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The Agency of Meetings as Systemic Process in the Constitution of Organizations: Insights from a Longitudinal Study and Bifocal Analysis of an Organizations Meetings

Martin Duffy

Technological University Dublin, mfduffy@eircom.net

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The Agency of Meetings as Systemic Process in the Constitution of Organizations:

Insights from a longitudinal study and bifocal analysis of an organization’s meetings.

Martin Duffy

PhD

Dublin Institute of Technology

2016
The Agency of Meetings as Systemic Process in the Constitution of Organizations:

Insights from a longitudinal study and bifocal analysis of an organization’s meetings.

Martin Duffy BSc MSc

PhD

Supervisor - Dr Brendan O’Rourke

School of Marketing

Dublin Institute of Technology

July 2016
Guided by a systemic and processual perspective, this research considers meetings as a collective organizational phenomenon and analyses how they contribute to the constitution of organizations. Longitudinal immersion as a participant observer in one organization’s ‘river of discourse’ prompted initial abductive theory development to conceptualize meetings as a collective phenomenon, rather than studying them as individual-centered events. Preliminary analysis conducted during data recording indicated collective agency that could not be attributed to individual meetings, nor to the intentionality of meeting participants. Subsequent bifocal analysis of the meetings’ discourse data reveals modes of meeting connectivity that reflect and contribute to their holistic nature and their agency collectively. Following a zoomed-out analysis informed by sensemaking and a zoomed-in analysis guided by CCO theory, the research findings indicate that meetings collectively exhibit agency through the hybridicity of three distinct modes of connection – human actors, material artefacts and shared processes – which are reflected in the Meetings as Systemic Process (MaSP) Framework. The findings also indicate that meetings impact the temporal structuring of the organization and form organizational building blocks with the potential to be deployed as a collective and shared organizational resource. Implications for meeting practice are deduced from MaSP, proposing ways to refine the operation of meetings as a collective organizational resource, mindful that proposed normative practices and their expected benefits can only be verified through further research.
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis was prepared according to the regulations for postgraduate study by research of the Dublin Institute of Technology and has not been submitted in whole or in part for another award in any Institute.

The work reported on in this thesis conforms to the principles and requirements of the Institute's guidelines for ethics in research.

Signature ___________________________ Date ______________

Candidate
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the owners, directors, managers and staff of KT-Inc, a company I can only refer to by pseudonym, but without whose generosity and wholesome participation, this research would not have been possible.

I am very grateful to Dr Deirdre Lillis for sharing her personal experiences in early discussions when planning my PhD journey. To all of the colleagues in DIT who attended the DAG and BS&S presentations – thank you for your generosity of time and expertise over the years, to support the development of my work. And to my fellow candidates – Diane, Joe and Lisa – I greatly valued our discussions and shared insights.

I extend a special thank you to Professor Tim Kuhn of the University of Colorado. His diligent review of interim results from this research ensured just the right ‘guns were hung on the wall’! His thought-provoking insights ensured a sharper focus on more fundamental issues that otherwise would have escaped my less experienced eye.

I could not have had better academic and personal support, guidance and advice than that provided by my supervisor, Dr Brendan O’Rourke. Unfailing accessibility, even at the most improbable times, was always well above and beyond the call of duty. Rigorous challenge was always matched with constructive support, while great humour and laughter helped to shorten our travels together more than he ever expected. A very big thank you for two shared journeys together.

Little escaped the attentive eye of my niece Sharon Carty, a consummate professional in her own work, who brings enormous pride and joy to our entire family. And to my son Philip, whose drawing skills improved my own less accomplished efforts in presenting the MaSP figures in Chapter 9. Thank you.

To Karin, Steven, Fiona and Philip, I am profoundly grateful for your steadfast and unwavering support, in an endeavour that demanded as much from your time as it did from my effort. With my eternal love and gratitude.

Dedication

To my cherished parents – Paddy and Maura – and my ever-supportive brothers and sisters.
NEOLOGISMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Neologisms

Research on meetings typically extends our understanding of how they operate as standalone events, or how features common to meetings in the same or different organizations influence how they are conducted. This individual-centered focus created an inadvertent gap in the literature, leaving unexplored those features of meetings, as a collective phenomenon, which cannot be attributed to a single meeting and have not been intended by meeting participants. The focus on meetings as individual events is also evident in our language. There is no collective noun with which to describe organizational meetings, which given their ubiquity, challenges our ability to even refer to them as a collective organizational phenomenon. For that reason, this work contains some neologisms which are explained in Table 0.1.

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<td>MaSP</td>
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<td>Meeting Connectors</td>
<td>MCs</td>
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<td>Systemic Meetings Model</td>
<td>SMM</td>
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Table 0.1 - Neologisms and associated abbreviations

General abbreviations

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>AGM</td>
<td>Annual General Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCO</td>
<td>Communicative Constitution of Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>Discourse Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESR</td>
<td>Enactment-Selection-Retention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GM</td>
<td>General Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAG</td>
<td>Project Advisory Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMI</td>
<td>Plus Minus Interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R&amp;D</td>
<td>Research and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-as-P</td>
<td>Strategy as Practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBU</td>
<td>Strategic Business Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLA</td>
<td>Service Level Agreement</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 0.2 - Abbreviations

Abbreviations for meeting participants.

To protect the identity of the company and participants, abbreviations are used for particular company roles and pseudonyms are used instead of the individuals’ real names. Roles are used in the transcripts to contextualize each speaker’s contribution. The list of meeting participants below is set out in the order in which they first appear in extracts from the data.
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<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>First appears in Extract ...</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pete (OpsD)</td>
<td>Operations Director.</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin (Res)</td>
<td>Researcher.</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millie (LabM)</td>
<td>Laboratory manager.</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason (PrM)</td>
<td>Production manager.</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken (GM)</td>
<td>General Manager. Note: Ken was the chairman for board meetings in February and May 2011.</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gavin (MarD)</td>
<td>Marketing Director.</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim (BC)</td>
<td>Board Chairman.</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sill (FinD)</td>
<td>Finance Director.</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanya (ODir)</td>
<td>Owner Director.</td>
<td>7.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack (SaM)</td>
<td>Sales Manager. Note: Jack was also referred to as the business development manager.</td>
<td>7.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guy (IndM)</td>
<td>Industrial Manager.</td>
<td>7.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathy (HR)</td>
<td>HR Manager.</td>
<td>7.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cian (LA)</td>
<td>Legal adviser.</td>
<td>7.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim (ND1)</td>
<td>Non-Exec Director 1. Note: Tim assumed company board chairmanship from July 2011.</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay (ND2)</td>
<td>Non-Exec Director 2.</td>
<td>8.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith (RSM)</td>
<td>Retail Shops Manager.</td>
<td>8.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan (UKSR1)</td>
<td>UK Sales rep 1</td>
<td>8.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leo (HSM)</td>
<td>Head of Sales &amp; Marketing.</td>
<td>8.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaspor (DM)</td>
<td>Distribution manager.</td>
<td>8.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shane (RSR2)</td>
<td>Regional Sales Rep 2.</td>
<td>8.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celine (UKSR2)</td>
<td>UK sales rep 2</td>
<td>8.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra (UKSM)</td>
<td>UK Shop manager</td>
<td>8.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian (PurM)</td>
<td>Purchasing manager</td>
<td>8.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gasa (PA)</td>
<td>Production assistant</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glen (RSR1)</td>
<td>Regional Sales Rep 1.</td>
<td>8.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy (GD)</td>
<td>Graphic designer</td>
<td>8.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinny (HIS)</td>
<td>Head of Industrial Sales.</td>
<td>8.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark (MC)</td>
<td>Marketing consultant</td>
<td>8.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stan (RSR3)</td>
<td>Regional Sales Rep 3.</td>
<td>8.106</td>
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION
Bateson's observation that "an explorer can never know what he is exploring until it has been explored" (Bateson, 1972, p. xvi) certainly captures the recursive and reflexive nature of this research. The research initially and tentatively focused on how the discourse taking place in different organizational meetings impacted on the implementation of strategic initiatives. However, the apparent certainty of researching topics that were readily evident in meetings was progressively replaced by considerable uncertainty but increasing interest in exploring a heightening intuition that something was being missed in the study of the meetings collectively.

Reflecting on the meetings’ discourse data as they were being collected, heightened an intuitive sense that meetings were in some way agential at a collective level and that this collective agency merited more detailed study in its own right. The research was redirected towards increasing our understanding of how meetings exhibit agency collectively and contribute to the constitution and development of the organizations in which they take place.

This chapter initially provides an overview of the research before outlining the practice, theoretical and philosophical considerations that guided it. The research methodology is then outlined, followed by summaries of the zoomed-out and zoomed-in perspectives adopted for the data analysis. The last two sections of the chapter outline the research findings and summarise the conclusions and discussion arising from it.

1.1 RESEARCH OVERVIEW

1.1.1 Why study meetings?

Viewed in a localized context (Schwartzman, 1986), organizations and their meetings are part of a recursive interplay (Giddens, 1984) in which they both inform and are informed by the organizations they help to constitute. The prolific nature of organizational meetings is well referenced in the organization studies literature over many years (Mintzberg, 1971; Schwartzman, 1986; Tobia & Becker, 1990; Volkema & Niederman, 1996), yet our understanding of them as topics of research in their own right is quite limited (Allen, Lehmann-Willenbrock, & Rogelberg, 2015b; Schwartzman, 1986, 1989).
Meetings are used for a diverse range of purposes, playing a crucial role in “the production and reproduction of social relations and cultural beliefs and values” (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 69). More specifically, they serve as “sites of social action and interaction that allow workplace members to produce and reproduce a department’s, team’s or organization’s vision, mission, and goals” (Olien, Rogelberg, Lehmann-Willenbrock, & Allen, 2015, p. 13). As microcosms of organizations, meetings reflect the nature of the organizations in which they take place (Schwartzman 1989, p. 39).

From a review of the meetings literature (Allen et al., 2015b) we can infer three broad problems associated with organizational meetings. The first is that as ubiquitous, habitual and integral parts of everyday organizational practices (Allen, Lehmann-Willenbrock, & Rogelberg, 2015a, p. 3), people seem to intuitively dislike meetings (Allen, Beck, Scott, & Rogelberg, 2014, p. 795; Rogelberg, Leach, Warr, & Burnfield, 2006, p. 83). Yet people and organizations still commit significant amounts of organizational time and resources to their meetings (Allen & Rogelberg, 2013; Allen, Rogelberg, & Scott, 2008; Rogelberg, Shanock, & Scott, 2012). The second problem is the limited number of references in the literature to organizational meetings being used or researched as a collective resource in the service of the organization (Hendry & Seidl, 2003; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2007, 2008; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011). The third problem, that may partially explain or contribute to the first two, is the individual centeredness of meetings research to date and the absence of an integrated perspective, viewing meetings holistically as a collective organizational resource displaying agency in their own right (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 740).

### 1.1.2 Developing meetings as the research topic

In my previous research involving ‘live’ recording of meetings’ discourse, specifically strategy workshops (Duffy, 2010; Duffy & O’Rourke, 2014), active participation as a professional strategy consultant precluded reflection on the research data as it were being collected. Reflection was only possible in the post hoc analysis of data already collected. In contrast, the data collection for this PhD research was more ethnographic, in that it involved attending and recording an organization’s meetings over an extended time period, primarily as an observer rather than as a participant. The observer participant role (Pacanowsky, 1988, p. 359) enabled an ongoing appraisal and analysis of the accumulating data and had a significant bearing on the final direction the research would take.
As the initial meetings unfolded in a company I will refer to by the pseudonym KT-Inc, I observed that past and future meetings were routinely referenced within meetings, but the significance of this occurrence was not immediately apparent. Given the prolific nature of KT-Inc’s meetings, it seemed reasonable to question the extent to which its meetings were being used as a coordinated resource for the organization, or if they simply took place as individual events that happened to frequently refer to other similar events. The apparent tendency to naturally connect meetings through ongoing discourse, prompted a progressive reorientation towards studying the company’s meetings themselves as research topic, rather than as a research resource as originally intended (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Schwartzman, 1989, p. 54).

As more meetings were recorded in KT-Inc, it became apparent that they were connected to each other but this seemed rarely intentional. The connections appeared to be an intrinsic part of how the organisation communicated and operated. The emerging connections between meetings and the sense that meetings were demonstrating some form of agency collectively, prompted a number of theoretical perspectives and concepts to be explored. Systems thinking and discourse analysis were initially examined (Duffy & O'Rourke, 2012a, 2012b) and then supplemented with influences from processual thinking (Duffy & O'Rourke, 2013a) and communications studies (Duffy & O'Rourke, 2013b).

As references were sought to meetings being treated as a collective organizational resource or phenomenon in a range of literatures, a gap in the literature became apparent, most recently through Schwartzman’s (2015, p. 740) reference to the individual centeredness of meetings research to date. There was a dearth of research treating meetings collectively as the topic of research or unit of analysis (Duffy & O'Rourke, 2015).

1.1.3 The research question

Meetings take place in all organizations and while findings associated with meetings (plural) are reported in organizational literature, examining meetings collectively as the focus of research effort is particularly rare. The research question is therefore oriented towards developing a theoretical perspective on the contribution of meetings collectively to organizations.
The Research Question is:

How do organizational meetings collectively contribute to the constitution of the organizations in which they take place?

Implicit in this question is an assumption and a question in equal measure. The assumption is whether (or not) there is a basis to consider meetings collectively. The question follows, regarding how and what contribution meetings collectively may make to their organizations. Both are explored and expanded through the research objectives.

1.1.4 Research objectives

The research objectives are focused on expanding the research question to interrogate the assumption that meetings are in some way collectively agential involving a contribution that is more than the sum of their parts, and then to address the explicit question of how such contribution arises. Fulfilling these research objectives improves our understanding of the agency of meetings collectively (Schwartzman, 2015) and how they contribute to the constitution of organizations. The research objectives are:

RO 1. To conceptualize meetings as a collective organizational phenomenon.

RO 2. To explore the systemic and processual nature of organizational meetings collectively.

RO 3. To examine the contribution of meetings collectively to organizational sensemaking.

RO 4. To identify mechanisms through which meetings collectively contribute to the constitution of organizations.

RO 5. To develop a theoretical proposition to account for the agency of organizational meetings collectively.

The initial focus is on developing an abductive conceptualization of meetings collectively, followed by a more detailed understanding of their contribution to organizational sensemaking (Weick, 1979, p. 130). The subsequent focus is on developing a more detailed understanding of how the agency of meetings collectively is accomplished through communication. The thesis presents a framework arising from the research that reflects the agency of organizational meetings collectively, and concludes by deducing practice implications of considering meetings as a systemic process. Systemic process refers to a combination of attributes drawn from systems and process thinking that are expanded in Chapter 3.
1.1.5 The unit of analysis

In selecting a unit of analysis it was necessary to balance its organizational scale with the ability to remain focused on it throughout the research. The unit of analysis must also reflect the totality of what is being studied and meetings (plural) is insufficiently clear in its meaning to do so in this case. Meetings (as a word or expression) does not convey anything about the range of the meetings being studied, their types or purpose, or how they might relate to each other. This suggests the need for a unit of analysis larger and more general than individual meetings (McPhee & Poole, 2001, p. 527; McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 30), yet more specific than just the plural of meetings. The constraints of language to express the complexity of units of analysis was captured by Vickers (1967, p. 68) when he wrote: “The familiar forms of language conceal from us the extent to which the objects of our attention are not ‘things’ but relations extended in time” (cited in Weick, 1979, p. 42).

To address the research question and to meet the research objectives, the unit of analysis must reflect on meetings as systemic process and focus on those features of meetings that connect them as chains of interaction episodes (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 30). The absence of a single expression in organizational or meetings literature to describe or account for meetings collectively lead me to adopt the expression ‘meetings collectively’, to convey that sub-sets of an organization’s meetings can be considered as a collective and interlinked phenomenon. That is not to say that every meeting is necessarily part of the same collective of meetings, but rather to distinguish a way of conceptualizing meetings that is other than the mere plural of the noun. Accordingly, the unit of analysis for this research is organizational meetings collectively.

1.2 PRACTICE, THEORTICAL AND PHILOSOPIDCAL BACKGROUNDS

1.2.1 Initial practice perspective

At the start of this research, meetings in KT-Inc were viewed as a resource for studying strategy-as-practice and implicitly viewed as sequential and connected events for that purpose (Duffy & O'Rourke, 2012b). As the initial meetings were being recorded and I was asked by meeting participants to comment on the meetings I observed, a broader question recurred without satisfactory answer - if KT-Inc wanted to take a more holistic view of its prolific meetings and sought advice on how to improve them collectively,
what literature would provide guidance to address this question? The distinguishing feature of this self-imposed question is the focus on meetings collectively, rather than thinking of meetings in the plural but treating them as singular events in isolation of each other. Reflective of Littlejohn and Foss’s (2008, p. 7) ‘Stages of Inquiry’, and mindful of my observer-participant role in KT-Inc, Figure 1.1 provides an initial view of the interplay of theory-consultant-client implicit in a question (Duffy & O’Rourke, 2012b, p. 27) that strongly influenced the direction and approach to this research.

