning is open to revision by the telling and re-telling of different stories and plots. As the example from White shows, there are always other opportunities for telling and re-telling other stories. As the term “Sneaky Poo” in itself indicates, White places a large focus on stories with humour, creating an alternative plot to the dominating narrative (White 2006).

The other theoretical influence is the work of Michel Foucault and his work on power and Derrida’s work on deconstruction (White 2006, White & Epston 1990). Foucault makes a distinction between the traditional understanding of power as located in persons, for example the King, the leader, or power in an institution, for example the police. This is the traditional

\textsuperscript{21} My translation from Danish.
understanding of power. The modern understanding is that power originates in language. To describe his linguistic understanding of power, Foucault uses the Panopticon. Panopticon is an architectural ideal for a prison, where the prisoners are putting maximal discipline on themselves with a minimum of effort. To do this each cell in the Panopticon is turning towards a tower in the centre with toned glass. The prisoner never knows when he’s being watched.

![The Panopticon prison](image)

**Ill. 1: The Panopticon prison.**

"He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power... he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (Foucault 1979 pp. 202-203). The power and control is self-sustaining. To White and Epston this is how modern power works and how people through language and cultural narratives end up being caught in problem stories of identity.

“Within the context of narrative frames (people) attribute meaning to their experiences of the events of their lives by locating these in sequences that unfold through time according to certain themes or plots. And more than this: it is in this “storying” of experience that people
derive identity descriptions that are filed into the identity categories of modern culture – motive, need, attributes, traits, properties, and so on” (White 2000).

In the example with “Sneaky Poo”, the dominating story of the child not being able to control itself is defining child, mother, and father’s identity. Such a story can only be told in a culture where “self control” is regarded both a valuable and necessary individual ability.

The narrative method is to use Derrida’s ideas of deconstruction by using “the absent but implicit” to challenge the dominating stories and create new and better narratives. “The absent” can be examples that are not usually part of the narratives, new narratives to make sense of identity and re-telling stories to a new audience (White 2006). White and Epston call these absent stories “unique outcomes”, a term White and Epston borrows from Erving Goffman (White & Epston 1990). By unique outcome White & Epston mean situations that are exceptions to the problem and are not part of the dominating story when using a problem’s narrative. The example is implicit but absent from the dominating story, to use the terms of Derrida. They are always present and when found and built into the story it opens for new meanings and identities.

One method often used in narrative work is externalizing the problem. As Epston says, “all that can be internalized can be externalized” (Epston in Marner 1994 p. 11). In White’s example “lack of control” would be internalizing the problem using the usual cultural narrative to make sense of the situation. “Sneaky Poo” would be externalizing the problem using a different narrative plot. The narrative approach is not an “anything goes” approach in the sense that any story is just as good as another story (White 2006). But it shows how a narrative approach favours stories where the power of dominating narratives is challenged in order to create new possibilities and better lives, as defined by the client.

The work of White and Epston is done in a context of therapy, so a comment on similarities and differences to consultancy work in organizations is relevant. I will make two reflections on

\[22\] On page 3 from version downloaded from the Dulwich centre website.
\[23\] My translation from Danish.
the narrative position going into similarities and differences between therapy and consultancy from a narrative position.

Firstly, one similarity has to do with the role of the consultant. As Marner frames it, the narrative therapist and consultant becomes a freedom fighter (Marner 1994). The consultant role is liberating people by de-constructing the dominating narratives executing a silent power on their identities. The job of the consultant is to create a context where the telling and re-telling of the organizational and individual stories is possible. Using the inspiration from cultural anthropologist Barbera Myerhoff, White calls this a definitional ceremony, where the individual, group, or organization is making new collective self-definitions.

Secondly, a difference between therapy and consultancy work has to do with the language used. Even though “Sneaky Poo” is a marvellous example, telling it in organizations often people respond by saying “But we don’t have that kind of problem in our organization. So can we use the narrative approach?” I will argue that the fundamental idea of the narrative position is to see humans as intentional agents that use language to create narratives of identity. These narratives constitute identities for both individuals and organizations. A consequence of this argument is that narrative position is closely connected to the work of Karl Weick working with sense making (Weick 1995), Ralph Stacey working with strategy development as changes in organizational narratives (Stacey 2007) and Patricia Shaw (Shaw 2002). I will return to Shaw in chapter 4.

I will end this section about the narrative position by giving an example of how working with sense making leads to new stories of team identity.

**Example 9**

_A leader invited me to work with her team of 5 leaders. The organization had gone through large change processes in each department. In this period the leaders had allocated attention to their own staff and as consequence coordination between departments and leader suffered. The leader wanted to refocus on the organization creating a strong team of leaders_
supporting one strong organization. My role was to follow the teams’ work for four days and help develop team identity and practice.

Reflecting in practice on our work I used the question shown earlier in chapter 3, reflecting on what I could see if I looked at the organization and situation from a certain position. Observing the team work from a narrative perspective, I listened for what words they used and how they described themselves. Very quickly an interesting dilemma emerged. When they talked about the future they kept talking about “being one strong team. A “we”. Not a group of individuals. But when they talked about the present they kept saying “The way I view our situation…” or “I believe that what we should do is…”. The others did not pick up on these statements. They remained a group of individuals.

I thought of how to challenge them from a narrative position. I said: “I’d like to challenge you. You say you want to be “a strong we”, but when you all speak, you keep saying, “I think” or “my idea is”. For the next 30 minutes, the word “I” is not permitted. You can only use the word “we”. You can only speak as part of the team”.

The team accepted the challenge. Conversation was difficult but full of humour, when someone forgot the rule. Interestingly the change made a difference. The team started speaking as “one team”. Evaluating the day this was used to talk of “the social construction of team” and the significance of paying attention to what words are used. And at the end of my work with the team, this episode was again mentioned as breaking new ground for the team.

The solution focused position

By a solution focused approach I mean the work done by people like Steven de Shazer (de Shazer 1994), Insoo Kim Berg and William O’Hanlon (O’Hanlon 1992). In many ways this position is the easiest to work from since it is almost free of theorizing. As described in the section about position as storytelling industry, the focus is on what people say, the actual word, not how we make sense of what they say using a particular theoretical framework. Still there are assumptions in the solution-focused position.
Firstly, the assumption of not having ideas is important. Criticizing the systemic position and its use of making a hypothesis, O'Hanlon says:

“[The systemic tradition says that] one shouldn’t fall in love with one’s hypothesis, but I don’t even think that you should have a date with it. I believe hypotheses to be distractions at best and at worst they become self-fulfilling prophecies. All brief therapists should have a sofa in their office to use, each time they get a hypothesis – the therapist should then lie down until the hypothesis goes away” (O'Hanlon in Marner 1994 p. 33).

The solution-focused position avoids any temptation to use a theoretical language to describe what is going on and renounces theory. De Shazer argues, using Wittgenstein, that “the difficulty of renouncing all theory [is that] one has to regard what appears so obviously incomplete, as something complete” (Wittgenstein in de Shazer 1994 p. 32). So in the solution focused position no extra language is necessary in order to make sense of what goes on. And the consultant should not spend time trying to work out “an explanation”. This points to the second assumption: a focus on the future.

The second assumption in the solution-focused approach is to make an almost exclusive focus on the future. “Things are the way they are; therefore, what does the client want to see change?” (de Shazer 1994 p. 82). A focus on the future is introduced from the beginning of the consultation asking, “how will we know when we’re supposed to stop meeting like this?” (de Shazer in O’Hanlon 1992 p. 139). And suggesting a similar approach O’Hanlon argues “since all successful therapy eventually comes around to finding solutions by getting people to do something different, I propose that we start pursuing these goals more deliberately from the start of therapy” (O’Hanlon 1992 p. 137). Solution focused methods are working with what the organization want to create. Not what the organization tries to avoid. This also shows how the solution-focused approach is creating a maximum level of influence for employees and leaders in a domain where they have the possibility to act on their situation. An example can illustrate:

24 My translation from Danish.
Example 10

An organization with 350 employees hired me to help create a cultural shift. For a long time the organization had been dominated by what the leader called “wash-room talks”. Employees talked badly about each other and talks of development were non-existent. Absenteeism was sky high leaving a big hole in the organization’s economy due to expenses for temps. Further cut backs were on the way due to poor economy in the municipality of which the organization was a part. Due to this situation the unions were alert, claiming that it would increase stress. In this situation the leader wanted to create a cultural shift in the organization towards focusing on creating results (not talking negatively about each other) and focusing on feelings of strength and motivation (not stress and lack of job satisfaction). In short this shift was called “a strength based organization”. I was to train the team of leaders to look at and develop their leadership and help them build an action learning process where they gradually developed a strength-based organization. A part of this was training solution-focused leadership.

2 months into our work, the leader decided to cut down on the night shift in order to meet economy demands. This both meant firing people and changing the way of working on the night shift. Previously the night shift had been two employees driving together to collaborate and create safety for the employees. Now they were to drive alone at night and only do the things they could do on their own.

Before our next meeting, the unions made a move. They had contacted the media and tried to tell a story of “lack of resources leads to increased stress”. Something needed to be done. Our next meeting was only two days after the media had contacted the organization. We decided to work through how this situation could become an example of “the strength based organization” by approaching the situation using solution-focused assumptions.

Using the criteria described above, talks circled around what to create. The decision could not be taken back since money had to be saved. But employee needs, the purpose of creating strength-based organization, and pressure from the media and unions made it clear that security had to be created for the employees. But how could this be done? Using the second
of the solution focused principles the leaders decided to initiate two lines of conversation both focusing on creating security. One line of conversation took place with the people being laid off work. The organization was part of a larger organization of 5000 and the leaders wanted to support the employees to get a job in a sister organization and thereby help create a job security. Another line of conversation was initiated with the remaining employees working at night focusing on questions like: How do we create security in the new way of working driving alone?

Just one week after the media stopped calling. The lack of conflict in the organization made the story uninteresting for them to pursue. Reflecting on our work the leaders saw this as an important shift in the process. It had indeed become an example of “the strength-based organization” by moving the project from the team of leaders into a here and now situation in the organization.

Two often-used methods by de Shazer can show how to turn the solution-focused assumptions into practice: scaling questions and the miracle question.

Scaling questions are always used by constructing a scale that suits the client, but the purpose is always the same:

“Since you cannot be absolutely certain what another person meant by his or her word or concept, scaling questions allow both therapist and client to jointly construct a bridge, a way of talking about things that are hard to describe – including progress towards the client’s solution” (de Shazer 1994 p. 92).

Often a scale from 0 till 10 is used since this makes it possible to talk about the issue with more details.
Example 11

I was invited by a leader to help develop her administrative team of 11 people, for whom she had just been appointed leader. Working in a very large organization of 15,000 people, they served the core of the administration: the directors and their closest staff. The team consisted of different subgroups of professions and for many years they had experienced a lack of leadership and as a consequence no real changes had been made. The employee satisfactory rate was low, and even in the group of 6 secretaries who served the 13 directors in the organization, collaboration was kept at a minimum. The other professions were specialists or front desk personal. They did not feel like a team. Additionally the organization was going into a process of cut backs, which had left the team with a feeling of “every man for himself”. Also this meant that we could only plan a one-day workshop for the team. The leader would have to follow up herself.

In an initial meeting with the leader and two employees designing the one-day workshop they said they wanted a process without any “bull shit bingo of consultant talk”. No fancy words. And they wanted “something” that was hands on. Something they could use straight away. The leader and two employees stressed that there was no reason to look back on the past. That would just aggravate conflict. I took this to mean the solution-focused way of working.

To prepare for the workshop each team member was asked the question: Imagine that one day our team had turned into the high performing team. How do you see this in our every day work? And how do others see this in our way of working? These questions had the purpose of looking at the future and by involving the team members create focus points that could be used in goal setting and evaluating team performance. From working with their answers, five focus points were created:

- Courtesy towards directors and other stakeholders
- Effectiveness in teamwork
- Respect towards each other in the team
- Loyalty to team decisions
• Readiness to engage in change processes, also the changes coming from downsizing the organization.

Having created these focus points, 5 scales were created. 10 were the score for “when the team works at its best” and 0 for “when the team works at its worst”. Everyone made their score for each scale about where they saw the team today and where they saw the team in 3 months, when the leader would conduct a follow up. The team used the different scales to discuss a realistic plan for developing the team over the next 6 months, with a follow up after 3 months.

I will make two reflections about the example. Firstly, it is important that the consultant does not introduce any “new language” in the organization. The consultant “just” works with what is already there.

Secondly, this points to what I have personally experienced as the biggest challenge working from a solution focused position: how much or rather how little do you need to know in order to facilitate change? The solution focused position answers this by saying not very much.

Another important method in the solution-focused position is the use of miracle questions. They have the purpose of consultant and client constructing a bridge around the future success of the process being designed. De Shazer almost always asks the question the same way:

“Suppose that tonight after you go to sleep a miracle happens and the problems that brought you to therapy are solved immediately. But since you were sleeping at the time you cannot know that this miracle has happened. Once you wake up tomorrow morning, how will you discover that a miracle has happened? Without you telling them, how will other people know that a miracle has happened?” (de Shazer 1994 p. 95).

Even though de Shazer, Insoo Kim Berg, and William O’Hanlon give credit to Bateson, they all make a move away from the systemic tradition. Therefore a comment on the differences between the systemic, narrative, and solution-focused approach is important to show how the positions are unique. Marner helps to make the differences clear (Marner 1994). The systemic
approach, using Maturana and Varela’s ideas, is concerned with differences between people’s perspectives as a key point of observation (Maturana & Varela 1992, Boscolo et al. 1991). Neither the narrative nor solution focused approach has this interest. In the narrative approach the consultant takes a very active role in mobilising anger and rejections towards the way problems are defining people’s lives (White & Epston 1990, White 2006). This is different to the systemic approach, where the concept of neutrality influences the consultant towards not coming with “fixed solutions” (Palazzoli et al. 1980, Cecchin 1987). In the solution focused approach the consultant is using a minimum of interventions to facilitate change and, as indicated with the quotes from de Shazer, there is scepticism towards any theorizing or creation of hypotheses on behalf of the consultant (de Shazer 1994, O’Hanlon 1992). Both the solution focused approach and the narrative approach are de-constructing the problem. But where the narrative approach is doing this by re-telling the past through unique outcomes, the solution-focused approach is focusing on the present and future (Marner 1994), as does the appreciative approach. The narrative approach is creating an alternative story by redefining identity with the client. The solution-focused approach is redefining connections and initiating small steps towards solutions (ibid.).

By now I’ve presented part of the results from the research showing how the consultant can use different positions in order to succeed. Each position is unique because it allows the consultant to do “something” different. In my research I found 6 distinct positions. In order to secure a pragmatic validity I’ve been looking at how each position gives the consultant a way of engaging in practice. To show the difference between the positions I’ve used a similar case by showing how each position inspires the consultant to work with developing team. But returning to my research question two important questions still need to be addressed in this chapter.

Firstly, I’ve not sufficiently shown how using multiple positions is stronger than using “just one” position. And secondly, going back to introducing “positioning in conversation” I haven’t sufficiently shown how multiple positions help the consultant position and re-position himself in the ongoing conversations in order to succeed. This will be the focus of the remainder part of this chapter.
Using multiple positions to develop teams

In this final part of chapter 3 I will show how the combination of positions can be used to work with developing a team. The example will illustrate that each position gives unique ideas of how to work with developing a team. In the case, the usefulness of multiple positions is illustrated by making it possible to change position when the team and consultant get stuck.

Example 12

A director for nursing homes in a municipality invited me to work with one of her districts. They were in a tight spot. Two years back the municipality had gone through a big and difficult merger. And one year ago the nursing homes had merged again to create four strong districts. But the district hadn’t become strong. Employees complained about workload and too many new initiatives. So did team leaders who, working in different locations, also complained about feelings of isolation. The district leader felt pressure from both below and above, and the director observed that too many situations were handled differently leading to many situations being turned into cases for the press. This gave everybody a hard time and the district a bad reputation. Furthermore, absenteeism was high and as a consequence the district had a big hole in its finances.