![Figure 1.1 - Theory-Client-Consultant relationship](image)

1.2.2 From ontological certainty towards processual becoming

In spite of decades of scholarship related to organizations, management theorists, sociologists and other scholars have not reached consensus on what to take into account in defining organizations (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 73). It is beyond the scope of this limited work to offer or try to defend any particular definition of an organization, but it is necessary to provide an indication of the meaning of organizations as they are referred to in this thesis. Scott (2003, p. 25) uses three different definitions for organizations, necessary to underpin his analysis of organizations as rational, natural and open systems. However, as a general definition he suggests that most analysts have conceived of organizations as ‘social structures created by individuals to support the collaborative pursuit of specific goals’ (Scott, 2003, p. 11 italics in original). This broad assertion is sufficient to my purpose in this thesis.
Organizations have taken on a bewildering array of types and forms, from public to privately owned, from non-Governmental Organizations to community voluntary groups, from exceptionally large corporations to sole traders, or from complex networks to simple family businesses. Notwithstanding this level of diversity, four common features of organizations are central to guiding this research and to the development of theoretical and empirical insights from it. In general, organizations depend on some form of interrelations and connectivity between people or entities (Weick, 1979); they require some form of shared sensemaking among members (Weick, 1995); they involve communications in many forms, but always at an inter-personal level (Taylor & Van Every, 2000); and meetings are habitual and routine events that support such formative activity taking place (Schwartzman, 1989). It is not suggested that these four organizational attributes are the only attributes common to or taking place within organizations: rather they are the four aspects common to both meetings and organizations that are explored in detail to develop a contribution about how meetings collectively contribute to the constitution of organizations.

Max Weber is acknowledged as the founder of modern organization studies from his work on analysing bureaucracy (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 22). Organizations could be considered to lie on a spectrum ranging from monocratic, formal bureaucracy to collectivized democracy (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979), neither extreme of which is realistically achievable, and both of which are reflected to some degree in the general hybrid nature of organizations (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979, p. 510). The emergence of organizations along such a spectrum is accomplished through what Chia (1996, p. 36) calls an ontology of becoming, or ‘becoming-realism’, in which he emphasizes the primacy of process. Weick (1979) is recognised for his seminal work in shifting the focus of organization studies towards the processes of organizing and away from the previous focus on organizations as reified ontological certainties. This shift represented a development of organizational epistemology rather than ontology (Weick, 1979, p. 235). His theory of organizing was firmly based on processes that could be considered to ‘unfold’ the organization (Weick, 1979, p. 235), described as ‘organizational becoming’ (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002) in the context of ongoing organizational change.
1.2.3 From mind constructions towards organizational ontology.

Weick (1979) made extensive reference to the concept of ‘cause maps’, a variant of ‘cognitive maps’ (Bougon, 1992; Weick & Bougon, 2001), to help explain how people made sense of the organizations around them. People generate ‘cause maps’ as summaries of the causal connections within their environment, which are then superimposed on experiences (Weick, 1979, p. 140) to make sense of that experience. Cause maps render an organization into mental form(s) that allow further and future sensemaking to take place. Since no two individuals generate exactly the same cause maps defining a particular ontological version of an organization, it follows that an organization is perceptually unique to each individual. This leaves us with the persistent question – can there ever be just one tangible expression of an organization as a complete or whole entity, comprising a definable set of discrete elements? It is how such elements are connected to each other through organizational practices, in combination with the use or application of mental models or cause maps that come to define an organization as an ontological and epistemic whole.

Significantly, Weick (1979, p. 149) noted that cause maps were inventions and not discoveries, in the same way that topographical maps are representations of a landscape and not the landscape itself (p. 249). Another important feature of using maps to represent topography is that territorial boundaries exist as a result of the maps we produce and not as an intrinsic part of the territory being mapped (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 290), an idea equally applicable to organizational boundaries. But unlike topographical maps, ‘cause maps’ as representations of our experienced reality are as much predecessors of experience that help create reality as successors of experience that reflect reality. As particular cause maps become more aligned in the minds of different people within the same organization, they can exert increasing influence on what the organization will become. This pattern of organizational emergence moves ever closer to such ‘maps’ actually becoming the territory, since unlike cartographers of geographic landscapes, the organizational map makers are also the builders of the associated organizational landscapes (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 290; Weick & Bougon, 2001, p. 313).

Weick (1979, p. 130) identified enactment-selection-retention as key phases of the unfolding sensemaking processes that lead to organization. To the extent that the ontological artefacts of organization are sought in the enactment-selection-retention cycles of organizational becoming (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002), they are most likely to be
found in the retention phases of sensemaking (Weick, 1979, p. 235). In this research, meetings are considered essential but also partial ontological elements of this enactment-selection-retention cycle and their place in and contribution to that cycle will be explored in the analysis in Chapter 7.

1.2.4 The guiding philosophical perspective.

A social constructionist view of reality pays particular attention to the ways in which discursive interactions between people as organizational participants, and between people and their environment, come to recursively shape both organization and environment (Alvesson, 2009; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2008, p. 59). It also accommodates examination of systemic relationships to understand the environment being studied. The role of the ‘participant observer’ (Pacanowsky, 1988, p. 359) is accommodated within a constructionist philosophy, as opposed to treating the researcher as objective or detached under a positivist philosophy (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008, p. 59; Van de Ven, 2007, p. 39). Accordingly, this research is primarily influenced by a social constructionist perspective (Alvesson, 2009; Shotter, 2006).

1.2.5 The meetings literature

Meetings as a topic of study have not attracted a dedicated literature in their own right. They have been used as research resources in a very wide range of applications (Dittrich, Guerard, & Seidl, 2011, p. 3) but have only recently become the topic of more focused research (Allen et al., 2015b). This represents a challenge to position research on meetings collectively in a particular literature when it draws from such a necessarily wide base. Accordingly, Olien et al. (2015, p. 15) guide meetings’ researchers to link their research to whatever bodies of literature are most relevant to their research question.

Notwithstanding the diversity of research domains associated with current meetings literature (Olien et al., 2015), Chapter 2 reviews the primary meetings literature, providing a consolidated view of the historical research on meetings as a research topic, as well as the current state of the art on meeting science research (Allen et al., 2015b). Chapter 2 identifies a gap in the meetings literature relating to the agency of organizational meetings collectively, to which the research makes a primary contribution.
1.3 THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Due to limited literature on meetings as a collective phenomenon there is little direct guidance on appropriate methodologies to pursue such study. The relative dearth of literature treating meetings collectively as the unit of analysis prompted the initial abductive phase (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 65) of developing a theoretical perspective on meetings at a holistic level. Initially, what Nicolini (2009) referred to as a ‘zoomed out’ focus was adopted, using theoretical tools appropriate to developing a broad conception of meetings collectively. However, in proposing a new conception for an old phenomenon (meetings), a more fine grained analysis was also required to identify the nature and function of essential components that define meetings as a collective phenomenon. This required a ‘zoomed in’ view (Nicolini, 2009) on meetings collectively as the unit of analysis and taking an inductive approach (Putnam & McPhee, 2009, p. 194; Van de Ven, 2007, p. 124) to develop insights from empirical data collected in one organization, for more generalized application in broader settings.

For research grounded in practice, Nicolini’s (2009) approach supports development of an understanding of localised practice and how that practice forms and informs the landscape of daily organizational life. Adopting the contrasting perspectives of being ‘zoomed in’ or ‘zoomed out’ requires “switching theoretical lenses and following, or trailing, the connections between practices” (p. 1392).

This duality of focus prompted the use of distinct but complementary systemic process and CCO analytical lenses. Systems, process and sensemaking literature (Chapter 3) informed the zoomed-out perspective as analysed in Chapter 7. The literature associated with the Communicative Constitution of Organizations (CCO) (Chapter 4), which closely reflects many aspects of the three perspectives from Chapter 3, was used to inform the more fine grained zoomed-in analysis of Chapter 8.

Chapter 5 initially considers the ongoing debate surrounding the macro versus micro perspectives on organizations, before explaining the methodology adopted. An outline is given of the iterative cycles required to develop a new conceptualization of meetings collectively, using abductive, inductive and deductive approaches as appropriate to each phase of the theory development. The generalisability of the research is considered in the context of the source, selection and collection of the research data, which is then elaborated in more detail. A short section of Chapter 5 then reviews the activities and challenges associated with being a participant observer in the research setting (Pacanowsky, 1988). Chapter 5 finishes by briefly setting out the details of
Discourse Analysis (DA) as both methodology and method (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), which is used for the data analysis (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In the closing Chapter 10, a deductive approach (Putnam & McPhee, 2009, p. 194: p194; Van de Ven, 2007, p. 120) is used to speculate, project and propose some of the practice implications that arise from the theoretical perspective developed in the research.

The data for the research were collected in one company and Chapter 6 describes its industrial and organizational context. The combination of global and national economic climates, along with a more detailed description of KT-Inc itself, provides a context and framework to guide the generalisability of the research findings and also the wider applicability of any meeting practices that are derived from it. Where the first half of Chapter 6 elaborates the sectoral and company context, the second half (re)presents the data in both systemic and processual formats. This prompted the initial abductive conceptualization of meetings collectively as systemic process, as presented at the end of Chapter 6, setting the scene for the zoomed-out analysis of the data in Chapter 7. The data analysis is initially focused through a sensemaking lens, which informed the development of the Systemic Meetings Model (SMM) reported at the end of Chapter 7. The SMM was subsequently enhanced using CCO to inform the zoomed-in analysis of the meetings data in Chapter 8.

1.4 GUIDING ZOOMED-OUT ANALYSIS

Figure 1.2 provides an overview of the thesis structure, showing the foundation of meetings literature as part of the wider context of Organizational Studies. The diagram then shows how different literatures inform the bifocal analysis and how the research contributes back into the different literature bases.
Chapter 3 reviews the literature associated with systems thinking, process thinking and sensemaking. Both systems thinking and processual thinking provide rich theoretical foundations on their own that could be applied to study meetings. However, due to the relative dearth of literature treating meetings collectively as the unit of analysis, I argue that combining complementary aspects of these two knowledge domains offers an appropriate foundation on which to develop an initial abductive theoretical perspective on meetings collectively.

1.4.1 A systems perspective

General systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1969) is predicated on the study of 'wholeness' (p. 37), in which the connections and interactions between parts, together with the discrete parts themselves, contribute to making up a whole entity (p. 54). Where reductionism may examine discrete parts of a whole, systems thinking takes
account of how constituent parts are ordered, how they connect with and influence each other, how control is achieved and how elements are hierarchically related. It is also concerned with the idea of purpose (Meadows, 2009, p. 11) as one defining feature of a system.

In the context of social systems, the connections between system elements can be defined broadly but not exclusively as language-based communication (Luhmann, 2013, p. 87). The combination of system elements, along with the modalities of connections between those elements, provides the basis for a system to produce emergent outputs (Checkland & Scholes, 1999, p. 24) that are more than the sum of its individual parts (Meadows, 2009, p. 12; von Bertalanffy, 1969, p. 55). Systemic thinking is a general world view or ‘Weltanschauung’ (Checkland & Scholes, 1999, p. 35; Van de Ven, 2007, p. 48) through which to view meetings collectively and provides concepts that are applied to study meetings, without ascribing literal ‘system’ status to those meetings, either individually or collectively.

1.4.2 A processual perspective

In his seminal work Process and Reality, Alfred North Whitehead (Whitehead, 1927/1978, p. Preface xiii) focuses his contribution on the becoming, being and relatedness of actual entities. Later, Whitehead (1938/1968) preferences patterns of relationships over numerical or quantitative relationships (p. 47) but significantly asserts that “nothing is finally understood until its reference to process has been understood” (p. 46). At the centre of processual thinking is the temporal evolution of sequentially connected phenomena (Hernes, 2014; Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013; Langley & Tsoukas, 2010) which define the past, present and future states of entities as an ongoing flux of perpetual change.

A disposition towards processual thinking is inextricably linked to systemic thinking (Rescher, 1996, p. 37), displaying a tendency to view processes as constituents of systemic wholes in which macro-processes are instrumental in ordering micro processes to constitute whole entities. Importantly, neither systemic nor processual thinking conceives boundaries as absolute (Scott, 2003, p. Chapter 8). Both acknowledge the impossibility of defining where processes might start or finish with respect to constituting whole entities which cannot be defined by impermeable boundaries.
Meetings collectively at once display characteristics of both a systemic and processual nature and it is not appropriate to claim the pre-eminence of one over the exclusion of the other. The overlap of both, what I will refer to as a systemic process perspective, guides a new way to conceptualize meetings collectively as agential links in processual meeting streams and constituent building blocks in an organizational whole.

1.4.3 Sensemaking and meetings

Sensemaking is a ubiquitous phenomenon and has been researched in a diverse range of organizational contexts such as organizational change (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Whittle, Housley, Gilchrist, Mueller, & Lenney, 2015), industrial accidents (Weick, 1988, 1990), natural disasters (Weick, 1993), medical misadventure (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2009) and managerial identity (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Whittle, Mueller, Gilchrist, & Lenney, 2016). Sensemaking refers to the processes of enactment, selection and retention that help to create organizations (Weick, 1979). Weick considers ‘talk’ as the basic sensemaking device to discover thinking (1979, p. 166) in creating consensually validated enacted environments (1979, p. 250).

Meetings combine organizational talk and sensemaking (Boden, 1994, 1997; Schwartzman, 1986, 1989) and in the broadest sense, Scott, Allen, Rogelberg, and Kello (2015, p. 35) identify sensemaking as one of five specific theoretical lenses through which to conceptualize the role of organizational meetings. Sensemaking is a pervasive and persistent feature common to all meetings and consequently provides the wider analytical lens for the zoomed-out analysis of meetings.

1.5 GUIDING ZOOMED-IN ANALYSIS

Communication does not always just reference reality but also acts to constitute it, especially those aspects of reality (co-)created by humans, their actions and their interactions with the material objects around them. Daily discourse names or identifies those who lead the organization and its sub-units, creates its strategic and operational practices, and controls its processes (Boden, 1994; Schwartzman, 1989; Scott, Shanock, & Rogelberg, 2012). Chapter 4 reviews in detail the literature associated with the Communicative Constitution of Organizations (CCO), an emerging sub-field combining communication and organization studies (Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011; Schoeneborn et al., 2014). Key concepts associated with communication
flows (McPhee & Zaug, 2000), social systems theory (Luhmann, 2006d; Schoeneborn, 2011b) and the agency of discourse and texts within organizations (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Cooren, 2004a; Hardy, Palmer, & Phillips, 1999; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Taylor & Robichaud, 2004a) are reviewed as the basis for the zoomed-in analysis of the data.

The meaning of agency in the context of the thesis is also reviewed in Chapter 4, reflecting on the distinction between agency as understood by the Montreal School versus the Giddensian view of agency (Giddens 1984, p.9) more favoured by the Structuration School of CCO. While Gidden’s concept of “the duality of structure” (Giddens 1984, p.25) will be used in the discussion in Chapter 10, the Montreal School’s understanding of agency will be used in the analysis in Chapters 7 and 8.

The role of discourse in organizational systems and processes can be explored using tools created, adopted and adapted by the CCO approach (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009; Clark, Cooren, Cornelissen, & Kuhn, 2008; Cooren et al., 2011; Kuhn, 2014; McPhee & Zaug, 2000, 2009; Schoeneborn, 2011b; Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Such CCO tools are used in Chapter 8 as a more fine-grained analytical lens to examine the agency of meetings collectively. The analysis is structured using McPhee and Zaug’s (2000) four flows framework (4-Flows) to consider how meetings collectively contribute to ‘membership negotiation’, ‘reflexive self-structuring’, ‘activity coordination’ and ‘institutional positioning’. The analysis is augmented by the use of specific concepts such as ventriloquism and immutable mobiles from the Montreal School and autopoiesis and decision paradox from the Luhmannian School of CCO.

The analysis identifies the modalities of connectivity between meetings, and in elaborating their contribution to the 4-Flows, identifies the basis on which meetings collectively contribute to the communicative constitution of organization (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009b; Schoeneborn et al., 2014).

1.6 RESEARCH FINDINGS AND CONTRIBUTION

The consolidated research findings, derived from the analysis in Chapters 7 and 8, are presented in Chapter 9. The research focused on identifying the agency of organizational meetings collectively and broadly speaking, meetings are shown to be systemic in relation to the wider organization and processual in relation to each other. However, this very broad summary hides important details about the modalities of meeting connections, the temporal impact of meetings collectively, and distinctive...
characteristics of how meetings collectively are utilised, all of which reflect their collective agency. Chapter 9 will expand on each of these categories of findings in turn and synthesize them into a Meetings as Systemic Process (MaSP) Framework. The MaSP framework is the primary contribution to the meetings literature. As a synthesis of the outcome of the zoomed-out and zoomed-in analysis, the key features associated with MaSP are:

- the application of holonic thinking - consideration of meetings collectively rather than as individual or discrete events;
- hierarchy between meetings - how individual meetings and groups of meetings may be discursively ordered or connected, reflecting a transient structure around which organizations may emerge, develop or decline;
- temporal inter-connectedness - considering connections between meetings, both past and future, along with the temporal ordering that meetings collectively bring to organizations;
- communication and control - focusing on communication as the primary means of connecting meetings to each other and the wider organization, and also of influencing and controlling the impact of meetings collectively on the wider organization.

1.7 RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Chapter 10 begins by summarising the research, before reviewing the conclusions and associated contribution to the relevant literature associated with meetings. This leads to elaboration on the practice implications of the research findings and conclusions and consideration of the potential for future research arising from it.

Meetings are systemic events that constitute and reconstitute organizations, and are indispensable features in defining how our organizations come to be as they are (Hansen & Allen, 2015; Schwartzman, 1986). Is it possible to even conceive of how organizations could be created or sustained without meetings? Developing a greater understanding of their collective agency will improve our understanding of one of the most ubiquitous features of every organization and how they contribute to the constitution of organizations. Through improved understanding, we create the possibility to develop ways of improving how we use them as formative organization elements. We can consider alternative and less time-consuming ways to achieve the
same outcomes, or perhaps use the same amount of time in meetings but to more productive effect. This research contributes to scholarship on organizational meetings in that it:

- Improves and expands our understanding of meetings as one of the most prolific features and activities in organizations.
- Extends the conceptualization of meetings beyond the individual-centric focus of extant meetings scholarship (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 740), viewing them as a collective phenomenon, exhibiting individual and collective agency.
- Elaborates meetings collectively as meso-level organizational events where sensemaking (Enactment, Selection and Retention) takes place as part of an ongoing, whole-organization activity.
- Demonstrates how meetings collectively provide a communicative framework around which organization can be (re)constituted (or deconstituted) through MaSP.
- Extends how features of CCO theory can account for the contribution of meetings to the communicative constitution of organizations.
- Provides guidance for practice to implement MaSP.
CHAPTER 2

THE NATURE OF MEETINGS
2 THE NATURE OF MEETINGS

Meetings as a social form, and indeed as formative of many social structures and societies, have been a central feature of human interaction for millennia (Schwartzman, 1989; Tracy & Dimock, 2004). Schwartzman’s (1989) seminal book, The Meeting, synthesised a long and rich history of meetings drawn from diverse cultural and geographic perspectives, reflecting the significance and importance of meetings as forms of social interactions. Her book represented a key milestone in the scientific study of meetings but it was not until the mid-2000’s that a recognisable body of literature emerged focusing on meetings as a research topic in their own right (Allen et al., 2015b, p. 4; Tracy & Dimock, 2004, p. 135).

This chapter reviews the literature associated with meetings in their organizational context. The chapter begins with a reflection on the ubiquitous nature of organizational meetings but also draws attention to the relative dearth of research on them. Section 2.2 considers definitions of meetings and the different ways in which they have been typified, while Section 2.3 considers how meetings are positioned on the micro-macro spectrum of organizational practices. Until recently, meetings have been used more as research resources than research topics, which is discussed in more detail in Sections 2.4 and 2.5 respectively. This leads to identifying a gap in research on organizational meetings as identified in Section 2.6, before the chapter conclusion.

2.1 THE UBIQUITY OF MEETINGS

Dittrich et al. (2011, p. 3) identified five broad academic disciplines within which meetings have been studied in the past, but the topic of interest or unit of analysis had been more focused on the discipline rather than on meetings. Where cultural anthropology focused on the cultural aspects of meetings and their role in cultural settings (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 309), political science was more interested in political behaviour within meetings (Tepper, 2004). Communications scholars have interest in meetings due to their ubiquity as sites and surfaces of organizational communication processes (Taylor & Van Every, 2000), as much as for their utility as communication tools within business (Asmuß & Svennevig, 2009). Sociologists have viewed meetings as products of the societies in which they take place as well as contributors to the development of those societies (Boden, 1994; Schwartzman, 1989). Within management and organization disciplines, meetings have been used as research resources to study other topics such as strategy (Hodgkinson, Whittington, Johnson, &
Schwarz, 2006; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Johnson, Prashantham, Floyd, & Bourque, 2010), use of language (Castor, 2007), power dynamics (McNulty, Pettigrew, Jobome, & Morris, 2011) or decision making (Clifton, 2009), rather than as the focal topic of research themselves.

Organizational meetings as the topic of research have been under-researched and under-reported (Allen et al., 2015b; Boden, 1994; Schwartzman, 1989; Scott et al., 2012), particularly in the context of management and organization studies. Treating meetings as the topic of research started with Schwartzman (1986) and to date has accumulated a relatively thin literature base (Allen, et al., 2014, p. 795). The most recent and comprehensive collection of literature dealing with meetings as the topic of research (Allen et al., 2015b) bridges national, disciplinary and methodological borders to bring together meetings-focused research from seven identified disciplines (p. 5). In a comprehensive and rigorous approach to examining the science of meetings, they provide a collation of extant meetings literature and research, and chart future directions for studying one of the most prolific social practices of organizations.

The ubiquitous nature of organizational meetings is well attested in organizational literature (Allen, et al., 2014; Mintzberg, 1971; Olien et al., 2015; Tobia & Becker, 1990; Tracy & Dimock, 2004; Volkema & Niederman, 1996). With the development and proliferation of more advanced communications technology, the incidence of organizational meetings might have been expected to decline, but the opposite appears to be the case. Tobia and Becker (1990, p. 37) reported that 72% of business leaders experienced a progressive increase in the number of organizational meetings to be attended and 49% expected that meeting frequency would increase in the future. More recent research estimates suggest that between 7% and 15% of most organizations budgets are devoted to meetings (Rogelberg et al., 2012). Time spent at meetings is estimated to average six hours per week (per person) and may be even greater in larger organizations (Allen et al., 2012), with up to 25 million meetings per day in the United States alone and that number is expected to grow based on current trends (Olien et al., 2015, pp. 15-16). Meetings have always been with us and in spite of, or perhaps even because of our technological development, look like they are here to stay.

We may reasonably speculate whether meetings reflect the cultural aspects of the societies or organizations in which they take place, or if they are essential constitutive elements and key building blocks defining those societies and organizations. Schwartzman (1989, p. 11) holds that meetings contribute recursively to both, relying
on Giddens' (1984) structuration theory to support her view. Allen et al. (2014, p. 800) identify that particular types of organizations hold meetings of similar type, raising the question – to what extent do organizations determine the meeting types they use, or do the types of meetings aggregately determine or characterize the type of organization that emerges over time. The recursive characteristics (Giddens, 1984, p. xxiii) of meetings are central to developing a greater understanding of how they contribute collectively to the constitution of organization, while being created from the resources within those same organizations (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 165). Such a recursive relationship between meetings and organizations is central to this thesis.

It is popularly held that meetings may be often viewed in a negative light (Allen, Beck, et al., 2014, p. 795; Rogelberg et al., 2006, p. 83; Tracy & Dimock, 2004, p. 143), yet their frequency and the time spent in them do not have an overtly negative impact on the job satisfaction of workers in organizations (Rogelberg, Scott, & Kello, 2007, p. 18). In terms of productivity, some staff surveys indicate that slightly over 50% of respondents find their meetings a sufficiently productive use of their time but equally indicate that there is room for improvement (Rogelberg et al., 2007, p. 19).

The pervasiveness of meetings is equally matched by the diversity of the purposes they serve. They provide an integral social function that in some instances reflects the very essence of the organizations in which they take place (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 39). In developing an integrative framework on meetings and organizational strategy practice, Dittrich et al. (2011, p. 6) identify five macro-level functions of meetings as: coordination, cognitive, political, symbolic and social, which are accomplished through micro-level practices associated with the initiation, conduct and termination of individual meeting events (Hendry & Seidl, 2003; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008).

2.2 MEETING DEFINITIONS AND TYPES

It is rare to find a single definition of any social phenomenon that is uncontested or universally acceptable to the communities of researchers that might research it. While meetings are no exception to this general rule (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003, p. 56; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2007, p. 8), the definitions of what constitutes a meeting seem less contentious and diverse than might apply to other phenomena. Boden (1994, p. 84), for example, defines meetings as planned gatherings of which participants are forewarned and in which the participants have some role to play, while the gathering itself has some reason or purpose for taking place at a specified time/place within an
organization. For the purpose of studying meetings as an organizational phenomenon, perhaps one of the simplest, earliest and most enduring definitions of a meeting is provided by Schwartzman (1989). Describing meetings as “a specific type of focused interaction” (p. 7), she defines a meeting specifically as “a communicative event involving three or more people who agree to assemble for a purpose ostensibly related to the functioning of an organization or group” (p. 61).

Parsing this definition draws attention to a number of points that merit further comment. Referring to a meeting as ‘a communicative event’ suggests that the absence of ‘communication’ would render a gathering of people as being undefinable as a meeting, even if the question of what constitutes ‘communication’ is rather broad. Reference to ‘involving three or more people’ immediately prompts the inference that two people meeting together would not constitute a meeting! If that is the case, one must speculate as to what a ‘meeting’ of two people might be or how it might be classified? Schwartzman offers no rationale for the apparent exclusion of two people from her definition, which is not without contestation (Tracy & Dimock, 2004, p. 129), and perhaps it is an artificial imposition of the analyst to constrain the scope of what might be studied as a meeting. Given that two people can fulfil the other criteria in Schwartzman’s definition, it is curious that such ‘meetings’ seem to be excluded.

Rogelberg et al. (2006), also referencing Schwartzman, provide a modified definition of a meeting as “a scheduled (i.e., prearranged) gathering of two or more individuals for the purpose of a work-related interaction (Schwartzman, 1986) that takes place either on or off site” (p. 86). Their definition incorporates two or more participants without detracting from the simplicity or comprehensiveness of Schwartzman’s definition.

Schwartzman’s use of the phrase ‘agree to assemble’ in her definition suggests that people should generally exercise free choice to attend, notwithstanding often heard complaints from participants about how much time is wasted at meetings (Tobia & Becker, 1990, p. 34), giving the implicit impression that participants might prefer to be somewhere else.

The use of ‘for a purpose’ in the definition raises the possibility for meetings to be more specifically defined in terms of the purposes they serve. For example, strategy workshops are a particular type of meeting, held for a particular purpose, and attract their own specific definition (Hodgkinson, Johnson, Whittington, & Schwartz, 2005; Johnson et al., 2010). Defining meetings in the context of the purposes they serve
or according to the groups they serve such as committees, boards or councils (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 62), leads to the development of meeting typologies to distinguish between them.

Tracy and Dimock (2004, p. 130) reviewed a range of ways in which meetings might be ‘typed’, but it is first worth reflecting on the distinction Allen, Beck, et al. (2014, p. 793) draw between typology and taxonomy in this particular context. In general, typologies “appear to provide a parsimonious framework for describing complex organizational forms” (Doty & Glick, 1994, p. 230) and bring mental order to how we view things (Hambrick, 1984, p. 27). Typologies are considered to be conceptually-driven classifications reflecting scholarly agendas, in contrast to taxonomies which are derived from quantitative analysis of empirical data to develop classification schemes (Allen, Beck, et al., 2014, p. 794; Hambrick, 1984, p. 28). In defining typologies as “conceptually derived interrelated sets of ideal types”, Doty and Glick (1994, p. 235) argue that properly structured and derived typologies can serve as both grand and mid-level-theories, so long as they identify falsifiable relationships between constructs.

Meeting typologies as identified in the literature seem to fall short of the rigour envisaged by Doty and Glick (1994) to be considered theories of meetings, but the available typologies go some way towards description of meetings such that more detailed associated theories may be formulated. At its broadest level, two types of meetings have been identified - scheduled and unscheduled meetings (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2007, p. 8; Mintzberg, 1971, pp. B-98; Schwartzman, 1989, p. 63). A similar but differently-focused typology classifies meetings as formal or informal (Boden, 1994, p. 85; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2007, p. 8), although in this case differentiating one from the other is more problematic. Focusing on the primary business goals and expected outcomes of meetings, Holmes and Stubbe (2003, p. 63) identify three main meeting types that reflect the temporal orientation of the content of meetings - planning, or prospective meetings (forward-oriented); reporting, or retrospective meetings (backward-oriented); task-oriented, or problem-solving meetings (present-oriented). A further variation of meeting types is routine meetings versus “away-days” (Wodak, Kwon, & Clarke, 2011), a typology in which away-days tend to be closely associated with strategy development and strategic planning (Johnson et al., 2010) or some other special purpose.

Using the purpose of meetings to focus quantitative analysis of empirical data enabled Allen et al., (2014, p. 799) to develop a taxonomy of meetings comprising sixteen
purpose categories. Categories ranged from meetings dealing with a single issue about one individual, up to the introduction of new products or services for the whole organization. Their second order analysis of these sixteen purpose categories identified just two meta-taxonomic categories which they termed ‘instrumental’ and ‘content’ (p. 805). The instrumental category of meetings focuses on accomplishing some task while the content category focuses on discussion of some topic.

As evidenced from this brief discussion on categorising meetings, it is clear that there are numerous ways to categorize them for the purpose of more detailed analysis, in part reflecting the diverse ways in which they are used. The choice of categorization depends on the purpose to be served by the categorization employed. Whatever categorization is adopted, meetings serve as locations for micro-level, interpersonal communication in which participants make sense of their surroundings (Scott et al., 2015) and by doing so, contribute to the ongoing constitution of their organization at a macro level. These two themes provide the contrasting and complementary analytical lenses through which the meetings data in this research are analysed in more detail.

2.3 MEETINGS AND THE MICRO-MACRO DIVIDE.

Meetings viewed as meso-level organizational events provide a recurring location for micro conversations while simultaneously embodying the macro organization as a whole (Boden, 1994; Schwartzman, 1989). While there is considerable divergence in the meaning of the expressions ‘micro’ and ‘macro’, broadly speaking micro refers to interactions on an interpersonal level, and macro phenomena refers to activities that transcend groups or organizations, while meso phenomena are those considered to take place at the intersection of both (Scott et al., 2015, p. 24). In this context, Schwartzman (1989, p. 39) characterized meetings as “the organization writ small”, while Weick (1995, p. 144) sees them as creators of an organizational infrastructure that creates sense. Both perspectives reflect the central role of meetings in linking individual people with each other, their communities, groups, organizations, states or nations of which they are part (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 37). Meetings could be seen as a recurring discursive bridge between the micro conversations of individuals and the macro interactions and structures that constitute organizations and societies. Adopting organizational meetings as the research topic and meetings collectively as a specific unit of analysis provides an opportunity to improve our understanding of the processes involved in connecting micro discourses with macro organizational development.
Weick (1979, p. 43) identified the increased possibility to "meddle the organization into a mess" if we fail to adequately identify or understand the processual flows inherent in organizational realities. To the extent that meetings are considered part of such inherent processual flows and use considerable amounts of organizational time and resources (Allen et al., 2012; Rogelberg et al., 2006; Rogelberg et al., 2012), failure to optimise their use increases the risk of them contributing more to organizational mess than to its success. The multi-purpose nature of meetings (Allen et al., 2014, p. 798; Holmes & Stubbe, 2003, p. 63) ensures they play a significant and repeated role in most organizational activity. As sites for engaging so many organizational activities at micro or macro levels, meetings should be more comprehensively understood to avoid them contributing to the potential mess envisaged by Weick (1979).

Boden (1994, p. 1) makes talk and its analysis the central topic of her thesis that organizations are "locally organized and interactionally achieved contexts of decision making". She sets out to show how the structuring of organizations is located in such talk and rejects any micro-macro distinction in the makeup of organizations (p. 5). Using analysis of micro events (talk) to show how they account for a macro level phenomenon (organization), while at the same time denying any distinction between the two seems somewhat incongruous. As with Boden (1994), Cooren, Thompson, Canestraro, and Bodor (2006) reference concepts from Actor Network Theory (Latour, 2005) to also argue for a bottom up construction of organizational order involving the agency of non-human actors, without the need to call on or try to justify any sense of micro-macro dualism. However, Cooren (2004a) also uses conversation analysis to demonstrate how (micro) conversation in a particular meeting reflects a process of collective minding, contributing to a macro-level collective mind that Weick and Roberts (1993, p. 358) presumed to be an inherent feature of most organizations. In this instance, Cooren seems to embrace rather than eschew the notion of a micro-macro spectrum, engaging a debate in which McPhee, Myers, and Trethewey (2006) assert that Cooren's analysis of micro-level conversation is neither necessary nor sufficient to account for macro organization from such micro interactions.

While the positions adopted by Boden (1994), Cooren et al. (2006), and Cooren (2004a) and McPhee et al. (2006) are not directed exclusively towards meetings, meetings consistently provide settings in which such micro organizational discourses occur, that contribute to the development of macro organization structure. Meetings in this context could be viewed as communicative cross roads at which organizational fellow travellers
periodically meet, make sense of their journey to date and where future directional choices are talked into being. Where the Cooren (2004; 2006) – McPhee et al. (2004) debate focuses at the two ends of the micro-discursive and macro-constitutive spectrum, the analysis of meetings collectively in this thesis improves our understanding of how that micro-macro divide is bridged through deployment of organizational meetings.

2.4 MEETINGS AS RESEARCH RESOURCE.

As has been noted earlier, much of the literature associated with meetings treats them as research resources in the study of other phenomena, rather than as a topic of research in their own right. Notwithstanding this limitation, such research has provided valuable insights into the utility of meetings and also their internal workings. For example, Volkema and Niederman (1996) explored the use and impact of written and oral communication within meetings, which are a common feature of virtually all meetings. Other research has also studied a wide range of phenomena that routinely occur in meetings, including the micro-processes and discourses within meetings (Karreman & Alvesson, 2001; Samra-Fredericks, 2000a, 2003); decision-making within meetings (Haug, 2015; Huisman, 2001); the relationship of meetings to organizational strategy (Dittrich et al., 2011; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011); and how discourses within meetings can constitute ‘collective minding’ as a form of ‘organizational intelligence’ (Cooren, 2004a), to name a few. But meetings in themselves have not generally been the subject of investigation in management literature (Dittrich et al., 2011).