At the initial meeting a group of six was invited to design a helpful process. The director, the district leader, her vice-district leader, two team leaders and I were present. There was tension in the room. One team leader kept saying that she felt distrust from the director who answered that it was time to deliver some results. I remember thinking in the Milan group term of neutrality. The group should experience that I was allied with everybody and nobody at the same time (Palazzoli et al. 1980). Using Peggy Penn’s idea, that “Future questions illuminate the present condition of the system as context bound ... they are the system’s own thought about itself in a new place, a new time, a new context” (Penn 1988 p. 299) I kept asking the question, I had planned in advance: “Imagine that the process we are designing together today has helped you create the district of your dreams in one or two years time, what has been created?”. From this appreciative question came a shared focus on the team of team
leaders. Everybody in the group saw this team as the key to success. The district would not become one strong district if team leaders did not work as a team. They wanted to be one team with shared goals and ways of collaborating. They wanted to become a “we”. Not a series of “I”’s feeling lonely. But tension was still in the room. I asked: “So how do we design a process that leads to such a team?” The director said that she wanted to be close to the process, which in turn made one team leader say that this was a sign of lack of trust. The district leader was silent. They looked at me and asked: What do your experiences say about how to become a strong team of team leaders? What they had said about defining shared goals and ways of collaborating echoed my experiences working from a strategic position, so we planned to spend 5 whole days during half a year to work with these questions. The meeting ended. In the car home I remember thinking of the distrust that the team leader had mentioned and how to work with it. Should I address it directly or should trust be created through working with the questions that we had agreed upon? The district seemed fragile after the two mergers, so I decided to go along with the plan we had created together.

The first whole day began as planned. With the district leader I had planned that I should present a few “ideas for inspiration” about working as a team of leaders, and the leaders seemed to appreciate having the time to reflect upon and discuss what their shared goals were. Interestingly this appreciation stopped at the end of the day. Suddenly one team leader said: “What have we been doing today? This is no different from what we did when we had just merged”. Another team leader nodded and everybody looked at me. Being taken by surprise by the sudden change in the process, I suggested a short break. In the break the district leader said to me: “This is where we always end in our meetings. What can we do?” Being in the research process, I used the break to reflect about in what ways the different positions could be helpful. I could stay in the here and now and bring them to reflect on what was going on in the room. I could ask the others if they had different views than the one expressed? I could use the comment to ask them what else they thought needed to be done, since this was not what they needed to do to develop the team. I could interview the district leader about her views of the situation and how to proceed. All these ideas had in common that I did not “accept” that I was the one having the responsibility to show a way forward. In a
sense return the responsibility to themselves. But it could also be seen as not taking the responsibility that could be expected from a consultant coming with a perspective of the outsider. The district leader’s last comment made me think that I needed to see how they collaborated in practice. And the team leader’s comment had a “less talking more action” tone to it. Not just talking about how to collaborate. But collaborating in their day-to-day meetings with me as a reflecting observer looking at how communication was made. How day-to-day tasks, goals, and collaboration were created.

After the break this was my suggestion. The following day the process could be used for not “talking about collaboration as a team” but “learning from actual collaborating, being a team”.

Preparing this day, Schein’s ideas of participating in the organization dominated my preparations. The team and the district leader would have a meeting, where they would work with themes to do with their shared goals. My role would be that of a reflecting observer, giving them feedback on their way of working. Thinking in terms of Maturana and Varela, I thought about how to work with their own way of observing themselves. My presence would in any case influence what was going on, so I might as well use this influence purposefully. To introduce the meeting I therefore gave two observation points to the team. One half of the team was to look with a classical appreciative inquiry perspective at their own work looking at “how do we collaborate, when we achieve our best?” The other half was to look from a perspective of team identity looking at “what values are present in our collaboration?” I believe this to have made a difference. The district leader smiled after the meeting. For the first time they had handled difficult agendas as a team. Together.

Evaluating day 2 in the process, the team of leaders were happy to have worked with actual assignments and to have learned from actual collaboration. They could see how they could continue to develop this aspect of the team performance. But one thing of importance to them had not been addressed. One leader said: “To become a team we need to get closer to each other. We need to collaborate around the individual leader and how her leadership is done”. Again they looked at me. This time around I was prepared and had in my preparations decided that I would not again take the role of doctor, as Schein puts it, prescribing the
treatment. Instead I asked: “So how could we do this in a way that would develop the team even further?” One leader had been on a systemic leadership course and found the reflecting team very helpful, so a model was created for leadership conversations to be made in the team. My role would be to take the role of supervisor initially and passing it over to the district leader, as the model had been developed further and had become known to everybody.

I will end the example here, because the point I want to make with it should be clear by now. Before looking at further results from the research I will summarize the results presented in chapter 3.

The successful consultant is able to work with a multi-positional ability meaning the ability to make clear distinctions between different positions in practice. This helps the consultant see and approach organizations in different ways working with a double gaze:

a. **What do I see now about the organization and situation from the position I’ve taken?**

b. **What could I see if I looked at the organization and situation from a different position?**

Further the consultant gets multiple possibilities for action in any situation. This is different from working from one theory or paradigm. 6 positions have been introduced in chapter 3, showing how the consultant positions and re-positions in the consultancy process. Particularly the examples in chapter 3 have shown how different positions by offering different perspectives on the organization and different possibilities for action help the consultant get out of a “stuck situation” using a reflecting pragmatically about what will work with this organization?

In chapter 5 I will continue working with distinctions of position by going into 4 typical critical questions raised by colleagues, customers and research supervisors, and how the research has answered these questions. The four questions are:

- **Question 1: You mention no example that is not “a success”. How come?**
• Question 2: I understand each position, but you do not give any instructions to the practitioner of “which position to choose when” – how come?
• Question 3: Are the positions used a skilful choice made by the consultant on his own? Or are they socially constructed through dialogue with the costumer?
• Question 4: How did you reach 6 positions? Why not 1, 2 or 3? And are these positions both “necessary and sufficient” to cover all practices?
Chapter 4: The consultancy room – distinctions of system and of time

The purpose of this chapter is presenting the final parts of the results from the research. This will fall into two main sections.

1. Distinctions of system: I will show how the consultant is simultaneously working with the conversational system, who is talking to each other, and the linguistic system, who is being talked about and in what way. I will show how the different positions give different perspectives on how to understand distinctions of system and how a focus of three prototypical systems: the organization, the group and the individual, can help the consultant navigate in practice.

2. Distinctions of time: I will show how the consultant is simultaneously working with multiple distinctions of time. I will show how using the inspiration from Barnett Pearce making distinctions between “in the moment” facilitation, “meeting”, and “process” design can help the consultant navigate and create success in practice.

In both sections I will continue presenting examples about developing teams to show the pragmatic validity of the research.

The second dimension of the room: distinctions of systems

The second dimension of the room concerns the multiple distinction of systems made in consultancy.
Fig. 16: Distinctions of system.

The main result working with similarities and differences in the examples falls in two categories:

Firstly, looking at differences in the examples made it clear that the consultant is simultaneously working with two kinds of systems:

1. The conversational system is the actual people talking to each other.
2. The linguistic system is who is being talked about and in what way?
Each position gives unique ideas of how to look and think of both conversational and linguistic systems.

Secondly, looking at the similarities in the examples made it clear that the consultant is using different distinctions of systems. Even though the number of system distinctions is in principle infinite, the consultant integrates and combines these in the consultancy process. I found it practical to continually work with three distinctions of systems: organization, group, and individual.

The conversational system
The conversational system is created by implicitly or explicitly answering the question formulated by Tom Andersen: “Who should be talking with whom, when, where and about what?” (Andersen in Anderson 1997 p. 69)

Example 13
For a while I had been coaching a leader creating organizational change through appreciative principles. Due to structural changes in the municipality that the organization was part of, her organisation became part of a merger between her and a smaller organization. Her organization was approximately twice as large as the other, and she became the leader of the new organisation. The leader from the smaller organization became team leader for her old employees now being one department in the new organization.

Straight away it becomes clear that the leader and the employees from the smaller organization saw the merger as a significant loss of culture and professionalism. As a consequence they talked about “being in a grief process”. My contact invited me to a meeting with representatives from the department and the team of leaders to talk about how I might be of help. The representatives talked about being afraid of losing their unique way of working. Asking them what they hoped would come from my participation in the organization everybody was surprisingly silent. A few statements were made about being “one
organization” but in the same sentence they added “with space for the uniqueness of each department and individual”. They all talked about the importance of having both long-term and short-term goals. But when asked they had no or very vague formulations about what these goals ought to be. Ending the meeting my contact asked me to come up with a suggestion of how to proceed. We agreed that I would write about my observations and my suggestions on how to proceed.

Leaving the organization I kept reflecting on the idea of meeting with the department “being in a grief process”. What good could come from that? In my understanding of their situation, their worry was legitimate. They did risk losing something they had used years to create. On the other hand, their unique way of working might be integrated and used successfully, if the organization could see its use. But this was a strategic matter to be worked through carefully by the team of leaders. Not something I could decide with employees. So meeting with the department I thought I would run the risk of “just” being able to listen to their stories and perhaps help them reframe the grief into stories of having a “strong professionalism”. But what good would that do, if worries came true? Could I run the risk of strengthening not reducing the “grief”? Further I reflected on the complete silence from the leader of the department. How could I understand this? In any case it was obvious that a key challenge for the team of leaders was to work as a team having a shared approach to the merger.

In my mail I wrote:

“My suggestion is that I will participate in two steps.

**Step one** has the purpose of creating a plan for “the good merger” for the whole organization towards next summer. My suggestion is that this work is best done by the team of leaders using 2 half days with me within the next month. This plan needs to address:

- Job rotation between departments.
- Shared tasks and working across department boundaries.

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25 The mail was longer containing a section about what I had heard at the meeting. Here I’m presenting the part of the mail with my suggestion about how to proceed.
• How to evaluate the merger process next summer.

To make sure that this plan is solid and secure ownership from staff, team leaders will present and discuss this plan in their own department. After this we will meet again.

Step two in my participation is to participate where it is useful. This is to be defined by the outcome of step one.”

This was decided and at the first meeting with the team of leaders, I was confirmed that it was the right way forward. The leaders had very different views of the merger, what goals to formulate and how to collaborate. Reflecting on this at the meeting with my contact, she decided to put additional focus on developing the team of leaders going into questions like “What does it mean for us to be a team in the merger process? And what’s the implication for each leader?”

It was decided that I should follow them for 3 half days working with these questions. After 3 half days work, the leaders saw themselves moving towards the team they hoped to become supporting “one organization”, as they had initially talked about. In this process the new structure came more or less in place, and the team of leaders decided to create a seminar for the whole organization addressing the merger through an open process. I helped the leaders design and run the seminar by helping them create the opening question to start off the days work.

I will make three reflections about this example.

Firstly, I want to draw attention to how consultant and customer discuss and coordinate who is to talk to whom about what and in what way. This example is important because it shows how I as a consultant introduce a new distinction of system in the process. In the initial meeting the focus was on the department. In my mail I suggest to move the focus to the team of leaders, thereby creating a different conversational system talking about the change and merger. This shows how answering the question of who needs to talk to whom in what way in order to improve the situation to a high degree decides how the consultancy process is designed.
Secondly, the example can be used to show that I use the term *conversational system* in two ways. Both as a choice made in the process about *who should talk to whom*. And as the actual conversation taking place between people. I will comment on this last definition of conversational system. In the beginning of the example the conversational system was the ad hoc group of leaders, employee representatives and myself. Then the conversational system became the team of leaders and myself, then the team leader and their own department, then the team of leaders and myself again, and finally the whole organization. I point out this observation because it links my work to what is often called a complexity approach to organizations and change and the work of Patricia Shaw (Shaw 2002) and Ralph Stacey (Stacey 2007), who both put the conversation, or what I call the conversational system, in the foreground of attention. Shortly put: the organization *is* the conversations and does not exist independent of these conversations (Shaw 2002). Organizational change is a change in conversation, and therefore the consultant role is that of “Changing conversations in organizations” as Shaw’s book is called. Harlene Anderson takes a similar approach in her book *Conversation, language and possibilities* saying, “human systems are language- and meaning-generating systems” (Anderson 1997 p. 5). Constructing a shared reality. This leads to a “view (of) human systems as complex entities composed of individuals who think, interpret, and understand” (ibid. p. 37). I use this to argue that the consultants working with the conversational system are working with *who meets with whom*, and this stream of organizational conversations in practice is creating the organizational sense making. So when a shift is made in example 13 from the department to the team of leaders, it (might) change the way meaning is being created in relation to the merger.

Thirdly, this raises the question of which positions are used in the dialogue between consultant and customer to make the choice of *who should talk to whom*. If the impact of the conversational system is as large as both I, Shaw, Stacey, and Anderson argue, then what do the different positions give as guidelines of how to answer the question to *who should talk to whom*?
In example 13 I remember thinking in strategic terms about the organization assuming that trouble at one level (department) is best solved by working with the super ordinate level (leadership). Even though meeting with the department and the team of leaders could have led to the same outcome, my assumption in this example was that this would not the case. This example also shows how making this assumption about the conversational system to a large degree influences how the process is designed.

So the consultant can use each position and their assumptions about systems to engage in dialogue with the customer to work and create the conversational system. Looking at the differences between the examples, I can see that the different positions have different assumptions about how to approach this question. In this section I will go into some details with each of the 6 positions used in the model of the consultancy room and show how they give different ideas of creating the conversational system.

The strategic position approach sees systems as based on what Goolishian has described as the onion model using a Parsonian understanding of systems (Anderson 1997). The employee is seen as part of a group or team that is again part of a department that is again part of an organization that is again part of a community and so forth. Each system is part of a larger system that consists of subsystems. “Social systems are objectively defined, exist in some kind of universal way, and are independent of people involved or of any observers” (Ibid. p. 19). In my experience this is the dominating understanding of systems in both literature and organization. As Anderson comments, it directs our understanding of how to improve the situation, since

“All problem in this framework is thought to be caused by the system super ordinate to the one expressing the deviance. That is, the super ordinate system must be inadequately socialized if it is imposing a defective role and structure on the system below… Parsonian social theories tend to promote hierarchy and patriarchy” (Ibid. pp. 19-20).

Another example of how this understanding of systems is expressed in everyday life could be Vestas and other companies working with renewable energy asking for society and government to create legislation that permits long-term investments from the companies. So
society is seen as the super ordinate system that both creates and enables the possibility for
the functioning and wellbeing of the subordinate system, the company. As showed in example
13, this gives the consultant certain assumptions about defining the conversational system,
answering the question who needs to talk to whom in what way and about what in order to
improve the situation: it is a leadership responsibility to create goals for the merger.

The systemic position sees social and living systems as interactional systems based on the
cybernetic model of feedback loops. Bateson’s example of the man felling a tree can illustrate
how distinctions of systems are made:

“If we desire to explain or understand the mental aspect of any biological event, we must take
into account the system – that is, the network of closed circuits within which the biological
event is determined… Consider a man felling a tree with an axe. Each stroke of the axe is
modified or corrected, according to the shape of the cut face of the tree left by the previous
stroke. This self-corrective (i.e. mental) process is brought about by the total system, tree-
eyes-brain-muscles-axe-stroke-tree” (Bateson 1972 p. 317).

I will draw two important conclusions about systems at this stage.

Firstly, the system is the interaction based on feedback loops. Not the man in himself or the
tree in itself. Example 1 in chapter 1 showed how changing my way of looking from the female
schizophrenic patient to me and her helped approach the situation in a new and helpful way.
Similarly, I showed in example 4 in chapter 3 how introducing a contextual approach based
on this understanding of systems helped finding positive deviances of interaction to create
new possibilities for action.

Secondly, the systemic position gives a fundamental critique to the strategic position and the
strategic approach to change based on control. “Thus, in no system which shows mental
characteristics can any part have unilateral control over the whole” (Bateson 1972 p. 316). An
analogy can illustrate the systemic critique towards believing in control in social systems:
Change in social systems is like backward driving with trucks with trailers. The number of
people in the organization is equal to the number of trailers making control increasingly
difficult. The important observation is that the systemic approach to distinction of systems has the consequence of suggesting a different *conversational system*. The purpose of the conversational system is not to exercise control over the remaining system. With the inspiration of Maturana and Varela viewing communication as coordination (Maturana & Varela 1992) and Asby’s law of requisite variety stating that only variety can absorb variety (Hoverstadt 2008), I will argue that the systemic position sees the purpose of the conversational system as coordination of meaning and handling complexity. By complexity I mean that a systemic guideline in creating the conversational systems is making sure that three layers in the organization are represented, thereby both crossing normal organizational structures and representing a larger range of perspectives in the organization. Both example 1 and 20 show how such an understanding can be used working with the conversational system. In example 1 the conversational system remains the same but the linguistic focus in the conversation changes. I will return to this below addressing the *linguistic system*. In example 20 the change process is not run by leaders but by a group of employee representatives initiating activities in different departments and the leaders having the role of supporting and challenging these initiatives. This is an example of a conversational system based on systemic ideas for two reasons. Firstly, it’s representing organizational complexity by representing each team in the organization. Secondly, it’s reflecting on and changing normal interaction between leaders and employees in the organization.