The relationship between meetings collectively and collective mind (Weick & Roberts, 1993) was explored in some detail early in this research (Duffy, 2013; Duffy & O'Rourke, 2013b, 2015), but it became clear that such a specific application of meetings collectively presupposed conclusions from the research question that had not yet been answered. Notwithstanding, that early study highlighted two specific concepts and associated language that could be borrowed from collective mind to elaborate the practice implications of the agency of meetings collectively as set out in Chapter 10. ‘Collective mind’ denotes an ability of the entire organization to ‘act with heed’ (Weick & Roberts, 1993, p. 360). Heedfulness is the first expression adopted, which refers to the mutual awareness that exists between constituent parts of a system or organization. It is not a static attribute but an ongoing disposition and approach to inter-relating between system elements. Collective mind “…inheres in the pattern of interrelated
activities among many people” (p. 360). Where collective mind is considered to be ‘located’ in the process of interrelating (p. 365), the level of collective mind is dependent on the degree to which heedfulness is present in interactions and also in the nature of the interactions taking place (p. 366).

The second expression borrowed from Weick and Robert’s work is mindfulness, which in the context of collective mind refers to the degree to which premeditation informs activity that ensures heedful interactions take place (Weick & Roberts, 1993, p. 374). It focuses on self-awareness of both individuals and groups, emphasizing the quality of the attention being paid and its ongoing sustainability (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 1999, p. 37). In this context, mindfulness is not a passive activity but is determined by the nature of activity within the organization. Activity reflects the nature and degree to which members are mindful of others and the organization around them, making activity necessary but not sufficient for mindfulness to be present. Premeditated thought and intent are the other key elements. Where mindfulness might be considered the conceptual and intentional foundation of collective mind, heedful interrelating is the practice foundation on which collective mind is built and sustained.

Ethnographers have often reported on meetings, perhaps because they are such a prevalent occurrence in everyday life, but their focus is more on the observed activities of meeting participants than on the analysis of the meetings they attend. In so far as meetings come to be the focus of ethnographers’ research attention, the emphasis is often on examining the micro-discursive practices which make up the interpersonal interactions within these meetings, (Samra-Fredericks, 2000a, 2000b). Conversation analysis is often the preferred methodology for such research. Samra-Fredericks (2000a) provides a good example of this approach in using ‘lamination’ (Boden, 1994) to illustrate how micro-discourse features observed in meetings may combine to contribute to the macro-organisational environment, but she too did not report on any explicit or deliberate connections between meetings (Samra-Fredericks, 2000a, 2000b, 2003). Boden (1997, p. 6) also adopts an ethnographic approach, relying on conversation analysis to explore how time is reflected in talk as ‘temporal frames’ that support the ordering and conduct of organizational life. She treats meetings as “essential, near-ritual face-to-face exchanges” (Boden, 1997, p. 8) in which such temporal ordering takes place. But meetings are again a research resource in which to observe peoples’ interactions rather than being the subject or focus of her research.
Organizational strategy is another prevalent research topic in which meetings prominently feature as supporting cast members but not as the central performers of research interest. Focused on strategic planning and the iterative evolution of a strategic plan as a communicative process involving both talk and text, Spee and Jarzabkowski (2011) highlight the specific role that meetings played in enabling the contribution of talk to an organizational planning process. In this instance, the planning process is the common thread linking a large number of meetings within a single organization. Strategy workshops, as a specialised meeting form are explored by Johnson, Prashantham, and Floyd (2006), combining an interest in strategy as topic and workshop as medium for the development of organizational strategy. They focus on how strategy workshops are characterised by rituals, intended to initially remove participants from day to day activity and enter a focused space/time to contemplate strategy, followed by re-engagement of the participants back into the routine daily workings of the organization. While their work accounted for locating strategy workshops within the wider organizational context, the meeting events are still treated more in isolation rather than as integrated or holistic sequences of interconnected events. Duffy (2010) and Duffy and O'Rourke (2014) provide an example of research that initially focused on the strategy-as-practice taking place within a strategy workshop and concluded with identification of David Bohm's particular form of dialogue (Nichol, 1996) to account for the discursive practices that led to a specific workshop outcome. Significantly, in the final turns of that workshop, the participants 'handed off' their topic to be considered and elaborated in the proceedings of another group's meeting, reflecting the initial conception of meetings in this thesis as connected events that could be treated collectively as a unit of analysis in further research.

2.5 MEETINGS AS RESEARCH TOPIC

Hendry and Seidl (2003) and Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008) moved considerably closer to locating meetings as the topic of research, treating them as strategic episodes by drawing on the concept of 'episodes' from Luhmann's social systems theory, one of the three pillars of CCO to be reviewed in more detail in Chapter 4. They particularly focus on how meetings relate to the wider organization in general, while contributing to organizational strategy in particular. In a more systems-oriented approach, Hendry and Seidl (2003) identify three phases within meetings (initiation, conduct and termination) to show how meetings can stand apart from but also be integrated with
organizational activity. Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008) highlight how these three meeting phases establish meetings as distinct ‘episodes’ within the organization’s routine activity, and analyse how the conduct of meetings impacts to stabilize or destabilize the existing strategy of organizations. Their identification of a taxonomy of meeting practices and three different routes that topics could take through meetings was a significant contribution to understanding the internal workings of routine meetings in the particular context of organizational strategy. Their use of data from fifty one meetings enabled identification of a comprehensive range of meeting practices and how they combine to impact on the topics being addressed at individual meetings.

Organizational communication scholars also attest to the significance of meetings as locations enabling the linking of past, present and future of organizations and supporting the translocation of organizational activity across time and space (Cooren, 2015, p. 99). Their particular foci of interest can be multifaceted: a single meeting can be analysed from multiple communicative perspectives (Cooren, 2007; Taylor & Robichaud, 2004b): multiple meetings can be used to examine particular phenomena from a communicative perspective (Castor, 2007; Cooren, Matte, Taylor, & Vasquez, 2007; Wodak et al., 2011); or analytic techniques from communications studies can be adopted to study interactions within meetings (Asmuß, 2015; Asmuß & Svennevig, 2009; Raclaw & Ford, 2015).

In the Cambridge Handbook of Meeting Science, Allen et al. (2015b) characterize their volume as “the first contemporary book to take a scientific look at meetings at work” (p. 4). They structure their volume around pre-meeting activity, activity within meetings, special meeting types, and conclusions and implications for the future study of meetings. Broadly but not exclusively, the contributions to this volume reverse the pattern of research previously described, in that meetings are the focus of the research and insights into other related topics emerge from that research. Examples include the relevance and impact of pre-meeting communication (Kocsis, Vreede, & Briggs, 2015), transnational and virtual meetings (Cichomska, Roe, & Leach, 2015; Eerde & Buengeler, 2015) or the nature and types of consensus decision-making that can occur in meetings (Haug, 2015), to name just a few examples from an extensive body of work. Where meetings have been identified as the specific topic of research, a diverse range of perspectives have been taken. Meeting-focused research is distinguished by placing the meeting at the centre of the research question and the resultant findings point
towards the impact ‘the meeting’ as a form has had on some other aspect of organizational life (Schwartzman, 1986, 1989).

One of the more general themes addressed, when meetings are the research topic, is the broad question of how to improve their performance. Within this area of focus, the research objectives can range from identifying broad ways in which to streamline the efficient running of meetings (Kocsis et al., 2015; Staren & Eckes, 2009; Tobia & Becker, 1990), to improving the return on the investment of time and resources that are committed to meetings (Allen et al., 2008; Rogelberg et al., 2012).

Where the research objectives are more specific and finely focused, ethnographic and conversation-analytic approaches, as previously mentioned, have been used to illuminate the role of meetings in socialising managers and facilitating their interactions (Nielsen, 2009); to examine the detailed practices and significance of how meetings are opened and closed through the chairperson’s and participants’ actions and behaviour (Nielsen, 2013); to negotiate or mediate power relations between managers (Van Praet, 2009); to serve as metaphors for and be reflective of organizational power relations (Tobia & Becker, 1990); or to act as fora in which meeting participants can overtly or covertly exercise direct power and control (McNulty et al., 2011).

Through a more macro-oriented lens, meetings may also be used by organizational leaders as a means to inspire and motivate, rather than as places to wield or impose power autocratically. Wodak et al. (2011) used an abductive approach to identify five discursive strategies employed in the chairing of routine meetings and ‘away days’, both to positive and negative effect, in pursuit of consensus-building processes (Haug, 2015) in a multinational corporation. Looking at team and organizational performance, Kauffeld and Lehmann-Willenbrock (2012) examined the relationship between the processes taking place within meetings and the impact of those meetings on the performance of teams and the organization at large. Mindful of the time invested in meetings, Rogelberg et al. (2006) examined the relationship between the time demands imposed by meetings and its impact on the well-being of employees. This type of research is often used to explore a wider range of options for how to improve meetings with the particular aim of making more efficient use of the time invested in them (Rogelberg et al., 2007; Tobia & Becker, 1990). The influence and impact of meetings on strategy and strategic change provides a further dimension through which the functions and functioning of meetings have been examined (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2007, 2008).
The common thread through these micro or macro approaches to studying meetings is that meetings are placed at the centre of the research agenda and the impact of the meetings on other organizational phenomena or characteristics becomes the primary output of the research effort. While many of these studies use data from multiple meetings, occurring in multiple organizations, to identify common characteristics or impact on the organization, there has been no reference to meetings collectively, in one organization, being used as a unit of analysis or to examine the implications of treating meetings as a collective organizational resource or phenomenon.

Most recently, the extensive contributions to Allen et al.’s (2015b) volume on meeting science largely focus on meetings as individual-centered organizational events, rather than considering meetings collectively (Schwartzman, 2015). At a very broad level, organizations’ disposition towards meetings can be measured and the associated impact on performance can be assessed (Hansen & Allen, 2015, p. 210). Performance, in this context, is understood to mean how the organization operates within itself, rather than its comparative output performance relative to other organizations. The organization’s orientation towards meetings can have considerable impact and can positively or negatively impact the overall performance of the organization (p. 218). Meetings can also have significant psychological effects on participants and reciprocally, the emotional states of meeting participants can be ‘transmitted’ within a group, leading to convergence or divergence of affect (mood or emotion) within meetings (Lei & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015, p. 458). Meetings (collectively) may therefore play significant roles in establishing or altering the collective mood or emotion throughout an organization but this proposition has yet to attract more detailed research attention.

A process orientation towards meetings brings focus to common approaches for planning them (Odermatt, König, & Kleinmann, 2015), facilitating them (Kocsis et al., 2015) or reviewing them (Lacerenza, Gregory, Marshall, & Salas, 2015; Scott, Dunn, Williams, & Allen, 2015), all of which potentially brings a degree of standardisation to conducting meetings, but none of which focus on the agency of meetings collectively.

### 2.6 TOWARD STUDYING MEETINGS COLLECTIVELY

The limitations of meetings research to date is summed up by Schwartzman (2015) in the penultimate chapter of Allen et al. (2015b):

The idea that there are any aspects of meeting functioning that (1) cannot be attributed to individuals, (2) are not actually subject to individual control, and
(3) may not have been intended by anyone participating in the event is almost impossible to consider when operating from the individual-centered viewpoint described here (p740.).

The ‘aspects of meeting functioning’ identified by Schwartzman would be considered emergent properties in the context of systems thinking, and would require a holistic perspective in order to adduce findings about such characteristics of meetings collectively. In identifying that several chapters in Allen et al. (2015b) seemed to challenge the individual-centric view of meetings, Schwartzman implicitly identifies a gap in the extant meetings research and suggests that my discussion on “systematised organizational meetings” (Duffy & O’Rourke, 2015) “...seems to come the closest of all the chapters to conceptualizing meetings as events with agency....”. For future research on meetings she suggests:

This move away from the individual centeredness that has had such a great impact on our thinking about behaviour in organizational and work settings may be one of the most important ideas embedded in several of the chapters in this book, and I would suggest that it be underlined and theorized in more detail in future research. (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 740)

Schwartzman identifies the principal gap to which this research contributes.

Schwartzman’s phrase ‘conceptualizing meetings as events with agency’ also prompts consideration of the semantic distinction between the collective agency of meetings versus the agency of meetings collectively. To make this subtle distinction, Figure 2.1 shows simple watch parts and illustrates their summative agency in forming a mouse, a motorbike or even a watch. In this case, the agency of each individual part is simply added together and they can create different outputs depending on how they are assembled. However, when connected in one specific way, i.e. as a functioning watch, while the parts still exhibit summative agency in forming the watch, more significantly, they exhibit agency collectively by telling the time. None of the parts individually nor any of the other configurations of the parts can achieve such a collective output. The agency of the parts collectively is more than just the aggregate sum of the agency exhibited by each individual part. In this case, time is an emergent output from the agency of the parts collectively.
While Figure 2.1 illustrates how a watch is pre-defined and pre-designed for the specific purpose of telling the time, as we will see from this research, the agency of meetings collectively is emergent and the result of human action not necessarily of human design. We can distinguish more clearly between the collective agency of meetings and the agency of meetings collectively, by considering what the adjective 'collective' qualifies.

To consider the 'collective agency of meetings', if we consider two meetings A and B, that produce respective agency X and Y, then we would say that the collective agency of A and B is simply the sum (X + Y) of their two agencies. Collective qualifies agency and there is no necessity for meetings A and B to be connected in any way in order to account for their combined or collective agency. In an extreme example, the meetings could even be from two unconnected organizations and we could still identify their summative collective agency. In so far as the agency of meetings has been studied to date, it derives from what Schwartzman (2015, p. 740) refers to as an "individual centered viewpoint" and largely reflects the sum of individual meetings’ agency.

Taking the expression ‘the agency of meetings collectively’, we see that ‘collective’ qualifies meetings in the first instance. In order to consider their agency collectively, we must first consider how they function collectively with each other. Agency arises from meetings A and B in combination because they have some form of connection that enables or contributes to the agency that arises from their acting in combination.
and that neither meeting could produce alone. This distinction between collective agency of meetings and the agency of meetings collectively is central to the findings and conclusions of this thesis – that is, that Meetings as Systemic Process exhibit unplanned and un-premeditated emergent agency that is distinct from just the sum of the individual agency of some or all of an organizations meetings.

In all of the research outlined above, while common features across meetings (of the same or different organizations) are used to draw conclusions about meetings, there are no reports of analysis of meetings in one organization being used as a unit of analysis, with a view to identifying if they effect some form of agency collectively. With the exception of Duffy and O'Rourke (2015), the wide-ranging contributions assembled by Allen et al. (2015b) did not explore the concept of deliberate or spontaneous interconnectivity between meetings within the same organization, or the agency that meetings might exhibit collectively. There has been no previous research which analyses specific sequences of meetings as episodic events. The potential origins, impact and implications of latent, emergent or deliberate connectivity between meetings within organizations remains to be addressed in the literature and represents the primary theme of this research.

2.7 CONCLUSION

As meetings form, dissolve and reform on a routinized basis, they represent a key part of the “structuring social context” (Giddens, 1984, p. 71) of organizations. Adopting “the popular metaphor of the theatre” (Whittle, Suhomlinova, & Mueller, 2011), meetings provide theatres in which organizational actors perform, making sense of the organization for themselves and also contributing to the sensemaking processes of the other organizational actors around them. Meetings provide temporary, semi-bounded pools of discourse, accommodating some of the interactional flow (Boden, 1994, p. 153) present in the day to day activities of organizations. This chapter has argued that how meetings are collectively connected is worthy of more detailed examination, to understand meetings as essential constituents of organization. Such an examination requires different theoretical resources and the next chapter marshals such resources from the Systems, Process and Sensemaking literature, while Chapter 4 does the same from the Communicative Constitution of Organizations literature.
CHAPTER 3

SYSTEMIC PROCESS AND SENSEMAKING
SYSTEMIC PROCESS AND SENSEMAKING

Systems and process thinking provide conceptual foundations for the abductive theory development and the bifocal analysis carried out in this research. Initially informing and influencing the abductive conceptualization of organizational meetings, they also directed thinking away from an individual-centered view of meetings (Schwartzman, 2015), focusing on them as a collective organizational resource capable of exhibiting collective agency. The next two sections of this chapter review systems and processual thinking respectively. Later in Chapter 6 I will reflect how these theories influenced the initial development of an abductive conception of meetings as a collective organizational resource.

Meetings are recognised in the literature as primary sites of organizational sensemaking (Boden, 1994; Schwartzman, 1989; Scott et al., 2015). The systemic and processual nature of sensemaking, along with its associated principles and concepts are examined in Section 3.3 to provide a foundation for its relevance and application to study organizational meetings. Sections 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6 will look at the process of sensemaking, requisite variety and sensemaking, and the temporal aspects of sensemaking respectively.

3.1 SYSTEMS THINKING

Systems thinking provides the original Weltanschauung through which I initially explored the inter-connectivity of organizational meetings with a view to conceptualizing and theorizing them as a collective organizational phenomenon. Weltanschauung is a German expression that refers to the way in which an observer views the world in general, which Van de Ven (2007, p. 48) describes as an evolving socio-conceptual framework in the context of developing theory. From an ethnographic viewpoint, adopting different perspectives on what is observed causes us to perceive different ‘truths’ in the situation being observed (Handel, 1982, p. 12 & p.21). The recurring point is that the perspective adopted by the observer is central to any ‘truths’ that might be subsequently reported or claimed (Luhmann, 2013, p. 99).