Though the strategic onion model and systemic model of interaction are different in their view of power and control they share one important similarity: it is “the system that creates the problem” meaning that the problem reflects the dynamics and interactions of the system.

In the *narrative position* this is turned up side down arguing that it is “the problem that creates the system” (Anderson 1997). When something is defined as a problem it defines identities and relationships and *who should talk to whom*. In this way “the problem creates the system”. Therefore, the narrative position suggests the conversational system should not mirror some existing structure in the organization. The conversational system emerges because it is useful in creating “a language system and a linguistic event in which people are
engaged in a collaborative relationship and conversation – a mutual endeavour towards possibility” (Anderson 1997 p. 2).

The **OD position** approaches the matter of conversational system in a different way. Patricia Shaw (2002) reads Schein one way, and I read him another. This leads to two different approaches to the conversational system.

Shaw reads Schein and the OD position as a way of working, where the consultant is “sitting in with people at various meetings” (Shaw 2002 p. 9) in order to analyse patterns using regularities of behaviour. “We can construct a picture of the group in terms of actual members and their relationships to one another and to the task. The focus (could) be on the relationships among the members of the group, regardless of what the group is actually working on… Just as it is possible to observe a group at work and abstract the methods it uses to accomplish that work, so it is possible to abstract the interpersonal processes evident in a group independent of the actual people involved in these processes” (Schein in Shaw 2002 p. 129). As Shaw comments this leads to “observing what is stable and repetitive in the way people relate” (Shaw 2002 p. 9). Reading Schein like this, the conversational system is seen as the exiting social structure in the organization in order to observe and give feedback on repetitive behaviour. But Schein could also be read in another way, going in another direction than Shaw does in her reading of Schein.

In my reading of Schein the important aspect of process consultation is to secure that the customer is helped both diagnosing and improving the situation at hand. Therefore the important aspect of creating the conversational system is to help the customer reflect on the choices made, not for the consultant to introduce a particular thinking in the organization about **who ought to talk to each other in this situation**. Typically this could be done introducing a second order thinking, reflecting on the type of situation being talked about. Working to design the conversational system the consultant working from an OD position could ask questions like: **If you look at the situation at hand and think of creating a culture for approaching this type of situation, what would be the right choice about who needs to talk to**
whom? Answering this question the customer is helped diagnose the organizational situation and learn how to improve this and similar situations.

Even though Shaw’s and my own reading are different, they both help the consultant see the conversational system in a different light than the ones suggested by the strategic, systemic, and narrative position and are thereby different in their practical consequences. This was the pragmatic ideal constructed in chapter 2.

The appreciative position does not, as I read the literature, make any suggestions to construct the conversational system. But I’ve made my own recommendation based on the assumptions presented in chapter 3. If the purpose is to nourish the soil from which new and positive images of the future can be created, the conversational system should be constructed from people making this possible. In practice I’ve begun asking for three types of people:

- **People with success experiences in relation to the affirmative topic choice.** These people are always present but sometimes come from outside the organization. By being part of the conversational system they can present examples making it possible to build motivation in the group and to make plans building on strengthening positive variance.

- **People with strong and positive images of the future in relation to the affirmative topic choice.** These people might or might not be the same as the people with positive examples.

- **People with strong motivation and ability to turn “thinking into action”**.

In the solution-focused position the consultant should not impose a particular thinking on the system but help finding solutions. I haven’t found any explicit comments in the work by Steven de Shazer (de Shazer 1994), Insoo Kim Berg and William O’Hanlon (O’Hanlon 1992) about how to create the conversational system. But I will argue that the solution-focused position in designing the conversational system is simply helping the customer bringing people together in order to create a solution.
I will make two reflections on the usefulness of working with the conversational system and combining this with the six positions. Firstly, this is, as mentioned above, a very strong and important part of designing the change process. And it never stops. Often, what changes the process is that a new distinction is made about the conversational system.

**Example 14**
As mentioned in example 10 a group of leaders were working with developing the strength-based organization. After three days of work with the group of leaders, the question of involving the employees kept being raised. Discussing this, the group of leaders decided that this was the only way to engage the whole of the organization in the work being done. After a half day working with both leaders and employees, several of the leaders kept approaching me saying “this is it – now we can all see where this is headed”. Voicing this reflection in the room everybody nodded. On the spot it was decided for employees to be part of the rest of the process.

So the conversational system is constantly changing in order to secure the outcome of the process.

Secondly, each position gives different ideas of how to construct the conversational system. This is helpful in two ways. It helps the consultant reflect in and on practice about what suggestions to make as example 14 showed. Distinctions of position and distinction of system in combination helps the consultant pragmatically reflect on what will work with this organization? And it helps the consultant voice different suggestions to the customer based on clear and distinct ideas. This helps increase customer reflexivity about how to engage in change processes.

Having looked at the conversational system and how the different positions give distinct ideas of constructing the conversational system, I will turn my focus to the linguistic system.
The linguistic distinctions of system: organization, group, and individual

By linguistic system I mean who is being talked about and focused upon. Going back to example 13 and my meetings with the team of leaders, we talked both of the entire organization and the merger and we talked about the team of leaders and how they collaborated. So in conversations many different linguistic distinctions are introduced leading to different outcomes of the situation. As example 4 shows, the conversational and linguistic systems can be different. The conversational system was the team, their leader, my colleague, and I. The linguistic system was the team and the old woman. In each case multiple distinctions of systems are used in the linguistic system. As shown in example 9, a change in linguistic system is not only who is being talked but also how they are being talked about. My argument in this section is that sometimes it is exactly a new distinction of linguistic system that moves the conversation in the right direction.

Example 15

A school educating nurses experienced an increase in students leaving the school and an increase in employee stress levels. Being invited to the school to help with the situation, I was invited to sit in on their meetings where they discussed the situation and what they could do about it. Looking at feedback from students leaving the school many pointed to conflicts between students as a key reason for dropping out. Therefore it was decided to look at “the group of students” as an important system, and particularly the changes that happened in “the group of students”. This was the first system distinction made. Working with how to understand this group, the distinction “the group of students as part of a youth culture” was made. Seeing “the group of students” as part of “youth culture” made the organization create a hypothesis that young people got their inspiration to solve conflicts from television and pop culture, seeing conflicts as being part of a Robinson-expedition\(^{26}\) where people are excluded and sent home. This hypothesis seemed useful to the teachers. They saw how students being

\(^{26}\) A Robinson-expedition is a television show running in Denmark. A group of people is sent to an island. Here they compete doing different tasks and have the possibility to send each other off the island. The last person on the island wins a large sum of money.
in conflicts did not only get excluded from the study group of which they were a part. They were often excluded from the entire group of students. And they saw this as somewhat of a paradox since they were training the future nurses in teamwork, seeing conflicts as a possibility for team learning and development.

Working with this hypothesis a new distinction of system was made moving the focus from the students to the team of teachers. Since this hypothesis was regarded as useful, what could they do as a team? Making the shift, the distinction of system was changed from “the group of students as part of a youth culture” to “the team of teachers working with the group of students as part of a youth culture”. This new distinction was appreciated. The new understanding of their problem was meaningful, but teachers were uncertain of what to do next. To work with this we worked through three distinctions of system that they saw as important. Firstly, we worked with the entire group of students and how they could teach this group about conflicts. They developed both text material with the headline “Do you approach conflicts as a Robinson Expedition or as teamwork” and they found video examples to use in teaching sessions. Secondly, we worked with the study groups of students. The teachers created tools to help study groups make plans for conflict resolution. And thirdly they reflected on their own role in future conflicts reflecting on when they would coach the individual student and when they would assemble the study group. During this they also reflected and gave each other feedback on “personal strengths and challenges” in the role of working with conflicts.

Reflecting on the output of our work the teachers said that they had the feeling that we had been “all the way around”.

Firstly, the example shows how 6 distinctions of system are used: “The group of students”, “the group of students as part of a youth culture”, “the study groups”, “the class room”, “the role as teacher” and “the differences between the teachers”. Working with multiple distinctions creates the sense of having been “all the way around”, and it minimizes the risk of getting stuck in just one distinction of system, for example “the group of students”.
Secondly, the example shows how working with multiple distinctions is useful, and how the distinctions are often created in the conversation. But similar to the discussion in chapter 3 about positions, it raises the question: what distinctions of system can the consultant bring to the conversation in order to reflect about what distinctions of system are being used in the consultancy process?

It is clear that it is not possible to take every distinction of system into account in every utterance. Talking about the organization, the individual tends to step in the background. Talking about one team, other teams tend to step in the background. So what distinctions are useful? Looking at the examples, I see that three distinctions keep being used to navigate in the linguistic system. Assuming that employees are embedded in groups that are embedded in departments that are embedded in organizations, helps the consultant reflect about how different layers are connected and thought of in the consultancy process. Looking across the examples, I found it both useful and complexity reducing to have a set of three distinctions that are always used as a framework to reflect in and on practice to secure a pragmatic reflection about what will work with this organization? These are distinctions of organization, group, and individual.

**Distinction of organization**

Even though the different positions have different assumptions about “what an organization is”, the distinction of organization is always concerned with a macro perspective on the situation. To help take such a macro perspective I crafted 4 questions to reflect in and on practice about the consultancy process. These questions are:

- **What are the dominating characteristics of the organizational situation?**
- **How are the goals of the consultancy process aligned with organizational strategies?**
- **How is what we are doing adding value to customers and/or users of the organization?**
- **How do we work constructively with the relation between “the people part of the consultancy process” and “the people not part of the consultancy process but still part of the organization”?**
These questions have both been a product of my research into my own practice but have also influenced my practice helping me to succeed. In the example 15 the organizational distinction was a huge help in order to remove the focus from the messy everyday interactions between the teachers and frustrated students and to see these examples as illustrating a shift between the organization and the organizational environment due to a shift in the profile of the typical student.

**Distinction of individual**

Again each position has its own assumptions about the individual. For example Bateson from the systemic position argues that the smallest unit of observation is the relationship (Bateson 1972 1984) placing the individual in a context. But where the distinction of organization helps getting a macro perspective on the situation, the distinction of individual is used to get a micro perspective on things. To help take such a micro perspective I crafted 4 questions to reflect in and on practice about the consultancy process. These questions are:

- **Who needs to be part of the change process?**
- **What are their perspectives on the process?**
- **How is the process made meaningful for each individual?** “The customer’s customer”, *the employee, leader, etc.*
- **How do I as a consultant work with each individual in the process?**

Again these questions have both been a product of my research into my own practice, but they have also influenced my practice helping me to succeed. In the example 15 the individual distinction was a huge help in order to avoid getting stuck in the macro perspectives on change in student profile and shift the focus to how each teacher as an individual could succeed with a new approach to conflict resolution. Using the distinction of individual makes it clear that each teacher has his or her own approach to conflict resolution based on personal strengths and challenges. And the distinction of individual helps create a multiplicity of stories about how to succeed with conflict resolution.
Distinction of group

Where “distinction of organization” helps getting a macro perspective and “distinction of individual” helps getting a micro perspective on the same situation, distinction of group directs the perspective somewhere in between. The term “group” is used very widely in this thesis. In some examples it is “the department” hiring me for a specific job. In other examples it is the ad hoc group designed to work with the change process. In example 15 distinctions of group help see three things. It directs attention towards:

- The study groups and their way of working with conflicts.
- The team of teachers and the tools (teaching material, abilities to work with the study group, etc.) they use.
- And the study group and their teacher. This last distinction is a typical distinction made in the systemic position looking at the interactions between study group and teacher and how this interaction helps or blocks the study group in its ability to work with conflicts.

To help work with the distinction of group I crafted 4 questions to reflect in and on practice about the consultancy process. These questions are:

- **What are the both useful and necessary distinctions of groups to pay attention to in the process?**
- **Who needs to talk to whom in order to improve the situation? (The answer to this question creates the conversational systems in the process).**
- **How do we make the process meaningful for each group that is either involved or influenced by the process?**
- **How does the group of leaders see their own role, responsibilities and difficulties in the process? And how do I see them?**

The awareness of these distinctions of system came from looking at similarities across research examples. In the success examples the distinctions of organization, individual, and group were used and balanced.
The third dimension of the room: distinctions of time

Working with my examples I struggled with how to make sense of time. Example 2 shows that the organization was successful if the distinction of “the patients benefit from a 4 week training stay” was made. But making a different distinction of “the patients sustained results during one year”, the picture changes. Similar to the work with systems I could see from examples that many distinctions were continually used.

Example 16

A large section of a hospital had gone through serious downsizing and had a very uncertain future. Most of the primary activities had been cut away. If the remaining staff did not create spectacular results, it was likely that the entire section would be closed entirely. As a consequence the recent past had been full of conflicts between employees and leaders and spirits had been low. The leader had me recommended due to my work with appreciative inquiry, and with this approach the workshop was designed with the purpose of finding resources in staff and building morale.

To begin the workshop in an appreciative take, I invited the group of about 20 people to talk about an appreciative question: If I (Andreas) were to work in the department for a three month period, what would I come to appreciate the most? When asked this question people started talking. Lots of interesting comments were made and documented on paper. Finally one employee said: Andreas, if you were to work with us for three months, you would see how frustrated we are!

The room went silent, and everybody looked at me. How to respond? Do I keep an appreciative position? Another employee said: “You can’t say that. It’s not positive!” Many thoughts went through my head. How did I respond to the employee introducing the theme of frustration in an appreciative way? Was I part of creating a normative language, where certain themes were no longer legitimate? I remembered Peter Lang saying: “There is always a frustrated dream behind every problem. So look for and ask about the dream. Not the problem”. This made me say: “If I then saw the frustration as an expression of something that
was truly valuable to you, what might I see it as?” Again the room was filled with energy, and people started to talk about the high level of professionalism, that they all thought to be an important characteristic of the section. Due to downsizing, they had found it very difficult to live up to previous standards. This high level of professionalism was, they said, what was truly valuable to them. This made me ask: “So am I right in assuming, that today has been a good day, if it has helped you re-find and re-create high levels of professionalism?” To this everybody nodded. I called for a short break to reformulate and sharpen the questions to be worked with together with the leader. After this our work continued.

I want to make four reflections about this example in connection to distinctions of time.

Firstly, the whole purpose of the workshop is to work with the future of the organization. Even though it might be unclear to some (including the consultant) where the organization is headed, or there might be different views of this situation, the perspective of the future gives our work a long time span similar to the macro level in distinction of systems.

Secondly, another and perhaps more obvious distinction of time is the 1 day workshop. The workshop can be seen to have a clear beginning at 9 am in the morning and a clear end at 4 pm.

Thirdly, a time distinction that is perhaps most significant to the consultant is the first time the customer calls the consultant by phone to the time when the follow up conversation by phone ends. I point to this third distinction because it shows Maturana’s point that any observation and distinction is made by an observer (Maturana 1988, Maturana & Varela 1992). Therefore there might be several distinctions.

Fourthly, a time distinction is from the moment one employee says “Andreas, if you were to work with us for three months, you would see how frustrated we are!” until another replies, “You can’t say that. It’s not positive!” till I say “If I then saw the frustration as an expression of something that was truly valuable to you, what might I see it as?” This short interaction is filled with tension and meaning and therefore often gets all the attention in conversations about consultation.
As with distinctions of systems several other distinctions of time could be introduced. Looking at examples like this, I could see that time was a key consideration in my work and I struggled to find a useful frame for these considerations. Help came when a colleague of mine told the following story:

**Example 17**

_Barnett Pearce was invited by a Danish therapy and consultancy company to lead a workshop on Co-ordinated Management of Meaning. As part of the workshop the leader from the organization invited Pearce to reflect and possibly critique the way the organization worked with other organizations. Pearce answered: As training therapists your skills to work “in the moment” are extraordinary. Whatever the client does, you manage to improvise a response that makes sense to the client and keep the conversation going. Working with organizations you are less skilful in creating meeting designs such as strategy conversations and organizational workshops to match organizational needs. And I hear almost no examples of how you design long-term processes of organizational change._

I do not know if the story is true. But looking at my examples and my own professional development it made sense to me. My own development as a consultant had clearly gone through a development. Initially I trained and worked as a coach for leaders. In these conversations all distinctions of system were used reflecting about the practice of the leader. But looking at my own work this privileged a practice, where my abilities to “be present in the moment” was crucial. Using the frame of episodes the main ability was to meaningfully respond to what was being said in order to make new actions possible for the leader. In short this echoed Pearce’s notion of “in the moment” facilitation.