The different perspectives of early systems scholars such as Alfred North Whitehead, Ludwig von Bertalanffy and Paul A. Weiss were unified in their shared belief that organized complexity should be studied as an integrated whole rather than through reductionist examination of discrete components (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998, p. 5), since
no one component could account for the formation or behaviour of ‘whole’ organisms. Whitehead (1938/1968, p. 109) in particular argues that the whole could be rendered as ‘trivial and accidental’ if too much focus is given to details to create summative meaning of the whole. General systems theory represents “scientific exploration of ‘wholes’ and ‘wholeness’” (von Bertalanffy, 1969, p. preface), and is guided by three underlying principles: (1) hierarchic order, (2) progressive differentiation and (3) feedback processes (Luhmann, 2006d; Meadows, 2009; von Bertalanffy, 1969).

Hierarchy is not denoted by authoritarian structure (Checkland & Scholes, 1999, p. 19) but rather by layers of construction which make up the whole system. This can be explained as a layering of sub-systems within each other (Meadows, 2009, p. 85) and the idea of sub-systems in part reflects a recursive feature of systems, in that systems may comprise elements which themselves display the same defining characteristics of the larger ‘system’ they constitute. As systems become more complex, component parts become increasingly differentiated from each other and the whole system becomes further differentiated from its surrounding environment. This requires increased coordination and communication between system components in order to control its system activities and preserve system integrity. Control and communication within a system are provided by feedback and feedforward processes which adjust system elements to achieve the systems’ outcomes.

When these three concepts operate in an integrated, systemic way, ‘emergence’ or ‘emergent properties’ become visible, representing whole system outputs that individual components cannot produce alone. Such emergent outputs may then come to characterise or identify the system as a whole (Checkland & Scholes, 1999, p. 22; Meadows, 2009, p. 12; von Bertalanffy, 1969, p. 55). However, if there is an over-focus on the individual components of a system without sufficient heed being taken of the interconnections between those components, the significance of interconnections may be missed and the emergent outputs of the whole system may mistakenly be attributed to single system elements (Meadows, 2009, p. 14).

3.1.1 System boundaries

Connections within systems tend to be blind to the notion of boundaries, as connections transcend boundaries rather than define them. System boundaries are generally created by the observing analysts and informed by the purpose of their discussion or the questions they wish to address about the system (Meadows, 2009, p. 97). More
specifically, Laumann et al. (1983, p. 20) distinguish between a realist approach versus a nominalist approach for boundary identification. In a realist approach, the researcher takes the view of the participants to define boundaries as the participants might see them. In the nominalist approach, the researcher imposes her own conceptual framework to serve her analytical purposes (Laumann et al., 1983, p. 21). In both cases, the researcher defines the system or network boundary for the purpose of conducting their analysis and further boundary allocation can be influenced by factors such as the actors, social relations or organizational activities in the setting being observed (Laumann et al., 1983, p. 25).

3.1.2 System purpose and emergent output

The concept of emergent output in relation to systems focuses attention on the ‘intended purpose’ of a system, which is a contested concept in the systems literature (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998). Some adopt what might be considered a realist view, seeing purpose as an intrinsic attribute of a system (Checkland & Scholes, 1999, p. 24; Meadows, 2009, p. 14). Others argue for a constructionist-oriented view of purpose as something attributed to a system by an observer/analyst (Maturana & Varela, 1979, p. 85). Whatever the origin of a system’s purpose, it is clear that systems in general fulfil some purpose. That purpose can also be expressed in terms of the emergent output of the system as a whole that could not be achieved by any one component making up the whole system. Whichever view is taken, the identified purpose or function of any system does not provide explanation of the phenomenon being studied but may help to identify consistency in its observed behaviour (Maturana & Varela, 1979, p. 86). Another noted feature of organic systems is their autopoietic ability to regenerate from within their own resource (Maturana & Varela, 1979), or to “produce or reproduce the elements of which they consist” (Muller, 1994, p. 43). As systems increasingly differentiate themselves from their environment, they increase the likelihood of adopting autopoietic characteristics to achieve and preserve that differentiation, fulfill their purpose and produce emergent outputs.

3.1.3 Systems in social context and organizations

The application of general systems theory to social environments and interactions prompted the development of social systems thinking as a way to study and explore the interactions and ordering of humans and their corresponding social groups (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998, p. 15). Adopting social systems as a research paradigm supports
holistic examination of people and the groups they form, set within their wider environmental contexts. Equal emphasis is placed on studying the connections and interactions between the elements of these social systems (both human and non-human), as is placed on the individual system components.

The principles and characteristics of systems in general, and social systems in particular, are visible in organizations to varying degrees. The influences of systems thinking are evident in general theories associated with organizations such as Giddens (1984) Structuration Theory, Luhmann’s theory on organizations (Seidl & Becker, 2006c) and more specific theories dealing with particular aspects of organizational development such as Weick’s (1979, 1995) Sensemaking theory.

Central to Giddens understanding of system is his concept of reflexivity as a self-conscious monitoring of social interactions (Giddens, 1984, p. 3). He proposes that the day-to-day activity of social actors draws on and simultaneously reproduces features of the wider social context within which the actors exist (Giddens, 1984, p. 24). Recursion is a concept in which an entity can be made from sub-entities that share the same features and characteristics of the larger entity they constitute. This recursive theme is reflective of Luhmann’s (1986, 2006a) theory of autopoiesis in social systems and is explicitly adopted by Weick (1995, p. 64) in his development of sensemaking theory for organizations. Reflexivity combines with recursion to partially account for how our social systems are generated by sub-sets of social interactions, how those social interactions are influenced by their wider social system and both may display system-like characteristics.

The ubiquity of organizations is matched by their diversity, and they merit detailed study as systemic forms because of the influences they exert in their own social settings (Scott, 2003, Chapter 1). Scott developed three distinct systems perspectives on organizations, viewing them as rational, natural or open systems. The rational view of organizations as systems, sees them as clearly delineated from their environment and from each other. They are characterized by two main features - a definable purpose and a formalized structure to achieve that purpose - which differentiates them from other forms of social collectives (Scott, 2003, p. 26).

A natural system view of organizations focuses on the interactions of the organization’s members and on the similarities they share with other forms of social collectives. Where peoples’ interactions are a key focus in this view, the organization as a singular system is still considered more as a discrete, self-contained entity than as part of the
wider society in which it exists (Scott, 2003, p. 28). The open system view of organizations lifts the isolationist constraints of the other two closed-system perspectives, and sees organizations as integrated parts of wider societal systems. Interactions and flows between the organization and its wider societal environment are seen as mutually and recursively constitutive of each other (Giddens, 1984), emphasizing the cultural-cognitive aspects of the origins and maintenance of organizations (Scott, 2003, p. 29).

Whatever systemic view of organizations may be adopted, defining or determining organizational boundaries poses significant challenges. For organizations, an organizational boundary delimits it from its environment, in part making it identifiably distinct from its surroundings, while also providing a key aspect of its identity. But how clear-cut are such boundaries? Weick (1979, p. 132) suggests they are not as clear-cut as many organizational theorists may think. Developing the concept of ‘collectivity’ as comprising normative, cultural-cognitive, and behavioural structure, Scott (2003, p. 186) explores the challenges of boundary identification when organizations are viewed as rational, natural or open systems. Depending on the perspective taken, boundaries may be respectively considered as deliberately imposed, naturally occurring, or openly porous with respect to the organization’s environment.

In the day to day reality of organizational life such boundaries are never clear cut. In so far as meetings might be conceptualized as systemic, their perceived boundaries with other organization activity is relevant to how they can be considered as locations of focused sensemaking or more broadly as constitutive building blocks of organization. Boundary definition is also relevant to conceptualizing meetings as systemic process within the broader organization.

3.1.4 Meetings and systems thinking

‘Wholeness’ and ‘emergence’ are essential systems concepts applied to meetings in this research but meetings are not represented as literal ‘systems’. Traditionally, meetings are reported in the literature largely from an individual centeredness perspective (Schwartzman, 2015), but are oriented to in one of three main ways. First, as individual events, they have been analysed to identify how they are organized, managed and contribute to organizations, with a view to improving their (individual) effectiveness (Asmuß & Svennevig, 2009; Staren & Eckes, 2009). Second, they have been treated as research resources through which other topics such as power (Allen &
Rogelberg, 2013; McNulty et al., 2011), strategy (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008) or identities (Aritz & Walker, 2010) are researched. Third, meetings have occasionally been considered as a collective resource but only in so far as they are still treated as a research resource to enable the study of other phenomena such as strategy development (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2007). In this research, meetings collectively are viewed systemically, both in relation to each other and in the wider organizational context, to explore the associated implications.

For over 50 years, organization theory was grounded in systems theory. More recently however, “it is systems theory that is adapted and selectively used by organization theoreticians” (Czarniawska, 2013, p. 5). Systems thinking in this research is used to view meetings collectively in a different way. Adopting concepts from systems literature and combining with complementary concepts from other fields, enables an integrated approach towards studying meetings, how they relate to each other, and what the associated theoretical significance and practical implications may be.

3.2 PROCESSUAL THINKING

“It is true that nothing is finally understood until its reference to process has been made evident” (Whitehead, 1938/1968, p. 46). This sweeping statement from Whitehead reflects how he placed process at the centre of his philosophical thinking as an inexorable part of the universe, that derives from the past and shapes the future (p. 52). Processual thinking is not a prescriptive methodology but rather reflects an approach towards philosophical issues (Rescher, 1996, p. 32). In this respect, systems and processual thinking rely on similar mental dispositions, which Rescher (1996, p. 54) captures thus: “when smaller processes join to form large ones, the relations is not simply one of part to whole but of productive contributory to aggregate result”.

Process ontology is mainly focused on the sequential and temporal relationship of events (Langley, 1999). Sequence and temporality are used to show relationships between events which in combination identify processes. Process can therefore be defined as “a sequence of individual and collective events, actions, and activities unfolding over time in context” (Pettigrew, 1997, p. 338). Pettigrew also introduces space as a further element for consideration when identifying and analysing processes. To study processes in more depth therefore requires: analysis at multiple levels (Langley et al., 2013, p. 9; Pettigrew, 1997, p. 340; Weick, 1979, p. 138); examination of both context and action relationships associated with the topic of study (Langley,
holistic rather than linear explanations (Langley, 2009, p. 13; Pettigrew, 1997, p. 340); linkage of events in sequence to overall outcomes but also treating outcomes as inputs to the next process iterations (Langley et al., 2013, p. 10; Pettigrew, 1997, p. 340); and identification of temporal interconnectedness between entities or events (Langley, 1999, p. 692; Pettigrew, 1997, p. 340).

Process thinking in general has informed research in a wide range of activities such as organizational change (Van de Ven & Huber, 1990), strategy development (Pettigrew, 1992), sensemaking (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005) and organizational routines (Feldman & Rafaeli, 2002; Feldman, 2000). From this overview of process thinking, the following sections outline key features of process thinking (Pettigrew, 1992) that are relevant to the study of meetings collectively.

3.2.1 Analysis at multiple levels

Process thinking in organization studies is concerned with how ‘things’ are accomplished rather than focusing on description or quantification of the ‘things’ themselves. The language associated with process thinking captures a sense of perpetual motion spanning time and space, to develop an understanding of organizations and how they change (Langley et al., 2013; Pettigrew, 1992, p. 5). But Pettigrew (1997, p. 338) also acknowledges the potential for analysis to become a prisoner of language and emphasises the care needed to avoid the linguistic trap that business strategy fell into - using static language to describe dynamic processes, leading to a reification of something that is intrinsically processual and perpetually changing.

Three features of process analysis distinguish it as an analytical methodology: identification of patterns to enable comparison; identification of mechanisms that shape such patterns; recognition of the inductive and deductive patterns of thought that researchers apply to their analysis (Pettigrew, 1997, p. 339). Combining Pettigrew’s (1997) three considerations with the centrality of time to processes (Hernes, 2014; Langley et al., 2013) and the recursive relationship between process and its situated context (Giddens, 1984, p. 338; Pettigrew, 1997), highlights the requirement for processual thinking to be analytical at multiple levels. These levels may be part of an organizations external context, such as international, national, or industry sectors. They may also be part of an internal multi-level context such as divisions, departments or work flows. In all cases, studying processes on a multi-level basis with congruent
attention paid to the contexts in which the processes take place, is an important aspect of adopting a processual perspective (Langley et al., 2013, p. 9; Pettigrew, 1997, p. 340).

3.2.2 Context and action relationships

Early process scholars asserted the impossibility of isolating an entity from its actual world context (Whitehead, 1927/1978, p. 11), while more contemporary scholars in process studies make this link between process and context more explicit. Pettigrew (1997, p. 339) identifies such interactions between process and context as crucial to the definition of process and sees it as cumulative over time. It is therefore implicit in process studies to view processes in their originating context as much as being visualised as temporally sequential events forming causal links in longer chains of events. The complexity associated with the embedded nature of processes in their surrounding context is reflected in challenges of identifying units of analysis, spanning multiple levels across space and time, compounded by indefinite boundaries (Langley, 1999, p. 692). In this sense, we see increasing congruence between process thinking and systems thinking.

The duality of process as comprising both static and dynamic features poses its own methodological challenges when studying process (Langley, 1999, p. 694). The embedded nature of processes in their associated contexts poses one such challenge for researchers - untangling process from associated context is in part addressed by a process of ‘abduction’ (Langley et al., 2013, p. 11; Taylor & Van Every, 2011, p. 20). The researcher is required to create imaginative links between empirically observed data and extant theory to gain new conceptual insights that can be applied in comparable or alternative contexts. The purpose is to ‘explain the what, why and how of the links between context, process and outcomes’ (Pettigrew, 1997, p. 340). Abduction is used to reconceptualise meetings as systemic process, which is foundational to using sensemaking for development of the Systemic Meetings Model.

3.2.3 Holistic links with outcomes

One of the strongest similarities between process and systems approaches is a resolute commitment to holistic thinking. Where systems thinking focuses on the fact of ‘ wholes’ being constituted through the connection of individual elements, process thinking acknowledges holism and the associated connections as given (Whitehead,

But even thinking with this degree of certainty about processes is itself somewhat contradictory, since processual thinking does not subscribe to the notion of definitive start or end points for process. The outcome of a particular process is always considered as input to some other process or process phase (Langley et al., 2013, p. 10). In distinguishing between the treatment of inputs and outputs within different types of processes, Latour (2005, p. 39 footnote 30) suggests that “Causes and effects are only a retrospective way of interpreting events” (italics in original). Latour’s observation alludes to the position of retrospection within process thinking which Weick more rigorously identifies as the most central of seven properties of sensemaking as a processual form (Weick, 1995, p. 24).

### 3.2.4 Temporal considerations

Where process ontology is mainly focused on the sequential and temporal relationship of events (Hernes, 2014, p. vii; Langley, 1999, p. 692; Shotter, 2006, p. 591), discrete events (and associated boundaries) are not always clearly delineated or readily identifiable (Langley, 1999, p. 692). The context in which processes take place is not only a set of events occurring in parallel, but also events from the past and events to come in the future. Pettigrew (1997) succinctly puts it thus – “The legacy of the past is always shaping the emerging future” (p. 339). Understanding the causal links with both past and future events is an essential contextual element that is central to using process analysis to understand how our organizations operate (Langley, 1999, p. 705).

Langley (2007) argues that focusing on temporal influences will enhance visibility of how patterns of systemic relationships develop around organizational phenomena. Taking account of temporal progression is indispensable to developing understanding or explanation from the study of processes (Langley et al., 2013, p. 1). While space does not permit an extensive elaboration on the concept of time here, it is necessary to draw attention to the distinction between ‘clock time’ versus ‘experienced time’ (Hernes, 2014, pp. 33-34) or ‘event-based time’ (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002, p. 686), as it is central to the research findings in Chapter 9. Clock time is viewed as a simple
measure of duration by reference to fixed and repeatable intervals such as lunar cycles, seasons, or a conventional calendar. Experienced time on the other hand is based on socially constructed logics associated with and measured by reference to events such as project cycles, meeting schedules or reporting periods. Pettigrew (1990) refers to the distinction as “time as chronology and time as a social construction” (p. 273).

Drawing inspiration from Giddens' (1984) structuration theory, Orlikowski and Yates see temporal structures as neither dependent on nor independent of human action, due to being simultaneously shaped by and itself shaping the context in which the temporal structuring takes place (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002, p. 684). Temporal structuring provides a sense of rhythm to organizational activity. The key point to note is that events that may have variable durations when measured against clock time (for example a phase in a project), may constitute a ‘fixed duration’ when considered as part of experienced time (for example completion of a full project). Giddens (1984, p. 286) asserts that the omission of time-space relations from social analysis will undermine the foundations on which the whole enterprise is based, making temporality an essential consideration in processual thinking.

3.2.5 Prehension

Whitehead (1927/1978, p. 3) believed that “no entity can be conceived in complete abstraction from the system of the universe”, and that the ‘prehensions’ one entity has of other entities (Whitehead, 1927/1978, p. 20) are one of the essential means of connection between entities. Whitehead adopts the concept of prehension as one of three essential components that comprise ‘immediate actual experience’ - entities, prehension and nexus. In this context, nexus refers to a set of entities collectively, while prehension refers to the mental appreciation and awareness shown by one entity of another within their wider nexus (Whitehead, 1927/1978, p. 24). Prehensions include ‘feelings’ about other entities and form an intrinsic part of how entities come into being and are ultimately perceived.

While there is limited reference to Whitehead’s concept of prehension in extant process literature, Hemes (2014) suggests that prehension “relates to the propensity of an event to connect to another event with which it has common aims” (p. 159) and places particular emphasis on the importance of conveying feelings as well as facts in the process of prehension (p. 208), a point also noted by Whitehead (1927/1978, p. 26). Such emphasis ensures that any apparent sterility of facts does not mask the passion
nor the significance of the process through which these facts came into being. Failure to appreciate the contextual origins of such facts may inhibit acceptance or development of proposals that have been conveyed from antecedent events. Such failure could be attributed as much to a failure of the antecedents to prehend their future use, as it would be a failure of anyone to grasp their full import in the present.

To address the challenge of how to convey the significance, relevance or provenance of something to be communicated as a next step in organizational activities, one might reasonably argue that prehension at the time of originating such activities should include in some meaningful way, the aspects of the process that originated the activities. This would support communication as a combination of emergent facts and the ingredient feelings generating those facts. In addition, to the extent that meetings may be scheduled in advance to deal with specific themes (such as strategic planning) or topics (such as getting a briefing on market research), they could be considered to play a material role in prehension.

3.2.6 Meetings, temporality and systemic process

While socially constructed events such as meetings can be defined or measured in terms of clock time, Schwartzman (1989) provides a vivid example of how meetings in tribal settings can be heedless of clock time (p. 284), are more defined by their role and place in their tribal society (p. 34), and recursively contribute to defining the broader organization within which they take place (p. 69). Where such meetings reflect experienced time, they contrast starkly with many meetings in contemporary organizations that are often defined by fixed ‘clock time’ periods within which they are scheduled and conducted. And yet the temporality associated with such organizational meetings can still play a significant role in the emergence of the organizations in which they take place (Schwartzman, 1989, Chapter 6).

As with the systemic perspective introduced in Section 3.1, adopting a processual perspective also focuses attention on the means of interconnections between events or activities. Schoeneborn (2011b, p. 670) refers to ‘ephemeral communicative events’ as central to a processual view of organization and goes on to argue that Luhmann’s contributions to the theory of social systems represent an essential means by which connectivity is achieved to ensure organization. Temporality as a more recently emphasized dimension of process studies (Hernes, 2014; Langley, 2009; Langley & Tsoukas, 2010) is not always explicit within systems thinking. To the extent that
process and systems thinking are congruent with each other, temporal inter-connectedness represents the weakest similarity and holistic explanation the strongest. Processual and systems thinking are jointly referred to as systemic process in this thesis, acting as a foundational influence for developing a new conceptualisation of organizational meetings collectively and exploring the associated theoretical and practice implications.

By adopting a process perspective in this research, meetings are viewed as ‘situated sequences of activities and complexes of processes unfolding in time’ (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010, p. 9). Individually, meetings display processual characteristics in how they are planned and conducted. Meetings collectively reflect system features of interconnectivity, hierarchic order, control and emergent outputs. Meetings contribute to the flow of meaning throughout the organization and represent identifiable past and future reference points, orienting and aligning organizational members towards a shared understanding of the organization’s history and signposting its future direction.

3.3 SENSEMAKING

For even the smallest organisms, making sense of our environment is as common as moving or breathing (Thompson & Stapelton, 2009). This making of sense (Holt & Cornelissen, 2014) has been studied at length in a diverse range of academic disciplines, covering topics such as language and discourse, power and politics, personal and collective identities, and change and decision-making (Brown, Colville, & Pye, 2015; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). This section initially provides an overview of sensemaking to outline different perspectives on the topic, followed by a definition appropriate to the organizational orientation adopted in the research. A short review of the key properties of sensemaking relevant to that definition leads to consideration of Weick’s (1979) specific recipe for making sense and associated sensemaking process. The scope of experience, or ‘requisite variety’, that is available for making sense is an important determinant of both the sensemaking process used and the sense made as an outcome from that process. Following consideration of requisite variety’s relationship with sensemaking, the temporal aspects of sensemaking are considered, before considering sensemaking as a lens through which the meetings data will be first analysed.
3.3.1 An overview of sensemaking

Sensemaking is comprehensively reported in the organizational literature in a wide range of areas including organizational change (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), industrial accidents (Weick, 1988, 1990), natural disasters (Weick, 1993), medical misadventure (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2009), managerial identity and roles (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Whittle et al., 2015) and power politics in multi-national corporations (Whittle et al., 2016). In Pacanowsky’s (1988) ethnographic account of the empowering nature of communication, he goes so far as to say that “The culture of an organization is much broader than its charter; it is the totality of sense-making practices and resultant ‘sense made’ of the organization” (p. 361). Sensemaking clearly has many faces, but some of the core ideas associated with it are derived from ethnomethodology and cognitive science (Weick, 1995, p. 13). The expression ‘sensemaking’ reflecting “a subtle, elusive phenomenon” (Weick, 2001, p. 95) may mask the distinction between sense making as an activity versus sensemaking as a process, which is perhaps best exemplified by initially considering the ethnomethodological perspective on ‘making sense’.

Ethnomethodology has been described as ‘a descriptive science of sense making’ (Heap, 1976, p. 107) or as ‘the science of sense making’ (Gephart, 1993, p. 1467). Common-sense thinking is a primary means of making sense for ethnographers (Handel, 1982, p. 54), enabling people to overcome differences in individual perspectives and to experience the world as social. While every individual may view the world from a personal spatio-temporal niche, the social world we experience and live in is a product of our social interactions (Leitner, 1980, p. 53). In this context, ethnographers’ emphasis on observation makes reluctant any attempt to impose a particular schema or process to account for how sense is made. Instead, they elicit from evolving circumstance how individuals in situ make (on-going) sense of their situation. Notwithstanding the emphasis on observation in the ethnographic tradition, Handel (1982, p. 59) concedes that, subject to appropriate ethical considerations, it may be necessary to ‘disturb’ a subject’s invisible means of reaching a common-sense view to make the process of making sense more visible. He also suggests that the more disturbance required to uncover how sense is made, the less accurate will be the account of the underlying process that leads to sense made (p. 60).

Where ethnography focuses on sense making in its social context, cognitive scientists consider sense making a personal accomplishment aimed at reducing interactive
ambiguity for an individual (Weick, 1995, p. 80; 2001, p. 51). Sense made is seen as the outcome of socially-grounded sensemaking processes, but it resides in the mind of each individual as a unique personal accomplishment. In this case, sense made of the same events will necessarily be different for every individual, since it arises from personal cognition within individual minds. And yet, such personal sensemaking contributes reflexively to produce the social settings that individuals have to make sense of. While sense may ultimately be made in the minds of individual people (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 444; Weick, 2001, p. 51), it is certainly formed and informed by most of what those minds are exposed to. This perspective is emphasised by Weick (1995, p. 5) in citing Ring and Rands definition of sensemaking as ‘a process in which individuals develop cognitive maps of their environment’.

Weick emphasises the significance of personally-held ‘cause maps’ in determining sensemaking processes (Weick, 1979, p. 132; Weick & Bougon, 2001, p. 309), which he in turn sees as the foundation of organizing. The degree of convergence (or divergence) of such individual cause maps as shared mental models can lead to positive or negative outcomes for organizations. The outcomes are largely determined by the extent to which the underlying sensemaking processes are permitted to operate, such as to question and challenge the validity of the shared models in the first place (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). Weick’s (2010; 1990, 1993, 1996) analysis of a number of natural and man-made disasters, emphasises how the varied and different sense made by individuals in the same shared circumstances contributed to the disasters that unfolded. He suggests that failures to provide “plausible platforms for sharing mental models” to resolve the individual and collective cognitive dissonance from different sense made in increasingly complex and confusing situations, contributed to the ensuing disasters (Weick, 2001, p. 95).

Other views of sensemaking suggest that factors beyond rational cognitive explanations may also play important parts. Holt and Cornelissen (2014, p. 536) for example suggest ‘absence’ in so far as it means openness to other possibilities, ‘mood’ in so far as it represents instinctive reaction rather than cognitive action or explanation, and ‘being open’ to alternative possibilities all provide grounds on which sensemaking can take place in the moment without specific reference to cognitive reasoning. Related to this idea, some scholars (Colville, Brown, & Pye, 2012) suggest we can ‘act’ our way to making sense, in so far as instinctive and sub-conscious action-reaction cycles in the moment can result in sense being made without reference to specific cognitive maps.
Organization and communication scholars bring a discourse perspective to the concept of sensemaking (Brown et al., 2015). While Taylor and Van Every (2000, p. 244) acknowledge the considerable influence and contributions of Weick to organization theory, they identify the failure of his organizing model to account for 'how' the organizing process actually takes place (p. 257), going on to identify the absence of organizations (as communicational constructions) from Weick’s accounts of collective sensemaking (p. 275). Weber and Glynn (2006, p. 1639), citing Taylor and van Every’s concerns, introduce priming, editing and triggering to elaborate the role of institutional context in sensemaking, broadening the base from individual cognition to include analysis of the impact of institutional factors on sensemaking processes. Other sensemaking ingredients such as scanning, interpretation and action are introduced by Thomas, Clark, and Gioia (1993) in their examination of the impact of strategic sensemaking processes on organizational performance.

From this brief overview, we see a spectrum of perspectives ranging from individual sensemaking at the micro-organism level (Thompson & Stapleton, 2009), to a call for attention to the neglected role of larger social and historical contexts in sensemaking (Weber & Glynn, 2006). In all cases, a distinction should be drawn between inputs to sensemaking, sense made as an output by individuals or groups, and the process(es) of sensemaking that connect both, particularly in an organizational setting.

### 3.3.2 Defining sensemaking

As with so many other aspects of organization studies, while there is no single definition of sensemaking (Brown et al., 2015, p. 3; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p. 62), there is a general consensus that sensemaking refers to processes by which people seek to understand ambiguous, equivocal or confusing issues or events (Colville et al., 2012; Maitlis, 2005; Weick, 1995). Karl Weick is regarded as one of the most influential thinkers in the field of organizational studies (Gioia, 2006, p. 1710; Putnam, Nicotera, & McPhee, 2009, p. 23; Sutcliffe, Brown, & Putnam, 2006, p. 1573) and is particularly credited with prolific and influential contributions in the area of organizational sensemaking (Shrivastava, Gioia, & Mehr, 1996, p. 1227). Weick’s extensive contribution is grounded in his seminal work (Colville, 1994), ‘The Social Psychology of Organizing’ (Weick, 1979) which set out Enactment-Selection-Retention (ESR) as a framework for sensemaking processes (Shrivastava et al., 1996;
Weick, 1979, p. 236). ESR is adopted in this thesis as the sensemaking lens informing the zoomed-out data analysis.

Weick (1979, p. 133) asserts that the basic theme of his entire organizing model derives from his sense-making recipe; “How can I know what I think until I see what I say?” He attributes this recipe to the words of a child wondering how she could be sure of her meaning before she spoke (Weick, 1995, p. 12). ‘Being sure of meaning’ empowers this phrase for Weick, which he then adapts as ‘a recipe’ for analysing how meaning is established by individuals in given situations.

Weick (1995) considers sensemaking a predominantly retrospective process, which is widely accepted, or at least not explicitly challenged, in much of the sensemaking literature (Maitlis, 2005; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Weick, 1995, 2001; Weick et al., 2005). While valid in respect of sense made, it raises temporal questions about the role the future plays in sensemaking processes (Gephart, Topal, & Zhang, 2010). In an appreciation of Weick’s work and contribution, Gioia (2006) questioned the absence of future-oriented consideration in Weick’s conception and definition of sensemaking, arguing for inclusion of ‘prospective sensemaking’ (Shrivastava et al., 1996) in the overall scheme of sensemaking. Whittle et al. (2016) identify ‘sense-censoring’ as a variant of sensemaking, that operates prospectively (p.4) to hide, dilute or restrict sensemaking from another party (p.2). While Gioia was ultimately convinced of the robustness of the idea of retrospective sensemaking (Gioia, 2006, p. 1718), that is not to say that the future has no place in the overall process of sensemaking, a theme to be considered further in the data analysis in Chapter7.

For a process as complex, varied and pervasive as sensemaking, part of defining what it is also requires setting out what it is not. Weick (1995, p. 6) takes time to do this, in order to identify the unique features of sensemaking as he sees them and to distinguish it from interpretation, with which it is often confused. Interpretation is cast as a mediation of meaning between two parties to ‘translate’ something one party knows into something the other can understand (Weick, 1995, p. 7). Significantly, neither party may have been involved in creating the material being translated. Interpretation at organization level is the attribution of meaning to data, an activity generally confined to top level managers (Daft & Weick, 1984, p. 286). Sensemaking on the other hand always involves some degree of authoring by the person making sense of a situation in so far as they reflexively contribute to creating the situation they are trying to make sense of. Sensemaking involves interpretation where the sense maker may have to
interact with others to explain or 'translate' aspects of unfolding events. This places interpretation as one component of sensemaking rather than a variation or substitute for it (Weick, 1995, p. 7) and sensemaking may even be considered to subsume interpretation (Gioia, 2006, p. 1718).

If wisdom is contained in profound simplicities (Gioia, 2004; 2006, p. 1717) then it is worth recapping a simple definition of sensemaking that informs this research, without detracting from its unquestionable complexity: Sensemaking — "processes by which people seek to understand ambiguous, equivocal or confusing issues or events" (Colville et al., 2012; Maitlis, 2005; Weick, 1995).

3.3.3 Properties and recipe for sensemaking

In order to bridge the gap between the simple definition from the previous section and the structured sensemaking process set out in the next section, it is first worth reflecting on seven properties of sensemaking that bridge the two. Weick (1995, Chapter 2) elaborates these properties in considerably more detail and describes them as helping to put some boundaries around sensemaking as a phenomenon. They are briefly outlined as:

- Grounded in identity construction – our personal experiences and identity significantly inform our individual sensemaking.
- Retrospective – sense is made after events have occurred, events we feel the need to make sense of.
- Enactive of sensible environments – we are part creators of the events and environments we make sense of.
- Focused on and by extracted cues – informed by our own identity, we make sense using cues selectively extracted from our situation to limit the amount of data to manageable proportions.
- Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy – we settle for using sensemaking cues that fit with our current perceptions, rather than using all cues that are available to us.
- Social – sensemaking arises in and is informed by the social settings and interactions we experience.
- Ongoing – sensemaking is a process without beginning or end, may vary in degree and is triggered to resolve individual or group dissonance.
Mindful of his later elaboration of the properties of sensemaking (Weick, 1995, Chapter 2), he both parsed and modified his sensemaking recipe as shown in Figure 3.1 (Weick, 1979, p. 134) to develop a framework for sensemaking, encompassing actor, retention, selection and enactment.

![Figure 3.1 - Sensemaking recipe (Source: (Weick, 1979, p. 134))](image)

An important aspect of Weick's conceptualization of sensemaking is the idea that the environment 'outside' the individual or organization is a superimposed order, rather than an underlying order that is separate from the actor (Weick, 2001, p. 188). In so far as we exist in "an ongoing stream of experience" (p. 193), sensemaking is the mechanism we use to contribute to that stream, extract parts of the stream to make cognitive sense of it, and to retain an interpretation of it for use as a retrospective reference point for comparison in future sensemaking process (p. 189). As an on-going, retrospective process, sensemaking is ever present in all aspects of our lives and continues almost as a background activity beyond conscious awareness, much like our heartbeat or breathing. However, "When the unexpected occurs sensemaking intensifies" (Weick, 2009, p. 183) and becomes more visibly apparent. In order to understand how it operates processually, it is helpful to break it down into the enactment-selection-retention (ESR) cycle for closer analysis.

### 3.4 SENSEMAKING PROCESS

Sensemaking can be considered as a three stage ESR process that can be explained sequentially but does not occur in such a clear-cut sequential manner. Before explaining each stage in more detail, it is important to appreciate four essential points about the process: 1. It is a metaphorical adaptation of the concept of natural selection applied in an organizational context (Weick, 1979, p. 119); 2. While presented and explained sequentially, moving between the three steps will occur as sensemaking takes place, sometimes with significant temporal difference between the steps taking place (Weick, 1979, p. 127); 3. Each of the steps may recursively use the overall
sensemaking process or sub-elements of the process; 4. The process is never ending, as we use it continuously to remain abreast of the unfolding circumstances in which we are perpetually enveloped.

3.4.1 Enactment

Taken as the first step in sensemaking, enactment may be seen as the folding together of cognition, action and order (Weick, 2009, p. 189). It could also be perceived as the least tangible part of sensemaking but is still considered to be of major importance (Weick, 2001, p. 187). While notionally occurring at the initial stages of sensemaking (Weick, 2001, p. 186), the recursive nature of sensemaking makes calling it a ‘first step’ an artificial imposition for ease of explanation rather than a reflection of its operation in practice. Different features of enactment have attracted different levels of emphasis from different scholars.

From an ecological perspective Whiteman and Cooper (2011, p. 891) describe a sensemaking process in which enactment amounts to “reciprocal exchanges between actors (Enactment) and their environments (Ecological Change)” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 414). Enactment is action that induces and is shaped by ecological change (Weick, 2009, p. 194) and the actors involved are active agents in creating their own environment as a continuous and shared “stream of experience” (Weick, 2001, p. 186). Enactment is therefore creation-centric action in which “people act in order to replace uncertainty with meaning” (Weick, 2009, p. 204).