Gradually my work changed. Groups inviting me to consult the group, and departments started inviting me to facilitate workshops. Using Pearce’s notion, “the meeting” became the main time distinction with a clear beginning, middle and end. I could see that many different positions influenced my work facilitating meetings. Sometimes my inspiration was the systemic position emphasizing to get the first question right assuming that this could define
the context for the rest of the meeting. Sometimes the meeting was designed from a strategic position with a clear purpose to be fulfilled at the meeting and detailed planning of who was going to say what and when. Sometimes working with purpose was exactly the reason for the meeting. In any case I will argue that the time distinction of “meeting” is a different kind of episode than “the moment”. And it requires different consultancy skills.

Additionally, “process” design is different from both “in the moment” and “meeting” facilitation. Besides the obvious difference of being a longer time span, the main difference is that there is time where the consultant is together with the customer, and there is time where the customers are working on their own.

The consultant needs to work with multiple distinctions of time. And the three distinctions always need to be balanced: “in the moment” facilitation and “meeting” and “process” design. Before going into detail with these three distinctions and how to use them, I will discuss Barnett Pearce’s term “episode” (Pearce 1999) since this captures how time can be thought of with different distinctions.

In the article “Using CMM” Barnett Pearce uses the term episode:

*Episodes are bounded sequences of messages that have a narrative structure and are perceived as a unit… The process of identifying when an episode "begins" and "ends" is called punctuation. In much the same way as we interpret oral speech as comprising complete thoughts that grammarians call "sentences,” so we interpret the flow of actions into complete units that CMM calls episodes (Pearce 1999 p. 27)*

I will make two reflections about this understanding of time as episodes.

Firstly, it shows that episodes do not exist independent of an observer making what Pearce calls a punctuation and what I call a distinction. It takes a person to perceive that “now it begins” and “now it ends”. Of course this distinction is not always explicit or conscious.

Secondly, it helps show that such distinctions are interpretations that can be re-interpreted. As example 4 shows that the same system of team and old woman can be seen in at least
four different ways making four different distinctions of time. The team creates an episode by making a distinction of time where the old woman's behaviour is the cause of their actions. My guess is that the old woman creates another episode by making another distinction of time seeing team behaviour as the cause of her actions. Together with the team we created two new distinction of time. A third distinction of time helped us see that team behaviour and the behaviour of the old woman was in some contexts a strange loop strengthening itself. And a fourth distinction of time helped us see that there where episodes of charmed loops with a completely different interaction.

I will argue in this section that the consultant in order to succeed needs to use multiple distinctions of time and reflect pragmatically about what will work in this organization? I will turn to each distinction and show how they can be used in practice.
In the moment
Since the introductory example showed how the appreciative position could be used, I will describe an example drawing on both the systemic and the OD position.

Example 18
A leader contacted me to help developing in her team of leaders. In the initial meetings with the leader and two of her team leaders the topics of communication and team coaching kept returning. Each leader had their own team and the assumption went that leadership based
team coaching was needed to take their teams (both the team of leaders and their teams of employees) to the next level of performance. Furthermore, my contact struggled to find a way to conduct her own meetings and conversation with her team of leaders, so everybody at the initial meeting saw a nice fit between what the leaders could practise together and what each leader could use with their own team of employees. We agreed to plan a two day workshop, where I was to give short lectures in team coaching and where the team of leaders could learn through a “learning by doing” approach.

Beginning the workshop, I found it difficult to create a shared focus. The leaders were very talkative, to say the least, and everything was discussed and turned upside down. Some of the leaders questioned the general belief in coaching as an approach to leadership, some questioned the relevance of the topics we worked with in the training sessions and others kept discussing what visions and goals to have for the organization as a whole. After lunch some of the leaders started asking me directly about where this process was headed and discussions started about what had come from the work we had made the first half day. While talking to the leaders, reflections ran through my head about what to do next. I thought of Schein saying, "When in doubt, share the problem" (Schein 1999). I was certain that I needed to voice my observation about not having a shared focus. But how could I do this without creating self-fulfilling prophecy? Thinking in systemic terms, I reflected on the interactions in the room and my own role in these interactions. What could I do to help the leaders? I didn’t know and this coined my question. I said: “We started off working with leadership based team coaching, but this morning many different and important topics have been thrown on the table. Working with you gives me the feeling of not having a shared focus. You might not agree with me on this, but in any case I’d like you to reflect on one question: What would you do now, if you were in my position not seeing a shared focus?” This question took them by surprise but managed to echo a shared experience: they all tried to introduce themes in their teams but apparently the organizational culture was that the team would answer with multiple answers leaving the leader puzzled about what to do next. My contact said she had the exact same problem that I now talked about, when she had meetings with the group of leaders. For the first time that day the leaders were talking about the same topic at the same time: how could they create a shared focus at team meetings? And what could they do if team members
started moving in different directions? A shared assumption was developed that they needed to “stay in the mess” until their team found a way forward together. Later on, this part of the process was evaluated as the most important, because it had resembled many episodes from everyday conversations and meetings in the organization, but had taken a different and useful path.

I will make two reflections about the example. The first important aspect I want to draw attention to about “in the moment” consultation is what Frank Barrett calls improvisation. He says:

“Drucker has suggested that the twenty-first century leader will be like an orchestra conductor. However, an orchestral metaphor – connoting pre-scripted musical scores, single conductor as leader – is limited, given the ambiguity and high turbulence that many managers experience. Weick (1992) has suggested the jazz band as a prototype organization. This paper follows Weick’s suggestion and explores the jazz band and jazz improvisation as an example of an organization designed for maximizing learning and innovation. To help us understand the relationship between action and learning, we need a model of a group of diverse specialists living in a chaotic, turbulent environment; making fast, irreversible decisions; highly interdependent on one another to interpret equivocal information: dedicated to innovation and the creation of novelty. Jazz players do what managers find themselves doing: fabricating and inventing novel responses without a prescripted plan and without certainty of outcomes; discovering the future that their action creates as it unfolds” (Barrett 1998 p. 605).

I will use the quote from Frank Barrett to argue that a key consultant skill in “in the moment” is improvisation. Even though the two day workshop was planned in detail the plan did not and could not have accounted for this situation. As Bateson frames it using the inspiration from Korzybski, the map is not the territory (Bateson 1984). Even though the consultant does approach a given situation with a detailed plan he must also and always be both able and willing to improvise leaving the plan.

Secondly, the example shows that the positions give both unique but also combinable ideas of what to do in practice. Something unexpected happened to which I responded using
inspiration from the OD and systemic position, and this positioning in the conversation had implications for the ongoing process. In this case the implication was positive. So I also use the example to argue that using and combining different positions help the consultant navigate and improvise in the moment without a prescripted plan or certainty of outcome, as Barrett frames it, as a way of reflecting pragmatically about what will be a good next step? As I described in the section about distinctions of system I used this and similar examples to create 4 questions that could help me work with a pragmatic reflexivity in the moment; questions to help me improvise in a meaningful way supporting a successful process. These questions are:

1. Looking at the situation from the six different positions, what would they suggest that I did next?
2. How can what I do now create a meaningful connection between the meeting, the consultancy process, and the long-term goals of the organization?
3. How can I respond in a way that is meaningful to each individual in the situation, the groups as a whole, and to the wider organization?
4. What will happen if I waited before doing something different?

Meeting and workshop design

By now I have, by quoting Barrett, introduced two metaphors about “the meeting”: the orchestra and the jazz band. Each metaphor implies different approaches to the meeting. The orchestra directs attention towards following plan and being in control of the process. The jazz band directs attention towards improvisation and sense making. As described in chapter 1 this is just one example of how different traditions become normative by making a dichotomy between the tradition’s own suggestions (the good, positive, and right way to work) and that of the other (the bad, wrong way to work and often described as the dominating tradition). As shown many times earlier in this thesis I suggest another approach based on a pragmatic reflexivity, where different traditions are chosen based on their usefulness, not their linguistic
appeal. Since the positions are already described in some detail, I will describe an example where it was the combination of positions that made the difference.

Example 19
A magistrate for schools, kindergartens and crèches had gone through two processes of fundamental restructuring within 4 years. As a consequence the magistrate had been turned into 9 districts covering schools, kindergartens, and crèches in one part of a municipality. Previously schools had been in one big department and kindergartens and crèches likewise. The strategic purpose of making this restructuring was to strengthen continuity in the work with children from the age of 0 until the age of 18. The second restructuring was made after recognizing that it was not easy breaking organizational boundaries between schools and kindergartens.

In this context a leader invited me to work with her team of 15 leaders being responsible for more than 1200 employees. The team had had a good start in March, but just the number of leaders having to coordinate was a problem. And they still struggled with working across organizational boundaries. Even though there were both success stories in the district and the new structure was in no way up for discussion, the discussions about the structure and whether or not it was favourable were part of almost every meeting. In the initial conversation with my contact and 5 of her leaders, we worked on designing a two day workshop supporting the development of the team. In the conversation the 5 leaders ended up in two groups each stressing what they saw as the reason to make the summit. One group of three leaders kept stressing the need to end up with some specific tasks they could put into action. The other group of two kept stressing the importance of discussing leadership, since they were all leading leaders. My contact saw both reasons as valuable and relevant and stressed the importance of remembering the 0 to 18 perspective working with the political agenda of securing that 95% of all young people would get a tertiary education. The agreement was made that I had the responsibility to turn inputs into a design that the group could develop.
further before sending it as an invitation to the team of leaders. The invitation ended up like this:

Invitation to leadership summit

The leadership summit has the purpose of developing our district and strengthening our leadership. To do this we will be working with the two things we have in common: shared responsibilities and tasks across organizational boundaries and leadership. The expected outcome of our work will be:

- Defining and planning important and shared tasks
- Development of leadership, culture, and values in our district based on the shared tasks we define.

We have invited organizational psychologist Andreas Granhof Juhl to help facilitate the summit. The summit will proceed in five steps.

Step 1: Getting started and framing the summit

Andreas will start off by interviewing “the leader\(^{27}\)” about expectations for the summit and the outcome from it. Everybody will be invited to join in the interview reflecting about how to make the summit both exciting and value adding.

Step 2: Defining shared tasks

First, we will define our shared tasks crossing organizational boundaries between schools, kindergartens and crèches. There will be many tasks like this, so we will work with finding those, which can help us raise performance. Therefore everybody is invited to prepare:

What do I see as the 2-3 most important tasks where we in collaboration can create improvements for children, young people, and their families in our district?

\(^{27}\) Name is made anonymous due to ethical criteria.
Having defined these shared tasks we will discuss and create learning about our tasks in general by working with questions like: what do we learn from our work about which tasks we share and which we don’t?

Step 3: Planning the tasks

In order for our work at the summit to add value in our district we will use time to thoroughly work through how each task is turned into a success. In this work it will be a key element to show how the task solved is "exemplary", i.e. becomes a defining example of the culture, the values and the leadership that we want to promote in our district.

Step 4: Presentation and discussion of the tasks and our leadership

At the summit we will not only make a traditional presentation of our plans and our leadership. We will use each task to discuss leadership, culture, and values in our district. We will go into questions like:

• What values and culture do we want to promote through our leadership in relation to the task?
• What are leadership strengths and challenges in relation to the task? And how are these respectively used and handled?
• What does a good collaboration on the level of leadership look like in relation to each task? And what is the role of “my contact”?

Step 5: Outcome and way ahead

We will evaluate the outcome from the summit and create a “way ahead” after the summit.

Andreas will additionally prepare short lectures to put new perspectives on our work.

I will use the example to reflect about how the systemic, strategic, and the OD position were used at the summit.

The inspiration from the systemic position is used by creating a shared context through interviewing each leader about the summit and team development in step 1. The purpose of
creating a shared context is both developing a shared understanding of why the summit is important and what the outcome is going to be; and building shared motivation and responsibility for the work to be done. This also happened, and one additional focus for the summit was created: working with the structure of team meetings once every two weeks.

Further several dialogical methods drawing on systemic inspiration were used to create exciting dialogues in step 2 and 3. The fishbowl developed by Peter Senge was used. Even though Senge is not using cybernetics as a basis for *the learning organization* (Senge 1990), the fishbowl is designed to create dialogues where talking and listening is structured in an inner circle talking and an outer circle listening, which is what Tom Andersen argues support reflection (Andersen 1996). Open Space Technology (OST) developed by Harrison Owen was used. OST is based on ideas of self-organizing that matches Bateson’s rejection of “the myth of control” (Bateson 1979 1984) and Maturana’s rejection of “the myth of certainty” (Maturana & Varela 1992).

The strategic position is the one most directly expressed in the invitation. Step 2 defining shared tasks and step 3 planning the tasks are essentially a matter of ends and means in the team’s work. Even though this sounds pretty straightforward, the team struggled defining the specific and shared tasks.

One of my roles at the summit was to facilitate the process; sometimes as an interviewer and other times as a moderator. But also to introduce methods in order to make the process successful. Doing this, the inspiration from the OD position was used intensively in two ways. Firstly, each process was ended by a reflection of the method used in relation to how the team could work in the future. Both the fishbowl and Open Space Technology was integrated in the design they made for their own meetings. Secondly, an additional role for me was to “just listen” to their conversation and give them feedback on their way of working and connect this feedback to help the team reflect on their leadership, culture, and values in the team.

Reflecting on this and similar examples, I’ve created four questions to help me reflect about the design of the meeting. The purpose of the questions is to help me connect my general knowledge about the organization, the knowledge obtained at the initial meeting and my
telephone conversations with my contact and the inspiration from the six positions. These questions are:

1. Looking at the situation from the six different positions: how would they suggest that the meeting should be designed?
2. How can we design the meeting so that what is created meaningfully connects the meeting, the consultancy process and the long-term goals of the organization?
3. How can the meeting be designed to secure value added for my customer’s customer? (In the example the children, young people, and families in the district)
4. How can the meeting be designed in a way that is meaningful to each individual in the situation, the team as a whole, and to the wider organization?

Using these questions as a guideline it is worth commenting on why not to use the appreciative position in this example. In one of my telephone conversations with the leader I tested the assumption that the team could profit from inquiries into best practices about breaking organizational boundaries and working in an interdisciplinary way. Even though the leader did know about very successful examples between one school and kindergarten, she asked me not to go into these stories. Some of the other schools and kindergartens had a somewhat troubled relationship, and she didn’t want to rub this in by others telling how collaboration was running smoothly. This choice can of course be questioned, but it shows how a pragmatic reflexivity is created in practice by explicitly or implicitly coordinating positions with the customer about how to design the meeting.

**Process design**

With “process design” I mean the time distinction made from “when the phone rings” to “when the job is done”. Of course this can be a very long time span. The main difference between the distinction of “process” and that of “in the moment” and “meeting” is that the design will be a combination of time where the consultant is together with the organization and time where the organization is working on its own. This has to be addressed in the design. Again I will present an example where three of the positions are used.
Example 20
A leader contacted me based on inspiration from my article “Stress as an opportunity” (Juhl & Hvilsted 2006). Her organization with about 80 employees, a department working with families in a municipality, had for a long period struggled with more than 20 sick days a year in average per employee. This was the highest rate of absenteeism due to sickness in the municipality. As a consequence work relations in the department were stretched to the limit. They had tried to break this poor record by several different initiatives: reducing workload, flexible work conditions, creating possibilities to work from home, days without contact with clients creating space for administrative tasks, talks with psychologists when experiencing stress, supervision on difficult cases, support from leaders in prioritizing, creating teams to collaborate around similar tasks, hiring a coordinator to help distribute workload and finally creating plans for developing competences. None of this had made any difference.

The invitation was to help break this negative pattern by finding a new and helpful approach. In the first two meetings with the leader and the group working to design the process, we discussed several assumptions about how to create a process design that could make a difference.

In these conversations Watzlawick’s systemic inspiration came to mind. Watzlawick makes a distinction between “difficulties” and “problems”. Difficulties are “an undesirable state of affairs which either can be resolved through some common-sense action … for which no special problem solving skills are necessary” (Watzlawick 1974 p. 38). Problems are “impasses, deadlocks, knots, etc., which are created and maintained through the mishandling of difficulties … An error in logical typing is committed and a Game Without End established … action is taken at the wrong level” (ibid. p. 39). In the conversation, this was talked about in a more practical way. “If what you do doesn’t work – then do something substantially different”. The inspiration from my article answered this question. They wanted to approach the situation completely differently.

In designing the process to do things differently, three inspirations were used. One inspiration came from the appreciative position focusing on the language of the organization. Inspired by
the article we discussed how to work with language. Leaders and union representatives designing the process were certain that changing organizational language and focus was important. The approach they had used had been clearly based on problem definition and problem solving. They needed a new way to work both in this change process and in a longer perspective as an organization. We ended up calling this language “a language of development” and inspired by Brun and Ejsing (2010) we identified a key skill to be the ability to “break the negative curve” into a language of development. The following model was used to talk about what they used to do and what they wanted to do in the future.