Enactment is reflexive in nature in that, while contributing to creating their environment, actors are simultaneously engaged in perceiving their own creation within their sensemaking process. If the broad environment being experienced is seen as ‘undifferentiated flux’ (Chia, 2000, p. 513; 2002, p. 866), then the sheer volume and complexity of the environment to be made sense of is simply too vast for the cognitive capacity of individuals to cope with. Enactment provides cognitive simplification processes (Porac, Thomas, & Baden-Fuller, 1989, p. 399; Schwenk, 1984, p. 111; Weick, 1995, p. 35) and imposes a sense of order and constraint that enable us to cognitively digest our surrounding world (Weick, 1979, p. 164).

Enactment is achieved by sub-processes such as noticing and bracketing (Weick, 1995, p. 35; Weick et al., 2005, p. 411; Whiteman & Cooper, 2011, p. 891) or punctuating (Weick, 2001, p. 189), in which individuals identify aspects of the flow of experience and isolate it cognitively for more focused attention. The act of ‘bracketing out’
imposes temporary order on a perceived external reality that may appear chaotic, simplifying the world around us. More importantly for sensemaking, bracketing that takes place in enactment generates the raw material that we subsequently use in the other sensemaking stages of selection and retention (Weick, 2001, p. 187). This implies that enactment is the only part of the sensemaking process where the sensemaker is in direct contact with the 'real' external environment (Weick, 1979, p. 130).

Noticing and bracketing are relatively crude activities within enactment (Weick et al., 2005, p. 414). They are arbitrary in so far as they are individual actions that are not immediately accountable to anyone to justify that action. While enactment limits the amount of experiential data to cope with, the reduced data still retain high levels of equivocality requiring more attention, in order to make sense of them. In addition, we can also ask - what prompts or directs us how to 'enact' or when to enact? Enactment is a process that needs a 'trigger and guide' (Weick, 2006, p. 1729), which is typically something in the actor's environment or something from their previous experience. The mental models that become the triggers and guides for sensemaking are themselves the products of some previous sensemaking cycles, setting up the recursive interactions between ESR that we understand as sensemaking.

3.4.2 Selection

Selection as the next step in the recursive cycle of sensemaking further reduces equivocality, in order to increase sense made. Like enactment, it comprises a range of sub-processes such as bracketing, interpreting, noticing or embellishing, to further reduce our perceived surroundings to more manageable proportions, making it more comprehensible and communicable. To make experiences meaningful and usable, requires 'things' to be sorted and identified in the first instance, and then labelled to enable referencing (Weick, 1979, p. 202; 2001, p. 237). Once referenceable, elements can then be linked to each other in causal relationships in which they are perceived as dependent or independent variables. Creating cause-effect relationships between these two variable types supports the construction of cause maps towards the end of the selection sub-process (Weick, 2001, p. 189). While this description is written sequentially, the operational practice can be much less easily discriminated. Some of these actions may well be similar or the same as actions taken in the enactment stage of sensemaking (Weick, 1979, p. 185; 2001, p. 237) but they are differently focused by the criteria that guide their application.
A key feature of making selections is the criteria against which the selections are made. Weick (1979) describes this as 'artificial selection' (p. 176) due to the directed interventions, actions and decisions of actors in the situation to be made sense of. The criteria used to guide selection can be as varied as the actors involved or the scenarios they are making sense of, making the list of criteria potentially infinite. This implies that the selection criteria are not features of the 'external' environment as initially experienced, but arise from the actors involved and the enacted environments they help to create (Weick, 1979, p. 125). For this reason, the selection choices of two different actors viewing the same emerging situation can be markedly different, (Weick, 1979, p. 202), resulting in different sense made from the same starting environment.

In broad terms, the choices made in the selection process are significantly informed by the variety of experience, knowledge or information available to the individual making the selection decisions (Weick, 1979, p. 188), which Weick refers to as 'requisite variety'. When selection takes place, the complexity and detail of the ensuing enacted environment (Weick, 1979, p. 131; 2001, p. 187) will have reduced from that of the initial 'perceived environment' (Weick, 1979, p. 164) that was first experienced. This has implications for any later iterations of the overall sensemaking process that takes place and less requisite variety will be needed by anyone making subsequent selections from this new enacted environment. The enacted environment is 'created' by selections that are considered artificial as opposed to natural, due to manipulations imposed by the sensemaker rather than selections that occur without the conscious intervention of any individual.

The enacted environment is both output and input to sensemaking and organizing processes (Weick, 1979, p. 166). It is at all times a surrogate for the original environment first encountered and is imposed in subsequent stages of the sensemaking process (p. 177). Through the selection sub-process information is created from the conversion of equivocal raw data and represents one of the key outputs of selection (p. 114). This generated information, particularly in the form of cognitive maps (Daft & Weick, 1984; Eden, 1992; Henneberg, Naudé, & Mouzas, 2010), becomes the reference points against which actors carry out the last part of sensemaking - retention.

3.4.3 Retention

Viewed sequentially, retention is the third phase of sensemaking that generates foundations on which reference and recall can be built for retrieval at a later stage.

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Where enactment involved action, interaction and manipulation of the external environment, selection involved choices to limit the amount of data used to build mental models to represent that experience. Retention is the sub-process that stores outputs from sensemaking as raw material for memory, whether individual or organizational. However, it is important to note that “memory is not the stored past” (Luhmann, 2013, p. 71), but merely a partial and selective representation of the past that is likely to degrade over time.

Enactment and selection are succeeded by acts of retention, but retention also recursively informs those phases of sensemaking. As surrogates of experienced reality, enacted environments leave impressions in memory much as a physical environment leaves an impression on a photographic film or sensor. The remaining image (or enacted environment) is a limited representation of a broader experienced reality, which is then retained for future use as a referent or comparator. Thoughts, maps, ideas or models retained from sensemaking processes are then subsequently used as benchmarks or reference points to inform the choices made in subsequent enactment or selection as part of the ongoing recursive cycle of future sensemaking. The retention phase of the sensemaking process is perhaps the easiest to understand but has the most profound impact in terms of determining how individuals or organizations evolve and define what they become. While we can try to describe it as a discrete sub-process, it cannot be a discrete exclusive function (Weick, 1979, p. 213), since it requires inputs from enactment and selection while also being recursively embedded within each.

Where ever and how ever retention takes place, it is usually accompanied by contention (Abolafia, 2010). As an example, in policy development discussions, retention may take the form of negotiations between participants with competing policy perspectives and result in a policy being retained that is a hybrid of a number of different policy views (Abolafia, 2010, p. 360). In more dynamic and high risk situations such as aircraft carrier flight operations, retention is evidenced through repeated patterns of successful interactions between individuals, groups or equipment on the carrier flight deck, that were developed through structured and repetitive phases of intensive training and ongoing operations (Weick & Roberts, 1993). Whether retention arises from negotiated compromises in committee discussions or from imposed procedures in a military unit, it represents the storing of outputs from sense already made, to be used as partial but key input to future sensemaking.
3.5 REQUISITE VARIETY AND SENSEMAKING.

Requisite variety is arguably fundamental to the process of sensemaking (Colville et al., 2012, p. 7) and originated in systems-thinking and particularly cybernetics (Ashby, 1968; Conant & Ashby, 1970). The concept of requisite variety grew from Ashby’s interest in a system’s capacity to regulate itself in the face of disturbance from its surroundings. The law of requisite variety thus became “R’s [the Regulator’s] capacity as a regulator cannot exceed its capacity as a channel for variety” (Ashby & Goldstein, 2011, p. 191). Variety in this context refers to a system’s ability to distinguish between elements in its environment, while ‘requisite’ refers to what is needed by the system to make such distinctions and carry out its intended function. The degree to which inputs to a system are distinguishable from each other determines the system’s capacity to respond to the implications of such differences. Simple inputs require simple capacity to respond. Increasing complexity and unpredictability of inputs requires a matching or greater capacity to both perceive the differences and to vary the system’s response, in order to cope with the inputs. The law of requisite variety can be summarised as “the larger the variety of action available to a control system, the larger the variety of perturbations it is able to compensate” (Weick, 2009, p. 159).

In questioning the adaptation of requisite variety to human systems, Zeleny (1986) raises the concern that complexifying a human system in order to deal with increased environmental complexity risks moving to “overblown bureaucracy and thus to virtually uncontrollable complexity” (p. 271). Zeleny’s analysis suggests that ‘increased regulation’ must take the form of imposed additional bureaucratic controls, missing the key point that requisite variety needs complexity to be matched with complexity but does not prescribe how such matching should be achieved. There may be multiple ways in which system complexity could be matched with corresponding environmental complexity, some of which may be desirable and others not. Zeleny’s preference of a move towards self-management and self-control within groups as a more appropriate response to increased external complexity seems more like a reaction against the imposition of control mechanisms in human systems rather than a robust refutation of the adaptability of Ashby’s concept to human systems. If Zeleny’s proposed move towards self-management and self-control leads more naturally to matching system and environmental complexity, then Ashby’s law is clearly applicable - the means of application is the only thing being challenged.
Weick (1979, p. 188) adopts Buckley’s (1968, p. 495) definition of the law of requisite variety as—“...the variety within a system must be at least as great as the environmental variety against which it is attempting to regulate itself.” Weick integrates this definition with his own organizing theory, by proposing that “organizational processes that are applied to equivocal inputs must themselves be equivocal” (Weick, 1979, p. 189). His subtle use of the expression ‘equivocal’ in this context is thought provoking and challenging (Gioia, 2006), setting up dichotomies between inputs and outputs to be bridged by generating plausible, coherent and reasonable cause-effect relationships between both (Weick, 1995, p. 61). ‘Equivocality’ is deliberately used by Weick (1995, p. 95) instead of ‘ambiguity’ in the context of sensemaking. This emphasises the possibility that two or more interpretations of inputs may have to be resolved into more meaningful output and understanding through sensemaking processes, while also emphasising the distinction previously drawn between interpretation and sensemaking.

If context dictates that small differences make a difference for sensemaking purposes (Ashby & Goldstein, 2011, p. 197), then to make sense of more complex inputs from external surroundings, organizational processes need to have at least matching complexity to discriminate such small differences to make sense of that environment. “Put more succinctly, only variety can regulate variety” (Buckley, 1968, p. 495).

3.6 RETROSPECTION AND PREHENSION IN SENSEMAKING

Temporal considerations associated with processes (see Section 3.2.4) are also a factor in the dynamics of sensemaking. A central aspect of sensemaking is the sensemaker’s reliance on actions already taken that enable sense to be made (Weick, 2001, p. 178), grounding the argument that sensemaking should be seen largely as a retrospective process. The retrospective and recursive focus of sensemaking suggests there is a danger that “people make sense of prior actions in ways that constrain subsequent actions” (Weick, 2009, p. 5). This highlights the interplay between past, present and future in sensemaking processes, drawing attention to the significance and role of future events. The social processes associated with sensemaking are considered to unfold in four distinct forms - guided, fragmented, restricted, and minimal (Maitlis, 2005). Maitlis argues that the particular forms to emerge will depend on the degree of ‘sensegiving’ employed by participants in the overall process.
3.6.1 Sensegiving – a necessary component of sensemaking

Sensegiving in this context is described by Weick et al. (2005) as “a sensemaking variant undertaken to create meaning for a target audience” (p. 416), which they consider a requirement for sensemaking to be complete. Sensegiving influences the sensemaking of others, and Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991, p. 442) describe it as steering individuals towards “a preferred redefinition of organizational reality”. This suggests that sensegiving reflects a future orientation towards influencing sensemaking, but is not sensemaking per se. It is one component of a sensemaking process that involves an interplay between sensegivers and sensemakers in which the parties come to a shared sense made. The notion of sensegiving also suggests a dynamic relationship between a sense giver and sense receiver, without necessarily prescribing the exact nature of either party. If sensegiving is perceived as a dominant or coercive act, sense receivers can passively or actively resist, which may ultimately lead to ‘sense-censoring’ which Whittle et al. (2016, p. 5) define as “the process through which actors consciously ‘censor’ their sense-making accounts, with or without the presence of any official attempts to edit or silence them, due to anticipated reactions or counter-actions” (p. 5).

Where sensegiving leads to sense-censoring, at best the consequence might be a breakdown in communication and at worst institutionalised strategic inaction resulting in severe financial loss or reputational damage (p. 20).

If requisite variety as described in the previous section is applied to sensegiving, a number of interesting implications arise. To make sense of sense given, the requisite variety of the sense receiver would have to be at least matched to that of the sensegiver.

If the sense receiver has less requisite variety than the sense giver one of two possibilities suggest themselves: 1) Sense will not be received as the giver intends. The intended sense will therefore not be made, requiring unspecified follow-up by the sensegiver if their view is to prevail. This could be one instance in which sensegiving becomes dominant or imposed with the attendant consequences that Whittle et al. (2016) allude to. 2). If sense is passively accepted as it is given, it may not be fully understood or even acted upon. Filstad’s (2014) study of the political influences of executives and managers on sensemaking and sensegiving highlights the importance of aligning levels of detail and understanding between sensegivers and sensemakers, with the attendant risks of disaffection if politics replaces such alignment. This suggests that sense made in the context of sensegiving depends on the confidence and trust that the receiver has in the sense giver and any breach of that trust could lead to a
progressive or partial breakdown of management and leadership function or in extremis, collapse of the organization as a whole.

3.6.2 Prehension – complementing sensemaking

In contrast to Weick's focus on retrospection, Bourdieu (1990) emphasizes "the absurdity of a future-less, and therefore senseless, present" (p. 82), and argued that projecting a possible future is an intrinsic and essential part of making sense of action in the ongoing present. Applying the concept of prehension (see Section 3.2.5) balances the need for present actions to be informed by a future perspective in order for them to make sense (Gephart et al., 2010) with the retrospective nature of sensemaking proposed by Weick. Combining prehension with Bourdieu's (1990) view of the present being absurd and senseless if it is without some future perspective, prompted me to look more closely in Chapter 7 at the relevance of future meetings to sensemaking taking place in present meetings.

3.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter considered systems-thinking and process-thinking as the foundational Weltanschauung for this research. Interconnectivity (von Bertalanffy, 1969, p. 31) and 'holism' (Checkland & Scholes, 1999, p. 19) are central concepts in systems-thinking, inviting holistic consideration of our environment as interconnected events and then to consider the implications deriving from that perspective. Where systems-thinking emphasizes inter-connectivity and holism, processual-thinking emphasises sequence and temporal relationships (Hernes, 2014). Process-thinking is grounded in a relational ontology (Rescher, 1996, p. 38) and emphasises that 'things' acquire their meaning from the processes in which they are embedded (Rescher, 1996, p. 49; Whitehead, 1938/1968, p. 46). Where systems-thinking leans towards explanation of pattern and order, processual-thinking favours explanations accounting for dynamics of change and development (Mingers 2002, p279). If systemic connectivity is considered to make things whole, process connectivity could be said to make things endure.

Langley (1999) and Meadows (2009) recognise the challenge of representing the complexity of working systems with language alone, particularly when they are formed through interactions of multiple processes, operating across multiple levels. From an empirical and practitioner perspective Meadows (2009, p. 14) suggests “It's easier to learn about a system's elements than about its interconnections” (p. 14), making it
tempting to focus on component parts that are easier to identify and describe, rather than explicating the potentially less visible connections and interactions between parts, how those connections operate and the impact that they have. Mindful of the limitations of language, representing systems or processes through pictures and diagrams enhances visibility of inter-connectivity. All parts of a picture can be seen at once, reflecting the context and operation of systems or processes and how they should be viewed holistically (Langley, 1999, p. 700; Meadows, 2009, p. 5). Pictures also enable the effects of time, sequence and parallel processes to be relationally represented and so will be used to these effects in later chapters in this thesis. Systems, process and sensemaking literatures as reviewed in this chapter, draw attention to the constitutive contribution of meetings to the organizations in which they take place. This guides the use of the newly emerging area of Communicative Constitution of Organization (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009a) as an analytical lens, which is the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4

THE COMMUNICATIVE CONSTITUTION
OF ORGANIZATIONS
4 THE COMMUNICATIVE CONSTITUTION OF ORGANIZATIONS

The Communicative Constitution of Organizations (CCO) is an emerging philosophy of organizing derived from communications and organization studies. Through the integration of three schools or ‘pillars’ (Cooren, 2013) spanning micro, macro and systemic views of organizations, CCO provides a broadly integrated theoretical lens through which to consider meetings as a collective organizational phenomenon. Grounded in Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984), the McPhee structurationist school of CCO provides the 4-Flows framework for the zoomed-in analysis in Chapter 8 of this thesis. However, mindful of McPhee’s own view of Structuration Theory as “... mainly a meta-theory, guiding theorization and methodology without, typically, constituting an explanatory theory” (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 289), a number of specific features from both the Montreal and Luhmannian Schools are also reviewed as they provide complementary perspectives informing the data analysis using the 4-Flows model. The constitutive effect of communication can be understood as positive or negative, in so far as communication can equally play a constitutive or de-constitutive role in organizing which will be explored in the data analysis.

This chapter initially contextualizes CCO as a new way of conceptualizing organizations. This is followed by a short review of the premises on which CCO is based and an outline of the three CCO schools. The McPhee School is then reviewed in detail, followed by a review of selected aspects of the Luhmannian School and TMS that are also specifically referenced in the data analysis. The chapter concludes with a reflection on how meetings relate to CCO and a review of whether communication is necessary and sufficient to constitute organization.