The grey arrow shows what they used to do. They had tried to define and solve problems, but in end they ended up having more problems. They wanted to move in two new directions. The orange arrow indicates a strong emphasis on strengths and successes in building the organization. But also introducing a way of working symbolized by the U-arrow in the middle,
where problems are turned into positive scenarios by “breaking the curve”. This raised the question: what kind of process design do we need in order to become an organization based on a language of development? It was agreed that every employee was to participate in a two day workshop working with “a developmental approach to language” in order to break the curve in everyday conversations. But how could organizational change be created and sustained in a longer perspective?

Two other inspirations in designing the process came from the narrative and systemic position. The dominating story about change in the organization was influenced by classical strategic thinking of a strong leader in control of the change. Employees had never felt either responsible or capable of changing the situation. Changing the situation was seen as a leadership responsibility, and this gave interesting consideration about stories of both leadership and employee identities in the organization. How could we create another employee identity to support both the change process as well as an appreciative organizational culture? And what kind of leadership identity story could support this? Working with employee identity stories, a concept of “firebrand” was developed. The idea went that if change was to become a success, the employees or at least some of them needed to be frontrunners in the change process. Active change agents with strong ideas about what needed to be done, having both the will, the time, and the organizational support to “do something”. It was agreed that a group of 12, one firebrand from each team, was to engage in a one year process of continued work with “a developmental approach” developing ideas and trying out solutions at every level of the organization. Using the systemic position to reflect about the role of the leaders, they were to support and challenge these initiatives in order to help turn initiatives into successes. 4 days were designed for the group of firebrands and leaders to work with and discuss the developmental approach and its practical implications and for the firebrands to choose local initiatives, turning ideas into organizational improvement. This was clearly a completely new approach to change in the organization.

Writing this thesis the change process has not ended. But half way no one in the organization is absent due to work related illnesses. And firebrands and union workers announce this as “the first time things have made a change”.

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I will make two reflections about the example. Firstly, using the different positions makes it possible for me to look at the organization from many different positions. Again this makes it possible for me to connect to and introduce many new themes in conversations with the customer.

Secondly, the example shows how more positions are combined using a pragmatic reflexivity in designing the process. Other positions are playing a smaller role or are completely absent. In the example the OD position is almost completely absent. In no part of the process the consultant “sat in” at organizational meetings or gave feedback on organizational behaviour. The consultant had a coordinating role with the leader and the coordination group designing the process, a teaching role at the seminar, and a coaching role working with the group of firebrands and leaders. But what about the strategic position? Any change process is strategic in the sense of trying to reach an end by designing a means. But the change process was not inspired by classical assumptions in strategy work about roles, responsibilities, and long-term goals and action planning. This line of activities was exactly what the organization had experienced did not work in the situation. Therefore the positions also helped introduce new perspectives on how to create change.

As described in the sections about “in the moment” and “meeting” facilitation, I created four questions to help design a successful change process. The purpose of the questions is to help me look at the organization with multiple perspectives, to introduce many relevant themes in the conversations with the customer, and thereby to quality check the process design in the process of creating it. These questions are:

1. Looking at the organization from the six different positions, how would they suggest that the process should be designed?
2. What distinctions of system is it necessary to work with in order to create successful change? How is the process made meaningful at the level of organization, group, and individual?
3. What distinctions of time is it necessary to work with in order to create successful change? What meetings, workshop, etc. could make a difference?
4. And how does the organization need to work “on its own” in order to create a successful change?

In chapters 3 and 4 I’ve presented the results from the research. I’ve worked with the pragmatic validity in the research by showing examples of how to use the consultancy room in practice focusing on how to use the consultancy room to develop teams based on a pragmatic reflexivity of *what will work in this organization?* Doing this I’ve met my own criteria described in chapter two about the pragmatic validity of the research. In chapter 5 I will go into different perspectives on the research.
Chapter 5: Perspectives on the research and the results

The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on the research and the results as presented in chapter 3 and 4. I will do this by making 6 different perspectives. Firstly, I will look at what the answer is to the research questions, and this section will have the function of conclusion of the research. The following perspectives will all address why this is a satisfactory answer and what future implications the results might have.

Secondly, I will look at why the results are a satisfactory answer from a theoretical perspective. In this second section of the chapter I will point to both similarities and differences between the research and results and the work of William James (James 2000), John Dewey (Dewey 1916 1938, Brinkmann 2006), John Austin (Austin 1997), Ludwig Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein 1989 1994) and Gregory Bateson (Bateson 1972 1984), Gianfranco Cecchin (Palazzoli et al. 1980, Cecchin 1987 1992, Cecchin et al. 1993, Boscolo et al. 1991), Pearce (1992 1999 2001), John Shotter (Shotter 1993 2010), Kenneth Gergen (Gergen 1982 1997, Gergen & Gergen 2008), and Daniel Goleman (Goleman 2000). Thirdly, I will look at why the results are a satisfactory answer from a practical perspective. Both the second and third section will allow me to dwell on the concept of pragmatic reflexivity.

Part of securing the validity of the research has been engaging in multiple conversations with my research supervisor, customers, and colleagues about the results and their usefulness. I’ve divided these conversations into two categories: confirming conversations and critical conversations. Fourthly, in this chapter I will present confirming statements from two customers, Jacqueline Christoffersen and Leif Ebbesen28, about the research and the results.

Fifthly, I will look at and reflect upon the critical questions and conversations. This critique has come from both colleagues and research supervisors and has helped develop a thorough analysis of my examples. I’ve categorized these conversations into 4 questions and I will present how the research has provided an answer to these questions.

28 Where all other examples are anonymous, Jacqueline Christoffersen and Leif Ebbesen have agreed to be referenced by names. I’ve chosen to use their real names since to me an important part of securing validity of the research is to show that “real people” support the results. The organizational background of both Jacqueline and Leif will be presented below.
• Question 1: You mention no example that is not “a success”. How come?
• Question 2: I understand each position, but you do not give any instructions to the practitioner of “which position to choose when” – how come?
• Question 3: Are the positions used a skilful choice made by the consultant on his own? Or are they socially constructed through dialogue with the costumer?
• Question 4: How did you reach 6 positions? Why not 1, 2, or 3? And are these positions both “necessary and sufficient” to cover all practices?

Sixthly, I will point to the future by showing two possible implications of the research. I will address possible implications of the research for training consultants. And I will address what kind of research I see as a continuation of the research presented in this thesis.

**Conclusion of the thesis: how does the thesis answer the research questions?**

Having presented the results from my research, I will now turn to the conclusion of the research. In chapter 1 I formulated two research questions:

*Research question 1: How can I on the basis of my own work as a consultant create an account of how to succeed as a consultant?*

*Research question 2: How can the consultant use multiple theoretical and practical traditions in order to create success?*

The answer to these research questions is that the consultant can succeed by using the consultancy room to create a multi-positional approach to consultancy based on pragmatic reflexivity. In practice this is done by simultaneously working with three types of distinctions.
Firstly, the consultant makes distinctions of position. Each position gives the consultant a theoretical and a practical tradition that can be used to create success in for example developing teams. Being able to make distinctions between the OD, systemic, solution-focused, appreciative, narrative, and strategic position, the consultant gets a multi-positional ability working with a double gaze continually reflecting about:

   c. What do I see now about the organization and situation from the position I’ve taken?
   d. What could I see if I looked at the organization and situation from a different position?

Fig. 19: The consultancy room.
Doing this the consultant gets multiple possibilities for action and for engaging in conversations with customers.

Secondly, the consultant makes distinctions of system meaning a continual reflection on both the conversational system, who should talk to whom, and the linguistic system, who is being talked about and in what way. The different positions give different perspectives on how to understand distinctions of system. Three prototypical systems: the organization, the group, and the individual, have been introduced to help the consultant orientate in practice.

Thirdly, the consultant makes distinctions of time. Making distinctions of time, the consultant is simultaneously working with “the moment”, “the meeting”, and “the process”. Again the different positions give different perspectives on how to understand distinctions of time.

**Why is working with multiple positions and a pragmatic reflexivity a satisfactory answer from a theoretical perspective?**

The conclusion presented above raises the question *why* this is a satisfactory answer to the research questions from a theoretical perspective? I will argue that my research is both inspired by and theoretically supported by William James (James 2000), John Dewey (Dewey 1916 1938, Brinkmann 2006), John Austin (Austin 1997), Ludwig Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein 1989 1994), Gregory Bateson (Bateson 1972 1984), Gianfranco Cecchin (Palazzoli et al. 1980, Cecchin 1987 1992, Cecchin et al. 1993, Boscolo et al. 1991), Barnett Pearce (Pearce 1992 1999 2001), John Shotter (Shotter 1993 2010), Kenneth Gergen (Gergen 1982 1997, Gergen & Gergen 2008) and Daniel Goleman (Goleman 2000). In this section I will discuss similarities and differences between the results presented in this thesis and these authors.

**James, Dewey, Austin, Wittgenstein, Bateson, and the pragmatic approach**

I’ve gone into detail presenting the pragmatic approach in chapters 1, 2, and 3. In this section I will connect the ideas presented already from Dewey, James, and Bateson to *why* and *how*
the pragmatic approach supports the results from the research. I will make two such supportive arguments.

Firstly, Dewey called his own approach *instrumentalism* (Egeblad & Høgh Laursen 2000), and James argued, “theories become instruments” (James 2000 p. 19). Using multiple theories the consultant gets multiple instruments. I will argue that seeing theories as instruments is both useful and supports a pragmatic reflexive approach where the consultant is continually reflecting on *what will work in this situation?* A pragmatic approach where theories are evaluated by their usefulness and not their linguistic appeal is exactly what the results show. Each position is used when it is expected to be useful and left behind when it turns out not to be.

Secondly, I will argue that Bateson’s idea of double description also theoretically supports the results. Bateson argues that new knowledge is created when “two or more information sources come together to give information of a sort different from what was in either source separately” (Bateson 1984 p. 21). As I’ve shown in the thesis and will continue to show below, the three dimensions in the consultancy room create multiple sources of information of a sort different from what was in either source separately. Since this is a key feature in Bateson’s work I will argue that he too theoretically supports the results.

**Gianfranco Cecchin and the notion of irreverence**

Cecchin as part of the Milan group used extensive time reflecting on the position of the therapist (Boscolo et al. 1991) and is famous for developing the systemic language in a series of articles from 1980 to 1993. In this section I will show how particularly Cecchin’s notions of curiosity (Cecchin 1987) and irreverence (Cecchin 1993) support the results presented in this thesis. I will further address some differences between the results and the work done by Cecchin.

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29 My translation from Danish.
In 1980 Cecchin and his colleagues suggested neutrality in position arguing that the therapist should be

“Allied with everyone and no one at the same time” and “if [the family] are asked to state whom he had supported or sided with or what judgment he had made concerning one or another individual or his respective behaviour or of the entire family, they should remain puzzled and uncertain” (Palazzoli et al. 1980 p. 11).

Reflecting on this work in his 1987 article, Cecchin states that “for many therapists neutrality has been regarded as the cultivation of a position of non-involvement, of not having strong opinions, and of not taking responsibility when necessary – the cultivation of the cold and aloof position of a relativist” (Cecchin 1987 pp. 407-408).

As an alternative Cecchin suggests curiosity:

“I propose that we describe neutrality as the creation of a state of curiosity in the mind of a therapist… When we assume that we have an explanation, we often give up looking for other descriptions. Thus, we give up a stance of curiosity because we believe we have ‘discovered’ a description that ‘fits’” (Cecchin 1987 p. 406).

And continuing this line of ideas, Cecchin in 1993 introduces the notion of irreverence that he defines like this:

“To believe too much in noninstrumentality is to be trapped, restricted. To become a true believer in narrative is to believe that changing narrative changes people. Unable to act in any other way, one may become immobilized by fear of being too active. Thus the irreverent therapist fights the temptation of ever becoming a true believer in any approach or theory… The position of systemic irreverence allows the therapist to juxtapose ideas that at first might look contradictory” (Cecchin 1993 p. 129).

There are several similarities between the work done by Cecchin and the work presented in this thesis. Working with multiple positions in the consultancy room has the purpose of fighting the temptation of ever becoming a true believer in any approach or theory. Since if the
consultant does become a true believer, he might assume that we have an explanation and as a consequence give up looking for other descriptions because he has got the one that fits. Loosing the stance of irreverence and curiosity the consultant runs the risk, as Cecchin argues, to be trapped, restricted. Further, Cecchin points to a crucial element of what I’ve called pragmatic reflexivity saying irreverence allows the therapist to juxtapose ideas that at first might look contradictory. As examples 3, 12, and 20 show this is how the different positions are used in combination to the benefit of the customer.

But I will argue that there are also differences between the results and Cecchin’s work. In his 1993 article Cecchin says, “Just as it is impossible not to communicate, it is also impossible not to have a hypothesis… As long as he/she does not fall in love with the hypothesis, as long as she/he plays with it” (Cecchin 1993 p. 130). This is also similar to the results presented in this thesis. But Cecchin does not say what these hypotheses might be except strategizing and non-intervention. I will argue that the risk of not knowing what these hypothesis are is to end in a intuitive position, as presented in chapter 2, not knowing what is done and why. In chapter 2, I used Rorty to argue that, “to discover the source of our intuitions is to relive the history of the philosophical language-game we find ourselves playing” (Rorty 1979 p. 34).

Since “hypo” means temporary and “thesis” means seeing, the multi-positional approach presented in this thesis suggests that the consultant needs to be more aware of what temporary ways of seeing the organization and the situation the consultant uses. Having 6 different positions in the consultancy room suggests that the consultant in order not to become a true believer in any approach or theory needs at least a handful of alternative hypothesis if he is to be able to maintain an irreverent stance.

A further difference between Cecchin’s work and the results presented in this thesis is that Cecchin does not reflect on distinctions of system or distinctions of time and how these distinctions are used.

The term social constructionism was crafted by Berger & Luckmann arguing, “Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product” (Berger & Luckmann 2000 p. 71) implicating that our reality is a product of human interaction. I will present 3 authors, Kenneth Gergen, John Shotter and Barnett Pearce, who are all contributing to social constructionism, and show similarities and differences between their work and the results from the research.

Kenneth Gergen and the relational approach
The idea from Mary & Kenneth Gergen’s work that has had the largest influence on the research is the claim that

“Perhaps the most generative idea emerging from the constructionist dialogues is that what we take to be knowledge of the world and self finds its origins in human relationships. What we take to be true as opposed to false, objective as opposed to subjective, scientific as opposed to mythical, rational as opposed to irrational, moral as opposed to immoral is brought into being through historically and culturally situated social processes. This view stands in dramatic contrast to … the most important intellectual and cultural traditions of the West… the tradition of the individual knower, the rational, self-directing, morally centred and knowledgeable agent of action. Within the constructionist dialogues we find that it is not the individual mind in which knowledge, reason, emotion and morality reside, but in the relationship” (Gergen & Gergen 2008 p. 163).

Following this line of thought, knowledge is something people do and create together. I will make two reflections to show how this connects to the results from the research.

Firstly, the consultancy process and the position of both consultant and customer in the consultancy process are social products, as I showed with the inspiration from Harré in chapter 3 going into positioning in conversation. Positions are not in the individual mind but socially constructed through dialogue as the examples in the research show.
Secondly, social constructionism “begins with a radical doubt in the taken-for-granted world” (Gergen 1985 p. 267). This radical doubt has the implication of looking at theoretical narratives about consultancy as historically and culturally situated social processes, as cultural traditions following rules for action, or what Wittgenstein called language games (Gergen & Gergen 2008, Wittgenstein 1994) that might or might not be helpful. As shown in the figure by von Krogh & Roos in chapter 1, a new position introduces a new language by introducing new words. The doubt following a social constructionist approach is looking at whether or not this leads to a new practice for the organization. In the thesis this radical doubt is called pragmatic reflexivity.

John Shotter and ‘knowing of a third kind’
John Shotter adds an additional level to social constructionism, saying

“Thus, as he [Vico] puts it, our historical development can be understood as a process of a providential kind: past human activities provide ‘organized settings’ (Bartlett’s term: Ch.4) which contain the resources necessary for the sensible continuation of these past activities; or, to put it another way, previous social activity works to create an ‘order of possibilities’ (Wittgenstein’s term: Ch.4) from which we must choose in deciding upon our next actions - if, that is, they are to be actions ‘appropriate to’ or ‘fitting to’ their circumstances. The future cannot be made to occur by the sheer force of one’s conviction as to its possibility; one must relate one’s actions to what at any one moment is a real possibility within it. Thus, if we are to act in such a way, we must not act solely ‘out of’ our own inner ‘scripts’, ‘plans’, or ‘ideas’, but must be sensitive in some way to the opportunities and barriers, the enablements and constraints, ‘afforded’ to us by our circumstances, in order to act ‘into’ them. This grasp, this sensitivity of what is ‘afforded’ us by our circumstances, is what I mean by a knowing of the third kind” (Shotter 1993 p. 7).

I will make three reflections showing how Shotter’s work connects to the results from the research.
Firstly, Shotter creates a strong argument for a multi-positional approach based on pragmatic reflexivity saying that past human activities provide ‘organized settings’ and previous social activity works to create an ‘order of possibilities’… from which we must choose in deciding upon our next actions - if, that is, they are to be actions ‘appropriate to’ or ‘fitting to’ their circumstances. Each of the positions presented constitutes such ‘organized setting’ and ‘order of possibilities’ that the consultant and customer can choose from, if they provide actions that are appropriate to’ or ‘fitting to’ their circumstances.

Secondly, this last statement and what Shotter calls knowing of the third kind is what I have called a pragmatic reflexivity. As example 20 shows, using a pragmatic reflexivity when designing a change process the consultant and customer does not just follow inner ‘scripts’, ‘plans’, or ‘ideas’, but must be sensitive in some way to the opportunities and barriers, the enablements and constraints, ‘afforded’ to us by our circumstances, in order to act ‘into’ them. And Shotter elsewhere argues

“They are difficulties of quite another kind: difficulties of the will rather than of the intellect; orientational or relational difficulties, to do with how we spontaneously respond to features in our surroundings with appropriate expectations and anticipations as to how next to ‘go on’ with our activities within them, thus to find our ‘way about’ without (mis)leading ourselves into taking an inappropriate next step” (Shotter 2006 p. 191).

This quote captures the purpose of constructing the consultancy room: to help the consultant increase his orientational or relational abilities and thereby be able to spontaneously respond to features in our surroundings with appropriate expectations and anticipations as to how next to ‘go on’.

Thirdly, Shotter argues “Thinking systemically is the attempt to transform what we are already doing spontaneously into something we can do deliberately” (Shotter 2009 p. 1). This connects to two aspects of the research. It connects to the purpose of doing the research, looking at my own practice in more detail. Having looked at what I was already doing I am now able to do it even more deliberately. And it also connects to the feedback from customers
and colleagues on the research. The consultancy room increases their awareness about what they are already doing spontaneously, enabling them to do so more deliberately.

**Barnett Pearce and the virtuosos**

Barnett Pearce adds two important elements that theoretically support the results presented. In his article “Making social worlds better – towards a grammar of ways of working that improve situations” Barnett Pearce addresses questions similar to my research questions. He says

“Virtuosos in any field of practice (1) have a "grand passion" of their work; (2) are able to make perspicacious distinctions among the events and objects within the field (including seeing things that are invisible to the untrained eye); and (3) are able to engage in skilled performances” (Pearce 2001 p. 3).

Pearce’s quote strengthens the connection between the research questions and the results presented by connecting the ability to improve situations with the ability to make perspicacious distinctions among the events and objects within the field (including seeing things that are invisible to the untrained eye). This is exactly what I’ve shown with the six positions. The criteria from Pearce about being able to engage in skilled performances are what I’ve shown by using examples of success in the thesis.

Further, in “A camper’s guide to constructionisms” Pearce elaborates on the notion of distinctions. Pearce does not regard social constructionism as one uniform movement. Instead Pearce introduces a set of differences based on intellectual heritage, practices, and whether or not the focus is on the product or the process of social construction. Pearce suggests the metaphor of campers in a forest sitting around campfires. In this metaphor there are no clear-cut boundaries between the campfires since the light and the warmth from one campfire spreads to the other (Pearce 1992). I will use Pearce to argue that such distinctions between different traditions within social constructionism are indeed both important and useful. I will argue that this is what I’ve shown with the six distinctions of position, three
distinctions of system and three distinctions of time.

Above I’ve shown how Gergen, Shotter, and Pearce all talking about social constructionism have been an inspiration for me to conduct the research, and I’ve argued that they theoretically support the results presented in this thesis. Before moving on to the work of Daniel Goleman about leadership that gets results, I will point to one important difference between the work of Gergen, Shotter, and Pearce and the results presented. Gergen, Shotter, and Pearce are descriptive rather than prescriptive. The results presented in this research are both descriptive and prescriptive. The consultancy room introduces distinctions of position, system and time that the consultant can use reflecting on the process and on own position. Even though the consultancy room does not, as described in the thesis, give an exhaustive account of all practices, the consultancy room does challenge the assumption that “these fine details of such embodied ways of relating are not at all easy to describe” (Shotter 2008 p. 7). I will argue that the consultancy room by introducing three types of distinctions do indeed describe such fine details.

Daniel Goleman and leadership that gets results
I will argue that the work of Daniel Goleman in the field of leadership similarly support why a multi-positional approach based on a pragmatic reflexivity is an answer to my research questions. Daniel Goleman using the term “leader style” instead of “leadership position” has shown that “The most effective executives use a collection of distinct leadership styles – each in the right measure, at just the right time. Such flexibility is tough to put into action, but it pays off in performance. And better yet, it can be learned” (Goleman 2000 p. 78). Goleman also reaches 6 distinct leadership styles and shows how each style correlates with a particular overall impact on organizational climate. These leadership styles are: Coercive, authoritative, affiliative, democratic, pacesetting, and coaching. These styles do not match the positions presented in this thesis. But the conclusion in Goleman’s work and this thesis is the same, since Goleman continues:

“Many studies, including this one, have shown that the more styles a leader exhibits, the
better. Leaders who have mastered four or more – especially the authoritative, democratic, affiliative, and coaching styles – have the very best climate and business performance. And the most effective leaders switch flexibly among the leadership styles as needed… Such leaders don’t mechanically match their style to fit a checklist of situations – they are far more fluid” (Ibid. p. 87).

I will make two reflections connecting Goldman’s work to the results from the research. Firstly, Goleman’s work is important because it supports the results from my research about a multi-positional approach where leader style is not chosen based on the latest hype of literature but based on how to get results. Leaders who succeed, like I’ve shown in the field of consultancy, make perspicacious distinctions about the situation and their own role, as Pearce argued in his quote above.

Secondly, it supports the results about using a pragmatic reflexivity. Later in the article, Goleman continues: “the business environment is continually changing, and a leader must respond in kind. Hour to hour, day to day, week to week, executives must play their leadership styles like a pro – using the right one at the right time and in the right measure. The payoff is in the results” (Ibid. p. 90).

In this section I’ve shown similarities and differences between the work of Dewey, James, Bateson, Cecchin, Gergen, Shotter, Pearce, and Goleman and the results from the research as presented in chapters 3 and 4. Having shown that working with multiple positions and a pragmatic reflexivity is a satisfactory answer to the research questions from a theoretical perspective, I will now address why the results are a satisfactory answer to the research questions from a practical perspective.

**Why is working with multiple positions and a pragmatic reflexivity a satisfactory answer from a practical perspective?**

From a practical perspective I’ve so far in the thesis shown how each distinction of position, system, and time gives unique possibilities to work with team development. This will be the
key argument in the thesis from a practical perspective to why and how a multi-positional approach based on a pragmatic reflexivity is an answer to my research questions.

Additionally, I will now describe four situations where by building on the results from the research I have created new ways of working. The first is approaching any situation with a large toolbox of possibilities. The second is approaching the consultancy process from multiple positions. The third is the multi-positional time-out in the process. The fourth is using the multiple positions when the process gets stuck.

**A large toolbox of possibilities**
The first implication for practice based on a multi-positional approach and the consultancy room is using a large toolbox of possibilities for consulting. Using the dancing metaphor, this large toolbox of possibilities resembles the skilled dancer being able to dance jive, quickstep, waltz, tango, and many more. For the untrained eye all dances might look the same. The skilled dancer knows that the dances are different, knows that the dances are used with different music, and knows that each dance has its own distinct steps and moves. And more importantly: the skilled dancer is capable of dancing all the dances even though he might have favourites. Using this metaphor multiple positions resembles the ability to dance in multiple ways. I will argue that this is a practical ability for the consultant, since one never knows what music is playing in the organization that you are consulting.

**Approaching the consultancy process from multiple positions**
A standard method based on the results from the research is approaching the consultancy process from multiple positions. The consultant on his own designing a change process can use this method or it can be used together with costumers to design a process. The process and outcome of the method are threefold:
Step 1: Here the organization and situation are looked at from different positions thereby seeing how and where the different positions give unique ideas to approach the situations differently. In practice this is done by

- Introducing one particular position by making clear what is typically looked for, what is typically done, and what are typical consequences of using the position.
- The organization and situation is looked at from this position. What is important in this step is that the consultant is loyal to the position in order to get into the detail of the practical implication of the position.
- Then reflections are made about the position and its practical implication: What is seen and what is not seen? What action does this lead to?
- Then a new position is introduced and the same process is made.

Step 2: Based on the different positions and the perspectives and ideas they give towards the organization and its situation, the consultants (and customer if used at a meeting) take a step back and reflect on how the multiple ideas can be used. If the consultant on his own uses the method, part of the reflection is addressing how to use the different possibilities from the different positions in the dialogues with the costumer.

Step 3: As a final step the consultant (and customer if the method is used at a meeting) is working with the question: what does it mean for the process and the position of both consultant and customer to work based on multiple positions? This creates a meta-perspective about the position of both customer and consultant. This meta-perspective is similar to the irreverent stance advocated for by Cecchin above (Cecchin 1993) and one of the guidelines for consultancy advocated for by Huffington and Brunning based on a systemic position (Huffington & Brunning 1994). Similar to my argument in the section about Cecchin above, the difference between the work of Huffington and Brunning and the results from my research is that I additionally show six distinct positions the consultant can use to create this meta-perspective.
As this 3-step method shows, both consultant and customer are helped to reflect on how the change process is handled, reflect on the use of multiple positions, and on what the implications are working with multiple positions.

**The multi-positional time-out in the process**

The consultant on his own as an inner dialogue can use a multi-positional time-out. Or it can be used together with customers as an outer dialogue. The time-out is, using Bateson’s terms, a matter of meta-communication (Bateson 1972 1984), where the process is made the topic of the conversation. In the time-out two questions are being addressed using multiple positions.

- How do we understand what is going on in the process? And how does the different positions give different answers to this question?
- What is the right thing to do next? And how do the different positions give different answers to this question?

As with approaching the consultancy process from multiple positions the purpose of using a multi-positional time-out is to create a meta-perspective on the process and the positions taken by both consultant and customer.

**Moving on from stuck situations**

Watzlawick’s task with 9 circles (Watzlawick 1974 p. 25) can illustrate how multiple positions can help moving on from stuck situations.
The task is to connect the 9 circles with 4 straight lines without removing the pencil from the paper. Often people find this task difficult for the same reason. They place the 9 circles within an imagined frame or context that makes this task impossible.

The solution to the task is always to break the imagined context that inhibits solution. When this is done the most often used solution looks like this.
Fig. 20c: Watzlawick's 9 circles task.

Of course there could be other solutions. The paper could be cut in strips of paper and placed one after each other. Then one straight line would be sufficient. Using this analogy the consultancy room is useful when the process gets stuck. Often it does so because what is done is done from the same position since taking the same position creates the same context. Changing position as shown in example 2 and 7 and 3 and changing distinction of system as shown in example 13, 14 and 15 and changing distinction of time as shown in example 16 and 18 helps creating a new context with new possibilities for action on behalf of both consultant and customer.

The 9 circles exercise from Watzlawick shows how a stuck situation is the continued use of a position that does not work. Having made the 9 circle exercise at several occasions I know that seeing and breaking the imagined context is easier said than done if not shown how to by others. But the consultancy room and the three dimensions can be used to create a hypothesis about what is done at the moment and what could be done in the future. Examples 16 and 18 shows how using multiple distinctions of position and of time is a help to both navigate smoothly in the moment and a help to get out of stuck situations. Which distinction of position, system, and time will turn out to be helpful is in the end a combination of qualified
choice and trial and error and the distinctions do “create an ‘order of possibilities’… from which we must choose in deciding upon our next actions” (Shotter 1993 p. 7).

So far in chapter 5 I’ve shown that the answer to my research questions are a multi-positional approach based on a pragmatic reflexivity. I’ve additionally presented theoretical and practical arguments to support the results.

In chapter 2, I constructed a research approach based on pragmatic authors like William James (James 2000), John Dewey (Dewey 1916–1938, Brinkmann 2006), John Austin (Austin 1997), Ludwig Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein 1989–1994), and Gregory Bateson (Bateson 1972–1984). As part of constructing a pragmatic research approach, I argued that in order to secure validity of the research, the results needed to be put into use and to be tested in conversations with customers, colleagues, and research supervisors. In the next two sections I will show how conversations gave both supporting statements and critical questions. I will show what these are and how the research gives answers to the critical questions.

**Confirming statements about the research and the results**

As described in chapter 2, I use the inspiration from Rorty to secure validity in the research. Rorty argues “truth is a word that we use about those convictions that we can agree upon” (Rorty in Haack 2000 p. 54). Following this idea, validity is not only a matter of showing a satisfactory connection between the data and the results, which I’ve already done. In order to claim validity of a research, others need to support the results through conversation and argumentation. So part of reflecting on the research and the results is documenting that the consultancy room can be agreed upon with customers and colleagues.

The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. For example an organization helping young people fight problems of addiction saw such a close connection between the results and their own way of working that they have already used the multi-positional and pragmatic reflexive

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30 My translation from Danish.
approach to train their collaborators. I will present part of two conversations supporting my results about a multi-positional approach based on a pragmatic reflexivity.

One conversation is with Jacqueline Uhrskov Christoffersen, who is an executive for HR and Secretary in the Danish Nurses Organization (DNO) with whom I’m working to develop their process consultants. To put our conversation into a shape that it is possible to present, I asked Jacqueline two questions by mail. I will present the questions and what Jacqueline answered.

Andreas’ question 1: Why is working with multiple positions and a pragmatic reflexivity a strategic aim for you and your organization?

Answer from Jacqueline: The multi-positional approach is not in itself a strategic goal for DNO but rather a way to work, a means to support that we in an even more qualified and skillful way reach our political and organizational goals. The multi-positional approach gives a pragmatic platform for leadership and change processes because it represents a flexible way of working with a wide range of possibilities. This is essential in DNO being a complex and politically driven organization with many political interests both inside the organization – organizational level, group level, and the level of the individual – as well as the outside of the organization – the members, external political interests, government, the regional level, and the organizations where the members work. The multi-positional approach at the same time supports the culture we want to create. A culture based on appreciation, involvement, openness, constructive feedback, and respect for different perspectives on how to do our job.

Andreas’ question 2: Having worked from this approach, what results have already been made? And how do you see the long-term value for your organization from working from this approach?

Answer from Jacqueline: The multi-positional approach has among other things contributed to a way of thinking, in which we see ourselves “from the outside”, meaning from the perspective

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31 I've just started the second education in DNO with groups of 21 people a group. I will return to this example later in this chapter going into the question of the implication of my research for consultancy training.
of our members. And by doing this we get an even more professional approach to the dialogue with our members. We start by looking at members’ needs more than looking at DNO-procedures. This means that the member becomes a subject in her own right. Not an object of DNO administrative proceedings. This both strengthens our business and gives even more opportunities for innovation. For example we are now developing digital services in collaboration with the members. Finally, the approach makes DNO even better in coordinating expectations with members and other stakeholders.

Where Jacqueline is making her comments from the perspective of leadership, I will also present part of a conversation I’m having with Leif Ebbesen, who was previously an HR-director in different companies and presently working as a consultant and change agent in different organizations. Leif’s perspectives are presented to account for how other consultants support the research and the results. Leif wrote by mail:

In both organizational theory and practice for many years a dilemma has existed between two approaches to strategy based on two substantially different traditions and understandings of rationality. One based on a relational understanding seeing truth as socially constructed through local conversations. One based on an economical rationality and a rational understanding of truth. There is nothing new in the situation that leaders must relate to opposing views of the organization and theories about “the right way to act” as a leader. But in a world of increasing complexity oversimplified tools promising gold and fortune often seduce leaders. When the tools do not help as they promised, the reaction is often discouragement and confusion on behalf of the leader and inscrutability and insecurity on behalf of the organization.

In my experience what is needed is a multi-positional approach to strategy work cancelling the dilemma by appreciating multiple rationalities and thereby preventing simplistic solutions. A multi-positional approach appreciates simultaneous co-existence and contradictory positions that can be combined, if leaders and employees in the organization are conscious about their existence.

32 My translation from Danish.
The multi-positional approach gives the leader a foundation towards change processes based on more than the latest hype in organizational literature as well as to indulge in simple trial and error. In a multi-positional approach, organizational change becomes exactly a matter of living in and using multi discourses. In order to do this the leader must create a reflexive distance from the different discourses in the organization and its surroundings. This is best done in networks of leaders where a meaningful and useful position can be found and thereby reduce the complexity of the situation.

I will make two reflections about the supporting statements.

Firstly, the similarity between Jacqueline and Leif is that they both address how the model of the consultancy room helps handling complexity. Jacqueline is saying that the model represents a flexible way of working with a wide range of possibilities. This is essential in DNO being a complex and politically driven organization because it offers different perspectives on how to do our job. And Leif continues in similar terms that a multi-positional approach appreciates simultaneous co-existence and contradictory positions that can be combined, if leaders and employees in the organization are conscious about their existence. I will argue that both Jacqueline and Leif support the idea that the consultancy room helps the consultant navigate in complex organizations with multiple stakeholders and multiple discourses in the organization. This resembles my own experience.

Secondly, another similarity between Jacqueline and Leif confirming the results is their statements about the pragmatic consequence of the model. Jacqueline is saying that the multi-positional approach gives a pragmatic platform for leadership and change processes and Leif argues that working with multi positions helps the leader create a reflexive distance from the different discourses in the organization and its surroundings. This is best done in networks of leaders where a meaningful and useful position can be found and thereby reduce the complexity of the situation.

In short, both Jacqueline and Leif support the results by saying that using one position gives the consultant or leader specific possibilities for action. Working with multiple positions gives the consultant or leader multiple possibilities for action. And Jacqueline and Leif support the
results by saying that in order to successfully use multiple positions the consultant and leaders must work based on a pragmatic evaluation of the usefulness of the positions. This is best done through conversation with others creating a reflexive distance from the existing discourses in the organization. This is what the results show as presented in chapters 3, 4, and the beginning of chapter 5.

Of course not all conversations directly supported the results. Many asked critical questions that helped look at the examples in new ways and brought my analysis to a deeper level. This will be the focus of the next section.

Critical questions and conversations about the research and the results

As mentioned in chapter 2, a key concern in designing the research approach is to create loops of critical reflection about the research and the results. Beside the critical perspectives I’ve made myself, looking at the examples for similarities and differences, this critical approach to the research and the results have been explored by presenting the results in different contexts in order to have others challenge and develop them even further. Doing this I will also meet my own criteria of placing critical perspectives on my research. What I will present in this section is four typical critical questions from these conversations and how they can be answered on the basis of my research. These questions are:

- **Question 1**: You mention no example that is not “a success”. How come?
- **Question 2**: I understand each position, but you do not give any instructions to the practitioner of “which position to choose when” – how come?
- **Question 3**: Are the positions used a skilful choice made by the consultant on his own? Or are they socially constructed through dialogue with the customer?
- **Question 4**: How did you reach 6 positions? Why not 1, 2, or 3? And are these positions both “necessary and sufficient” to cover all practices?

**Question 1**: You mention no example that is not “a success”. How come?
This question came from both my research supervisor and colleagues asking: You choose an appreciative inquiry approach building your learning on examples of success. But do you not also learn from failure? I will first present an example where I did not succeed and then reflect both about learning from the example and finally my choice about using success examples in the thesis.

Example 21
Finishing my studies at psychology I got very interested in working with team development. I read literature about the subject such as Michael West’s book “Teamwork” (West 2008) and “Making the team” by Leigh Thompson (Thompson 2000). What I got from literature was an approach to team development that was essentially based on two elements:

1. Increasing team understanding and reflexivity of the shared goals. And
2. Increasing team understanding and reflexivity about the processes in and around the team, for example understanding and using different team roles in the team.

I was lucky to get a job working with team development in a nursing home. My contact was the leader of the nursing home and she was impatient with team development in two of her teams. I agreed to work with both teams. A process was designed together with my contact for each team. Each team would meet with me one full day and two half days.

Using the model I knew from the literature, the first day’s work with both teams was used discussing team goals and agreements about how to collaborate in the team. The SMART model was used creating team goals in order for goals to be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound. I remember team leaders being very quiet in both sessions and interpreting this as a message to “go on”.

Meeting the team at the second session, none of the teams seemed to have made any progress. This took me somewhat by surprise. We had done what the literature had said we should do, so what was going on? I concluded that what we had done was not sufficient, so in both sessions I decided to continue work with team goals and team agreements. Again the
team had some interesting conversations and team leaders were very quiet. This confirmed to me that the teams needed time to thoroughly work through team goals and agreements. At the third session the picture was about the same. One of the teams said they had started talking differently to each but the other team seemed low on energy. Evaluating the process with my contact not long after, she confirmed my picture of the situation. Nothing new had come from the process. On the contrary, the process had confirmed her view in regard to her evaluation of the team leaders and their lack of abilities as leaders. This on the other hand took me by surprise. I did not know team leaders were being evaluated.

I will make four reflections about the example and its usefulness in my research:

Firstly, it’s important because of what I did not do. In all three sessions I focus on the team and its internal dynamics. This is my distinction of system, and at no point am I looking at other distinctions of system. I first really saw the team leaders when evaluating the process with my contact. In retrospect several other distinctions could have been useful. For example

- The team leader: What goals did team leaders have for their team? Did they feel capable of working as team leaders? I don’t know because I never asked.
- Team leaders and their interactions with the team: In retrospect I didn’t hear or see anything that told me that team leaders had changed their way of working. Even though I had read the literature, I certainly hadn’t appreciated those parts addressing the change in interaction between team leader and team. Re-reading the same literature again I came across this section: “Teamwork, to those in power in control-and-command organizations, is not necessarily a good thing… Yet companies often expect middle managers to metamorphose into stellar team leaders, ready to coach, motivate, and empower. The problem is that few people understand how to make this transformational process” (Thompson 2000 p. 188).

In retrospect we all continued to focus on the same distinction of system – the team – and as a consequence the process got stuck. Now I believe we ought to have focused on the team leaders and their interaction with my contact. Apparently my contact had expectations that team leaders did not meet. What these expectations are, I still don’t know, because I never
asked. In retrospect the conversational system should have been either my contact on her
own, coaching her on how to coach her team leaders. Or the conversational system should
have been my contact and the team leaders looking at how to create team development. In
either case I did not at the time of the consultancy process see that I made a distinction of
systems that was not useful.

Secondly, I kept doing “more of the same” even though it did not work. I kept asking the same
questions allowing each session to play out the same way without changing or re-coordinating
the process and my position. Even though I had been reading Schein, I did not use his ideas
of if in doubt, share the problem (Schein 1997). I did not give the feedback that I could see
that things hadn’t changed and use this feedback as a source of learning (Ibid.). Neither did I
think of using systemic interviewing skills to interview the team leaders about goals for the
team, even though I had trained interviewing techniques at a consultancy course (Dahl & Juhl

This brings me to my third reflection. Both my lack of ability to re-position myself in the
process even though it did not bring any substantial progress and my lack of ability to change
the distinction of system used in the process confirm the results presented in chapter 3 and 4.
This and other examples of not succeeding show me the same: when the process is
successful, I work reflexively with the three dimensions of the consultancy room and bring the
reflections into the conversation with my customer. When neither the customer nor I bring the
dimensions into the conversation, the process tends to continue on the tracks where it
started.

Fourthly, this addresses the question of what examples I use as examples of learning in this
thesis. On a general level I see potential learning in any example. The choice about using
success examples is made for three reasons: It connects directly to the research question
asking about “success”. Further the positive examples have the advantage of “showing what
to do” not “showing what not to do”. By showing “what not to do” the examples of failure do
not necessarily give the consultant the right clue about what to do instead. I remember
leaving the organization with the feeling that my contact had a hidden agenda and a feeling
that she hadn’t played her part right. I was not at the time able to turn this into learning at a personal level. For example I could have asked her in advance. Looking at similarities across examples of failure, I can see that I have a tendency to conclude that “more leadership is needed” sending me towards hierarchical solutions as I used Anderson to show in chapter 4 (Anderson 1997). As example 20 shows this is not always what is needed. The value of success examples is that they give an ‘order of possibilities’ (Shotter 1993) that the consultant can use in following conversations with customers.

**Question 2: I understand each position, but you do not give any instructions to the practitioner of “which position to choose when” – how come?**

The idea of giving precise advice of “what to do when” would imply that change processes in living and social systems would follow a predictable formula. I’ve found nothing in my research to confirm such an idea. On the contrary as I showed using Shotter earlier we must not act solely ‘out of’ our own inner ‘scripts’, ‘plans’, or ‘ideas’, but must be sensitive in some way to the opportunities and barriers, the enablements and constraints, ‘afforded’ to us by our circumstances, in order to act ‘into’ them (Shotter 1993 p. 7). I’ve shown how the consultant can do this using a pragmatic reflexivity choosing what will work in this situation based on distinctions of position, system, and time.

Above, I’ve shown 4 methods to use multi positions in practice in order to both create a meta-perspective on the process as well as choose position in the process. In this section I will describe the contract as an additional method the consultant can use with the customer to coordinate and choose positions.

Schein’s focus on building the helping relationship (Schein 1997), Gergen’s focus on knowledge as originating from relationship (Gergen & Gergen 2008), and Maturana’s focus on coordination of meaning (Maturana & Varela 1992) inspire the consultant not to believe too much in any position in any situation, but to coordinate both process design and consultant position with the customer. I call this ongoing coordinating activity the contract. The contract is made at the beginning of the collaboration and developed through the process in order to
keep the process evolving. In the contract where consultant and customer construct a process design going into questions like

- What are the long-term goals of the organization?
- What are the goals with the consultancy process?
- How do we create a process in order to create the goals?
- What kind of consultant role do I need to take in order to support creating the goals?

Such a contract should always be regarded as temporary and open to revision. But it has as both purpose and consequence that direction and positions are coordinated. As shown in chapter 4 presenting the conversational system I made it clear that each position gives unique ideas to create the contract.

As examples 4 and 12 show sometimes customers ask for particular positions. As example 13 and 20 show coordinating positions with the customer can be a combination of customer requests and consultant assumptions about what is useful. In either case, what is important is that the contract is made.

**Question 3: Are the positions used a skilful choice made by the consultant? Or is it socially constructed through dialogue with the costumer?**

Having written the book “The professional process consultant” together with Kristian Dahl (Dahl & Juhl 2009) about my research, we translated part of it and sent it to Edgar Schein. We had the honour of receiving his comments, which turned into a foreword for the second edition of the book. Edgar Schein commented on it and part of it was saying that:

*The positioning of the project, as described in the different possible locations in the “room” in the early cases should be jointly decided by the consultant and the client. The consultant should certainly be aware of the different perspectives that can be taken toward any given case, and these are beautifully described in the book, but should be careful not to make these decisions unilaterally.*

33 Schein’s comments in full length are presented in appendix 2.
The danger inherent in all consultation situations is that the consultant will be more attuned to his inner self and his own models of how to proceed and will pay insufficient attention to the personal, group and cultural issues in the client’s organization. For me the critical time is early in the relationship where I must minimize my own reactions and ideas, focusing instead on how the client can become involved in solving his own problem.

Once I have a good relationship with the client in the sense that he trusts me enough to tell me what is really bothering him, then I can discuss with him how to proceed and test with him which of the many positions described in this book would fit his situation best. But he must be part of the decision making process (Schein, personal communication).

It is not only Schein who has made this critique and it has given a valuable input to the research process highlighting important aspects of positioning. I address the question because it shows how my research has developed. In my initial work and in the book published in 2009, I only looked at what I in chapter 3 called position as theory. My concern was to map the theories and their possible practical implications. Schein (Schein 1997), Gergen (Gergen 1982 1997, Gergen & Gergen 2008), Cecchin (Cecchin 1987, Cecchin et al. 1993), and Shotter (Shotter 1993 2009 2010) combined with examples like examples 2 and 12 directed my attention towards what I in chapter 3 called positioning in conversations emphasising that positioning is always negotiated and re-negotiated in dialogue. The risk of not taking this approach is, as Schein himself describes, to be attuned to his inner self and his own models of how to proceed with the risk of ending in a “selling and telling” model of consultancy, where the consultant is giving to the customer the consultant’s models of the world (Schein 1997). This connects to the quote from the Gergen above saying what we take to be knowledge of the world and self finds its origins in human relationships (Gergen & Gergen 2008 p. 163). So positions are both theories and methods that the consultant knows from practice and training as well as being something that is coordinated and negotiated with the customer. So answering question 3, positions are neither just a matter of the consultant’s mindset or blueprint nor just a matter of reaching consensus. Positions are a product of interplay of intentions, as Stacey’s framing it (2007).
Question 4: How did you reach 6 positions? Why not 1, 2, or 3? And are these positions both “necessary and sufficient” to cover all practices?

This has been an important question and one frequently asked. I will show how it has helped me argue that in order for the consultant to create a pragmatic reflexivity, the consultant must work with at least three distinctions of practice well known to the consultant.

Colleagues from both organizational development and the university have asked questions about the amount of positions: How come you reached 6 positions? One colleague found it strange that the psychodynamic position was not in the room, since this was a position valued and often used by him. To answer the question I will use both Gregory Bateson and Søren Willert, my former supervisor at the University of Aarhus.

Bateson’s idea of distinction is central to answer “why not 1 or 2?” As Bateson writes “Information is the difference which makes a difference” (Bateson 1984 p. 95). This helps argue why one position is not satisfactory. If you do not have two positions, a distinction is not made and a choice is not possible. The consultant needs more than one position if he is to make a distinction that makes a pragmatic reflexivity possible, where the consultant chooses positions in conversations with customers. Not just conduct intuitive or habitual behaviour. So 1 position is not useful.

With two positions I will argue that the consultant ends in one of two situations. The most likely is the one I discussed in chapter 2, where two positions are turned into a dualism. This dualism has the form of right and wrong, good and bad, etc. In this situation there is not much of a choice for the consultant. It is implicit that the consultant should choose the right and good and leave behind the bad and wrong and this leaves no relevant space for a pragmatic reflexivity where the consultant is reflecting and choosing positions together with the customer. My critique and challenge of dualisms was exactly part of my motivation to make this research, as described in chapter 2.

The alternative situation with two positions is the situation where both are equally meaningful positions as described by for example Hoverstadt, going into the paradox of autonomy and
control (Hoverstadt 2008). Having two equally meaningful positions does not mean the organization is sound. As Hoverstadt describes, this might end in what he calls a yo-yo organization where the organization is oscillating between the two positions (ibid.).

I'll argue that three positions again have two possible outcomes. Either the three positions take the Hegelian shape of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. An example from this is Molly-Søholm's action learning consulting integrating theory O and E in organizational theory into an integrated model (Molly-Søholm 2010). In my account such a synthesis creates a new normative position. Knowing and accepting the synthesis, neither thesis nor antithesis are relevant any longer. The second outcome with three positions is that the three positions are three equally possible ways of approaching the situation. This gives the consultant a possibility to reflect and choose what to do. So using the Batesonian idea of distinctions I will argue that in order to create a pragmatic reflexivity the consultant needs at least three distinctions of positions in order to make a skilful choice about what to do.

But that does not answer the question of “Why these 6 positions? Why not 6 other positions?” My former supervisor Søren Willert in his supervisions said to me that I should always read theories autobiographically. Theories are always explicitly or implicitly telling a personal story about the person explaining the theory. From my research I can see this to be the case. Even though I try to work with a completely open mind, I can see that certain positions are used in my practice (the 6 positions described in this thesis) while others are not (for example the psychodynamic).

This also answers the question of the “necessary and sufficient” positions, which is not the case. The 6 positions are not an absolute list. Using the model with other practitioners or leaders, a key question is always what positions they use to navigate in their practice. Using the room as a model in a coaching conversation with a leader about her way of balancing different leadership positions, she used the 8 distinctions of leadership made by Kurt Klaudi Klausen between production, the social, the market, politics, consciousness, vision & belief,
culture, and finally aesthetics in his book “Strategic leadership” (Klausen 2004). Working with leaders at colonel level in the Danish forces, we used Cameron and Quinn’s 4 distinctions balancing collaborating with competing leadership and controlling with creating leadership (Cameron & Quinn 1988). We did so because Cameron & Quinn’s distinctions are already part of leadership protocols in the Danish forces and therefore were both well known and integrated in their practice. I mention the work of Klausen (Klausen 2004) and Cameron & Quinn (Cameron & Quinn 1988) to clarify that there might be multiple ways of creating useful distinctions. Not to go into detail with their actual work.

I prefer Morgan’s idea of metaphor saying that “all theory is metaphor” (Morgan 1997 p. 5) as described in the section about position as theory in chapter 3. Metaphors allow a one-sided insight by at the same time being a way of seeing and not seeing. In the fable of the five blind men and the elephant each has found one but just one piece of the truth. When the pieces are put together the complete picture emerges.

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34 My translation of the title of the book Strategisk ledelse.
Ill. 2: Five blind men and the elephant.

With this I do not agree. I use Wittgenstein as presented in chapter 2 to argue that each theory by introducing a language and a practice creates a life form (Wittgenstein 1989 1994). Such life forms are constantly evolving and we will never be able to find neither necessary nor sufficient positions to account for all possible situations and life forms. But working with multiple positions increases the range of possible actions taken on behalf of the consultant and helps create a pragmatic reflexivity about this practice.

**Implication of the research: connecting to the future**

In this final section I will look at the future implications of the research. I will address two questions. Firstly, I will discuss possible implications of the research on the training of
consultants. Secondly, I will show three ways to continue the research presented in this thesis.

**Implications of the research for the training of consultants**

In this section I will show how I’ve used the results from the research in the training of other consultants. I will discuss how to create a context that enables learning at a multi-positional level based on pragmatic reflexivity. This is an important question since most courses usually give privilege to one position among many. Further I will discuss training exercises that I’ve created building on the results from the research and the experiences from the trainings sessions.

My main concern in this section is how to create a context that enables learning at a multi-positional level. The following guidelines for training consultants in a multi-positional approach based on a pragmatic reflexivity is based on one course at DNO and one open course with a group of both internal consultants, external consultants, and leaders. More courses need to be made to develop the guidelines further.

**A toolbox of possibilities**

The first implication for training consultants using a multi-positional approach and the consultancy room is training a wide range of possibilities for consulting. Above I used the dance metaphor to illustrate using a wide variety of positions. The dancer knows what the dances are, how to dance them, and is able to do so with different partners and in different situations. I will use this metaphor to argue that in order to train consultants in a multi-positional approach based on pragmatic reflexivity the course must simultaneously address three levels of knowledge:

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35 At DISPUK in Denmark they train leaders in *Narrative leadership*. At ATTARCTOR in Denmark leaders are invited to *Systemic leadership in theory and practice*. The education at Haslebo & partners privileges *social constructionism*.
Theoretical knowledge: John Shotter using the inspiration of Gilbert Ryle calls this *knowing that* (Shotter 1993) taking the shape of factual and theoretical knowledge. Using the systemic position as an example this kind of knowledge could be *knowing that* Bateson is a key figure in this tradition who has worked on creating “an ecology of mind” and that people like the Milan Group and Karl Tomm have used his ideas to develop their way of working in therapy. In short: theoretical knowledge. In training sessions this gives the consultant a context for the different positions by showing how and why they developed and how they are different. This is similar to Pearce’s camper’s guide to constructionism looking at different intellectual legacies (Pearce 1992).

Knowledge of method: John Shotter again using the inspiration of Gilbert Ryle calls this *knowing how* taking the shape of procedural knowledge (Shotter 1993). Using the systemic position as an example again, this means the ability to shape circular questioning and the ability to use for example the model from Karl Tomm (Tomm 1992) formulating different types of questions. In training sessions this is done helping the consultant use the model from Karl Tomm to formulate different types of questions and discuss possible practical implications of the model.

Pragmatic reflexivity: John Shotter as shown above calls this *knowing of a third kind* (Shotter 1993), since it is a different kind of knowledge taking place in actual interactions. In training sessions this is done by continued training of the different tools and by giving feedback to the consultant using them. By doing and using a wide range of tools the consultant is both helped and challenged to look at own habits of behaviour and to reflect on future habits creating exactly the pragmatic reflexivity that was part of the results from the research. I will address this important implication for training consultants in its own right below.

Training these three levels of knowledge simultaneously most often has the same effect. They give consultants new possibilities for action in situations, where they used to feel that they had none. One consultant from DNO reflecting on the outcome of training sessions stated that: *I used to turn away when leaders or colleagues became too rough. Now I can see that I have different possibilities and that I can actually do something in these situations.*
Consultant role and cultural narratives of change

The second standard element in training consultants based on a multi-positional and pragmatic reflexive approach is that consultants are helped to reflect on both their own habitual positions and dominating cultural narratives of change in their work. In the case mentioned with DNO the training sessions made it clear to the consultants that both their own role and cultural narratives about change were exclusively dominated by the strategic position. Looking at both own role and cultural narratives of change through multiple positions created a reflexive distance where positions can be chosen for their practical usefulness not as a consequence of habitual use. This was exactly part of my motivation as described in chapter 2 and confirmed by Leif arguing that what is created is a reflexive distance from the different discourses in the organization and its surroundings. This challenges approaches to consultancy based on intuition or normative stories of how to create change. Intuition often leads to reproduction of personal or cultural habits and in normative stories of change theories get a life of their own without any connection to how they help in everyday situations. As Watzlawick’s task with the 9 circles (Watzlawick 1974), this reflection on one’s own position and cultural narratives helps create training sessions where consultants see new possibilities in stuck situations by breaking personal or cultural habits.

Having shown possible ways to create a context for training a multi-positional approach based on pragmatic reflexivity, I will end this chapter and thesis addressing another interesting question: how can research into a multi-positional approach based on pragmatic reflexivity be continued in the future?

Implications for continued research and how it can be done

Research is often ended with the truism that “more research is needed”. I want to get one step further than this. In this research I’ve taken the approach that “everything is potentially data”. The key source of data has been examples from my own practice based on memory, notes taken while working, mail correspondences with customers and everything else that could be used in the research. Doing this has had the obvious advantage of using many and
deviant examples. On the other hand it gives way to the obvious critical question of why focusing exclusively on my own practice and why not to use customers’ perspectives to validate and enrich the examples. I addressed these questions in chapter 2, but now I will show how the argumentation can be taken further by showing three ways to continue research about a multi-positional approach based on a pragmatic reflexivity. Continuing the line of argument presented in chapter 2, any research must begin by addressing what is to be researched and why the research is worth making. The first line of research is concerned with getting more and richer details about a multi-positional and pragmatically based approach to consultancy. The second is concerned with researching into organizations’ successful use of consultants. The third is concerned with looking at the implications of a multi-positional approach for leadership.

**Researching across consultancy practices**

Researching across consultancy practices means using multiple consultant practices as sources of data. This has implicitly been part of the research through the conversations I’ve had during the five years I’ve been researching. But a simple yet inspiring way to continue the research is for more consultants to use the research approach presented in chapter 2 and collaborate about looking at similarities and differences between the examples. I will argue that this could give two important types of results in understanding the multiple positions used in consultancy in relation to both position as theory and positioning in conversation.

Firstly, I’m sure that the six positions I’ve presented would be challenged and developed. As described above they mirror my professional history and are by no means a complete picture of either an organizational practice or a theoretical landscape. They do not present a complete list of ways of working as consultant. Looking across consultant practices a new set of distinctions of positions would most likely emerge giving a richer picture of the different traditions and possibilities in consulting organizations.

Secondly, I would expect this research to create a richer language about both combining and changing position. Looking at similarities and differences across many examples from many
consultants, I expect that this line of research would show in more detail how different positions are being established, combining organizational narratives of change, organizations expectations of consultants, consultants’ own preferences, the situational circumstances, etc.

In order not to become a sole researcher in other consultants’ practices, I imagine this research done as a collaborative research with my colleagues in Deutero consultants. Of course this could be done in many ways. But drawing on the success, using the research approach described in chapter 2, and twisting this to a collaborative research, I imagine each consultant would collect examples and bring these into conversations working with the same three questions that guided my research:

- **Question 1**: What can be learned from the example about how to create success and to behave professionally?
- **Question 2**: What are the similarities and differences between the examples?
- **Question 3**: What examples are deviant and how can they be used in the research?

**Researching into customer perspectives**

As I described in chapter 2, researching into customer perspectives is connected to several types of problems. Placing a tape recorder in the room changes what is happening and thereby changes the field being researched. Furthermore, each research method has its own limitations. Using interviewing techniques the customer might or might not be able to describe how the consultant is working. Moreover, a possible description from the customer might or might not be compatible with the practice being talked about. Additionally, using interview techniques raises the question of whom to interview? Is it the referring person? The person the consultant is making a contract with who again might or might not be the same as the referring person? The leader who is collaborated with? The employees who are part of the consultancy process? The colleagues who are not part of the consultancy process but who are influenced by the outcome? Or the customer’s customer who should in the end benefit

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36 I’m a partner in Deutero consultants together with 5 other partners. See [www.deutero.dk](http://www.deutero.dk).
from the consultancy process? I will argue that each of these perspectives is important but if all part of the research could make the amount of data overwhelming. In short: every research method has its own limitations.

Still I will argue that researching into customer perspectives could be valuable but especially if done in a different way. As part of my research I looked at which organizational and leadership circumstances made it easier for me to be part of a successful process. Even though this has not been the prime focus of my research, I’ve reached two incipient hypotheses.

Firstly, it seems that the clearer visions the organization and leader have, the easier it is for me to match a relevant position or combination of positions.

Secondly, it seems that the more willing the organization and leader are to reflect on the different possible ways to use me as a consultant, the easier it is to find a useful position in the initial phase of contracting and the easier it is for me to re-position in the process.

Based on these incipient hypotheses, I see the beginnings of research looking at how organizations use consultants, researching into the question: *How do organizations secure that their use of consultant is a success?* This question implicitly addresses Schein’s critique that much consultancy done from the expert position is *not* a success (Schein 1999). And based on my two hypotheses, two additional questions could be:

- *Which organizational and leader circumstances make a difference as to whether or not the consultancy process becomes a success?*
- *How does the organization coordinate and re-coordinate the position of the consultant in order to secure a success?*

Where my research has looked at consultancy from the perspective of the consultant, this research would look at the consultancy process from the perspective of the organization and customer. This leaves the question of *why* such a research would be worthwhile. Based on my work at both DNO and the ministry of employment, I know that organizations do see a need to monitor whether or not their spending resources on internal and external consultants.
is worthwhile. So thinking in practical terms about how to do this research, my suggestion would be that one or more organizations are helped to research into their own use of internal and external consultants, addressing for example the three questions mentioned above. Of course the more detailed elements of the research would need to be planned with the organizations.

**Researching a multi-positional approach to leadership**

Some of the most supportive conversations and statements about the research I’ve conducted have come from leaders saying that what I’ve described as *the consultancy room* could just as well have been described as *the leadership room*, since they work with similar distinctions of position, system, and time. But one typical critique from leaders has been that the six positions described do not satisfactorily describe the positions they choose from in everyday situations. This suggests a different line of research addressing the question of the use of multiple positions in leadership. This research would by no means be ground breaking, since it has already been started by others as mentioned about Goleman’s work using 6 different positions (Goleman 2000), Kurt Klaudi Klausen in Denmark also using 8 different positions (Klausen 2004), and Cameron and Quinn in their competing values model using 4 different positions (Cameron & Quinn 1988). The fact that there are more models makes this field interesting. I will argue that two types of results could come from such a research:

1) *Knowledge about which positions leaders need to use in order to create success in the organization.* Both the work of Goleman, Klaudi and Cameron and Quinn could be used to create a “qualified hypothesis” to test and expand on in the research.

2) *Knowledge about how positions are constructed through conversations in relation to particular situations.* This question would elaborate Goleman’s work. Goleman’s statement about *using the right one at the right time and in the right measure* (Goleman 2000) is obviously easier said than done. Using the pragmatic approach that I’ve constructed, looking at similarities and differences between success examples, would both create examples to learn from, create the pragmatic reflexivity advocated
for in this thesis, and at the same time reject a checklist of situations, which Goleman also critiques.

Addressing these two questions would, as my own research, create results that I haven’t seen before. This ought to make the research worthwhile.
Chapter 6: Epilogue

I started chapter 1 with descriptions about the different theoretical and practical positions I’d been using until the research. Therefore I will end the thesis with an epilogue about the research journey and where it has brought me. I will do this by making a distinction between my journey as a practitioner and as a researcher.

The practical journey is nicely described in the above quote from Pearce about the virtuosos. Being a “virtuoso” is of course something I’d prefer others to say about me. Not to claim myself. But looking at the past five years I do, even more so now than before, feel passionate about my work. And even though I before the research was able to make distinctions between a few positions, I now see myself making perspicacious distinctions between different positions, systems, and time. And I do evaluate my practice as even more skilled and successful with less rooky mistakes.

The journey as a researcher has been, even though very time consuming, equally inspiring. Beginning the research I had two very ambitious goals. One was to develop a customized research approach to both meet the objectives of this research and equip me with an approach to continue research after the thesis. This is by all means achieved. The second goal was to develop a new qualitative research approach based on pragmatic ideas combined with the idea that “everything is potentially data” with a new way of writing the thesis intertwining practice and theory. As my research developed, this second goal came to play an implicit role by writing my thesis as I’ve done intertwining data in the shape of examples and theories in the shape of quotes. I know this is the way I will continue writing.

I hope the reading of the thesis has been almost as inspiring for the reader as it has been for me to write it. E. E. Cummings says “always the beautiful answer who asks a more beautiful question”, so I will end my thesis in this spirit by inviting you as a reader to reflect on your own practice by reflecting on five questions:

- How does what I’ve described resemble how you in your practice participate to create success, be that as a leader, consultant, etc?
• What distinctions of position is part of your “room of practice”?
• What distinctions of system is part of your “room of practice”?
• What distinctions of time is part of your “room of practice”?
• And finally: How do you navigate in this room in order to create success?

I’m sincerely curious about your answers.
**Chapter 7: Bibliography**


Burck, C. (2005). Comparing qualitative research methodologies for systemic research: the


Shotter, J. (2009). Some relations between practitioner initiated and oriented inquiry and ‘coolly rational’ forms of ‘research’: ‘Systemic thinking’ and ‘thinking about systems’. Notes from the Professional Doctorate Course at Bedforshire University.


Appendix 1: List of publications

The following list shows publications of books and articles\textsuperscript{37}.

Books


Articles


\textsuperscript{37} All titles are my translation from Danish.


Appendix 2: Foreword by Edgar Schein to The professional process consultant

(Dahl & Juhl 2009)

Edgar H. Schein

This book is an exciting and provocative journey into the complexities of consulting. The title and the approach used by the authors builds on my own consulting model as a “process consultant” and then takes that model forward into many new dimensions of how different kinds of processes can be managed to help an organization. In this brief foreword I will comment both on the places where I feel the authors have usefully expanded the consulting field and on the places where I feel that more understanding is still needed to fully capture what I have meant by process consultation.

I will comment on the second issue first. The most central principle of the process consultation philosophy which I spelled out in more detail in my current book Helping: How to offer, give and receive help (2009a) is to build a relationship with the client in order to find out what kind of help is really needed, in order to make the client feel better about having to ask for help, and in order to involve the client in becoming a team member with the consultant. If we take organizational culture at all seriously (Schein, 2009b) we must realize that we cannot be helpful if we don’t understand the client’s culture and we cannot understand that culture without the active participation of the client.

What this means on a practical level is that the earliest interventions should be solely designed to build that relationship. Once the relationship permits more trusting communication between client and consultant, one can move to various positions and perspectives on what to do next, but the decisions have to involve and be agreed to by the client.
The positioning of the project, as described in the different possible locations in the “room” in the early cases should be jointly decided by the consultant and the client. The consultant should certainly be aware of the different perspectives that can be taken toward any given case, and these are beautifully described in the book, but should be carefull not to make these decisions unilaterally.

The danger inherent in all consultation situations is that the consultant will be more attuned to his inner self and his own models of how to proceed and will pay insufficient attention to the personal, group and cultural issues in the client’s organization. For me the critical time is early in the relationship where I must minimize my own reactions and ideas, focusing instead on how the client can become involved in solving his own problem.

Once I have a good relationship with the client in the sense that he trusts me enough to tell me what is really bothering him, then I can discuss with him how to proceed and test with him which of the many positions described in this book would fit his situation best. But he must be part of the decision making process.

The description of the different positions that the consultant can work from is an excellent review of the possible perspectives. This view of the consulting terrain will be very valuable to consultants in laying out the many options that we always have to consider in planning further interventions. If we want clients to be involved in this decision, as I have advocated, it suggests that an important vehicle is what Richard Beckhard called “educational interventions.” Here the consultant might suggest a seminar that reviews some different ways of approaching the client issues with the latent goals of 1) educating the client, 2) sensing what kinds of interventions might work best in the client’s culture, and 3) getting the client emotionally involved in the consulting process decision making.

This will be a valuable book in showing how process consultation mixes with expert and doctor roles. As I have argued in my most recent book, the ability to know when to be in which role is ultimately the most important skill that consultants have to learn. In addition, as is argued here, they have to become flexible in knowing which position to take in relation to client needs and client cultures.