4.1 CCO - A NEW CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ORGANIZATION

Historically, communication studies represents a diverse field involving multi-disciplinary research drawing on inter alia sociology, humanities, law, media and organization studies (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008, p. 4), with corresponding research published in a diverse range of communication related outlets (Ashcraft et al., 2009, p. 3). In spite of its prolific nature, communication as a theory field lacks a consistent
definition (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008, p. 3) or foundational base on which scholars can ground their diversified perspectives and interests (Craig, 1999).

Earlier scholars across multiple disciplines focused on communication as a transmission model, in which messages were encoded by a sender, sent via some transmission mechanism, to be received and decoded by a receiver. This popular view of communication came to be augmented by a constitutive view whereby choices of language or transmission media were shown to have an influence on the ultimate ‘message’ and interpretation being made, indicating that communication had greater constitutive force than just transmitting messages (Ashcraft et al., 2009, p. 4). Within this broad communication landscape, organizational communication scholars adopted the constitutive view and differentiated organizational communication from other genres of communication (such as business, media, social studies) by its focus on how communication contributed to or accounted for the development of organizations. The traditional informational view of communication (Craig, 1999, p. 124) sees communication as something that happens within organizations. The organization in turn is seen as a form of ‘container’, in some way separate or distinct from the communication that happens within it (Kuhn & Schoeneborn, 2015, p. 296; Taylor, 2013, pp. 207-208). In this informational view, communication represents a way of defining how ‘things’ are accomplished within organizations.

Communicative Constitution of Organizations (CCO) is founded on the principle that without communication, organizations as we know them could not exist (Boden, 1994; Giddens, 1984; Taylor & Van Every, 2000; Weick, 1979). CCO focuses on how such ‘things’ come into being in the first place through communication, and in so doing, how communication contributes to the constitution of what we have come to view as organizations. CCO may be seen as a radical turn (Kuhn & Schoeneborn, 2015) in how both communication and organizations are viewed and studied, that places communication at the centre of organizing and as a principle means of accomplishing organization. Prompted in part by Karl Weick’s (1979) work in focusing attention on organizing as process rather than organizations as reified entities (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009a, p. 1), CCO scholars are interested in understanding how communication contributes to the organizing processes and how it can be seen to constitute whole organizations as systemic entities. CCO scholarship also seeks to overcome some of the identified deficits in the discursive turn in organization communication studies.
(Conrad, 2004) by integrating materiality and communication as co-creators of organizations (Ashcraft et al., 2009).

Where meaning changes due to the context in which communication takes place, or due to different interpretations by different people of the same communicative acts, we start to see the agency of communication and its constitutive influence taking place. How something is said can often become more important than the content of what is said, thereby conferring it with greater (or lesser) constitutive force. To consider ‘organizations as communication’ therefore requires a different view or conception of both communication and organizations.

4.2 THE PREMISES AND SCHOOLS OF CCO

CCO comprises three pillars (Cooren, 2013) or three schools of thinking (Schoeneborn et al., 2014), fused into a complementary framework to account for the constitution of organization - the Montreal School of Organizational Communication (Taylor & Van Every, 2000), the Luhmannian School based on Luhmann’s Theory of Social Systems (TSS) (Schoeneborn, 2011b) and the McPhee Structurationist School based on Giddens Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) and McPhee and Zaug’s 4-Flows Model (McPhee & Zaug, 2000/2009)\(^1\). The complementarity of the three perspectives does not hide or mask their differences or points of divergence – it is through both that CCO provides such a rich resource for use as an analytical lens in this research. Notwithstanding the different perspectives adopted by each school, they are unified by CCO’s six underlying premises (Cooren et al., 2011).

In the first instance, CCO looks beyond the mere use of language in discourse to focus on the interactional events through which communication takes place and simultaneously how such events are reflexively defined by the same discursive practices. As a second premise, CCO looks for inclusivity rather than exclusivity in what defines organizational communication (Ashcraft et al., 2009, p. 22), seeking to include forms of interaction beyond just speaking and listening.

The co-constructive and co-orientative nature of communication (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 46) defines a third premise, grounded in the view that it is the interactive

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\(^1\) McPhee and Zaug’s (2000) original article is reproduced in Putnam and Nicotera (2009) and for consistent referencing with respect to page numbering, the McPhee and Zaug (2009) reference will be used throughout this section.
exchange, or double-interacts (Weick, 1979, p. 110), rather than unidirectional messages that moves the constitutive effects of communication beyond any initial intent of a ‘message sender’. The fourth premise is focused on the agency of communication, remaining open to who or what is ‘acting’ within communicative events, thus broadening the interpretation of what it may mean to be agential, and unfettering the constitutive nature of communication from the traditional base of human intention and associated action (Latour, 2005).

Identified as potentially the most difficult premise ‘to swallow’ (Cooren et al., 2011, p. 1153), CCO scholarship seeks the broadest explanatory rationale for ideation and materiality as being mutually implicated in constituting organization. The final premise eschews any preferential treatment between organizing and organization, favouring a both/and rather than either/or approach to treating them as arenas that are constituted through communication.

The Montreal School takes a broadly inductive perspective to account for how organizations develop from individual communicative interactions and are sustained over time and distance through textual agency. This school provides the theoretical foundations through which the multiple voices of single participants can ‘laminate’ (Boden, 1994) or ‘imbricate’ (Taylor, 2011) to become a single organization, characterised as an entitative being (Nicotera, 2013) and appearing to ‘speak’ with one ‘voice’. These theoretical concepts provide the foundations on which the School’s adherents justify their rejection of a micro-macro view of organizations in favour of a ‘flatland’ ontology (Latour, 2005, p. 165) in which to study “the dance of agencies that compose and structure our world” (Cooren et al., 2006, p. 534). TMS scholars pay particular attention to how those ‘agencies’ interact and network with each other to form entitative organizations. TMS concepts relevant to this research are reviewed in Section 4.4.

As perhaps the most theoretically dense of the three CCO schools, the Luhmannian School requires careful attention due to Luhmann’s challenging use of bespoke language and the dense interconnection of his theoretical concepts, drawn from a wide range of disciplines (Seidl & Becker, 2006c). His appropriation and adaptation of autopoiesis and his development of the paradox of decision, underpin how he distinguishes between social and psychic systems and the unique conception and role he attributes to communication are considered in more detail in Section 4.5.
The McPhee School of CCO, characterised by the 4-flows model of organization, is founded on Giddens (1984) structuration theory. Also drawing strongly from systems and processual theory, the McPhee School adopts a macro perspective of organizations and uses a more deductive approach to account for how organizations are accomplished. The 4-Flows model focuses on processual communicative flows considered necessary for the constitution of organization and asserts that organization only emerges at the intersections of these flows (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 42). The 4-Flows model is analytically pitched one or more levels above some of the more fine-grained concepts from the Montreal School (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 29), and arguably one or more levels below Luhmann’s grand Theory of Social Systems.

### 4.3 MCPHEE’S STRUCTURATION SCHOOL PERSPECTIVE

Two important articles appeared in the Electronic Journal of Communication in 2000 themed around “Communication as a Constitutive Process in Organizing and Organizations” (McPhee & Zaug, 2000; Taylor, 2000). Their articles are noteworthy for their areas of similarity, from scholars who appear to represent different and sometimes divergent schools within the CCO community. In their respective articles, they approach CCO from quite different but intersecting perspectives. Taylor proposed a theory of how micro communicative constituents (A-B dyads and A-B-X triads) can imbricate to account for larger scale organization, while McPhee and Zaug begin at a meso/macro level of organization to identify four broad flows of communication that may account for the constitution of organization. Taylor’s perspective is elaborated in Section 4.4. The McPhee structuration perspective is reviewed in more detail in this section.

Structuration Theory (ST) proposes that structuring processes involving human actors and/or actants recursively influence and are influenced by the social structures within which they operate, but also that emerge from the structuring processes themselves (Gioia & Pitre, 1990, p. 592). Repetitive and habitual activity (routines created by routinization) is a fundamental concept of ST, establishing psychological trust and ontological security from which human actors derive stability and some certainty for their social interactions (Giddens, 1984, p. xxiii). These recursive interactions create what Giddens calls “a duality of structure”, in which “the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize” (p. 25). Through the ‘duality of structure’, social structure is taken as a fusing of the
apparently subjective constitutive action (structuring) of human actors with the apparently objective, ordered elements (structure) that may appear to pre-exist the human action (p. 191). The apparent paradox that neither social structure nor action precede the other yet each contributes to the other is referred to as structuration (Gioia & Pitre, 1990, p. 592; Poole & Van de Ven, 1989). Communication is an ongoing action constantly changing over time that significantly contributes to wider actions that constitute organizational structure. The evolving structure also guides and shapes the ongoing communicative action taking place. This sets up communication as a significant constituting force in organization worthy of more detailed study and understanding (McPhee & Poole, 2001, p. 504) and its ongoing nature implicates time as an essential constituent to be considered.

Where some scholars may consider that ST does not provide suitable tools for making sense of performative experiences in the study of organizational routines (Wright, 2014, p. 13), it provides a strong foundation for developing more abstract representations of practices to account for the constitution of organizations. Recalling Taylor and Van Every’s (2000) metaphor of filming a scene through close-up versus long photographic shots, makes it easier to see that theorizing about the communicative constitution of organizations will require different lenses (Nicolini, 2009) through which to view the organizing activity, depending on the level of detail that we seek to account for. Whereas others have contributed tools through which we can examine close-up details in organizational communication, McPhee himself views broader Structuration Theory as “... mainly a meta-theory, guiding theorization and methodology without, typically, constituting an explanatory theory” (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 289). McPhee also favours discourse-focused and critical methods over standard quantitative methods to demonstrate the processes accounting for structuration (p. 302). His collaboration with Pamela Zaug (McPhee & Zaug, 2000/2009) provided the ST school of CCO with the ‘four flows framework’ (4-Flows) to explain how macro communicational elements combine to form or define organizations. While not a specific analytical method itself, when used in conjunction with more specific discourse analytic methods (Browning, Greene, Sitkin, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2009; Cooren & Fairhurst, 2009; Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2008), the 4-Flows model moves ST closer to explaining the communicative constitution of organizations, while focusing at more meso and macro levels than other theories.
In the absence of models linking micro-level studies with macro-theoretic questions, McPhee (1988) explored vertical communication chains in organizations by adopting a system-oriented and process-driven perspective (p. 488). Using the concepts of production and re-production from Giddens (1984) ST, McPhee crafted a framework of questions summarised in Table 4.1, that were then used to develop a communication-based explanation of the vertical chains of authority that were accounted for in three different types of organizational models reflected in the literature up to that point: the Homogenous model, the Multiple Strata model and the Multiple Clusters model (McPhee, 1988; McPhee & Poole, 2001, p. 521).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Production (Processes)</th>
<th>(System) Re-production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Macro</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Function - What are the organizational/ collective functions of vertical chained communications?</td>
<td>Distribution - How are chained communication phenomena distributed organization wide?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Micro</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use - What are the individual/ dyadic uses of vertical chained communications?</td>
<td>Conditionality - How is/are dyadic communication(s) conditional on the vertical communication chain(s) within which they are embedded?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 – Vertical communication chains

(Adapted from McPhee (1988, p. 459))

The framework represented in Table 4.1, as a pre-cursor to the 4-Flows, provides a conceptual challenge to account for the recursive influences and formative contributions of dyadic interactions at micro level, linking into triadic chains and ultimately system generative processes at meso and macro levels. From a broader systems perspective, McPhee suggests that these elements cannot be looked at in isolation from each other. The methodological implications of his position (McPhee, 1988, p. 485) suggest: 1. that there are different and distinct phenomena or variables to be examined, derived from the four questions in Fig 4.1; 2. that method triangulation is required to look across phenomena, taking account of multi-level contextual observation, message-tracing and multi-level reflexive interviewing (p. 486); 3. and that a unit of analysis should be used such as to distinguish between focal objects whose
properties have to be explained, versus context qualities surrounding objects that might contribute to or account for the objects’ properties (p. 487).

4-Flows is based on the premise that complex organizations, as distinct from other forms of social groupings, require different types of relations to four ‘audiences’, each of which is analytically distinct from the other, but all of which can account for organization through their relatedness (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 21). McPhee and Zaug set out contextual considerations for their framework and in defining each of the terms in the phrase ‘communicative constitution of organizations’ make four important points: all communication has constitutive force in creating socially recognized agency; in general, increasingly complex entities will require increasingly complex communication to constitute them; while all communication may be constitutive, not all communication is organizational; their analysis is relatively broad, deductively rather than inductively grounded, and is positioned at a more abstract level than other accounts of constituting organization. In speaking about “array[s] of social practices”, “chains of interaction episodes” or “systems or fields of messages”, their framework is firmly grounded in a systemic and processual view of organization.

McPhee and Zaug are also clear that the flows are not literal channels, processes or systems through which ontologically discrete messages pass, in readily identifiable form. It is more apt to see the flows as communicative outcomes arising from unique combinations of unique processes or routines, positioning the 4-Flows framework more as “a template by which to detect, diagnose, and assess novel organizational phenomena” (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 32), rather than as four particular ‘processes’ to be looked for in their own right. Informed by ST as a meta theory, the 4-Flows could be considered a more detailed but also a meta-theory, focused on identifying how communication constitutes organization.

While McPhee and Zaug are clear that single messages may simultaneously contribute to different ‘flows’, each flow can also be more explicitly characterized by distinct sets of communication processes (McPhee & Iverson, 2009, p. 62), progressively reducing to more fine grained levels of detail using conceptual resources from the Montreal School of CCO (McPhee & Iverson, 2013, p. 109). In line with the duality of structure, the reflexivity between communicative action and emerging organizational structure assures that the same type of communication in two different contexts may lead to distinct organizational outcomes. Consequently, the flows in isolation do not account for the constitution of organization, but rather organization is found in the systemic
intersection of all four flows (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 32). The 4-Flows involve membership negotiation, reflexive self-structuring, activity co-ordination and institutional positioning which will now be reviewed in more detail.

### 4.3.1 Membership negotiation

Although the order of the 4-Flows does not say anything about their relative importance or their assumed sequence of occurrence, I will elaborate them in the order in which McPhee and Zaug (2000) presented them in their original paper. Organizations as we know them cannot exist without people. People or sub-groups of individuals as we also know, may be simultaneous constituents of different organizations. Membership negotiation therefore refers to the processes of interactions that define relationship(s) between individuals and the organizations of which they are constituent parts.

Membership negotiation as a processual communicative flow has a number of distinct features. In its broadest sense, it is about establishing the relationship between individual and organization (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 34). In establishing the relationship there is an initial introduction of both parties to each other, in which each becomes aware of or expresses interest in forming the member-organization relationship. In sequence, this phase of membership negotiation would be naturally followed by ongoing definition and re-definition of the member’s position within the organization. As members progress through the organization or identify more closely with it, the third aspect defines the degree to which the individual is seen to be of the organization, become a representative or spokesperson for the organization, or ultimately be seen to embody or to be the organization. Bill Gates, Steve Jobs or Larry Ellison are examples of the latter, who over time came to be identified as the personification of Microsoft, Apple and Oracle respectively.

The (sub)processes associated with membership negotiation may also (re)define the member-organization relationship such that the relationship ultimately ceases to exist (McPhee & Iverson, 2009, p. 64). McPhee refers to this as “disidentification” (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 294), and while not explicitly referenced by McPhee and Zaug (2009), membership negotiation could also entail de-establishing the member-organization relationship.

These processes associated with membership negotiation generally involve some form of collective action and social interpretation. In some instances they may assume specific legal form with attendant legal responsibilities such as becoming a director in
a company. In other instances they may consist of formal ceremonies inducting individuals or informal celebrations to recognize new members' arrival. The nature of such activities can also be carefully managed to distinguish the relative positions or standing of new arrivals versus established members (McPhee & Iverson, 2009, p. 65).

4.3.2 Reflexive self-structuring

In its broadest sense, reflexive self-structuring refers to the accumulated processes that define how organizations create internally recognizable boundaries, sustain or replicate their constituent parts, establish, sustain or regenerate relationships between those parts, and ultimately exercise control over them, such as to make the organizations recognizable as discrete entities. McPhee and Zaug (2009, p. 36) particularly note that some message types may simultaneously contribute to reflexive self-structuring and activity coordination, but reflexive self-structuring is analytically distinct in so far as it emphasises communication that establishes hierarchy, monitors performance, determines information processing arrangements, or may pre-fix and impose particular working arrangements.

Reflexive self-structuring represents the communication processes that result in allocation of resources, leading to the establishment of formal structures with some form of identifiable boundaries (Kuhn, 2012, p. 558). McPhee suggests that such boundaries will have varying degrees of permeability (Schoenebom et al., 2014, p. 294) and Weick (1979, p. 132) suggests they are not as clear cut as we may think. Reflexive self-structuring is distinctive in that it focuses analysis on the organization as a systemic whole. With reflexive self-structuring, communication accounts for how the organization can be viewed as “becoming in discourse”, while a structuration perspective marks it out as “grounded in action” (Putnam et al., 2009, p. 12). Central to reflexive self-structuring is the exercise of effective ownership and control over deployment of human and non-human resources (McPhee & Iverson, 2009, p. 70).

More abstract and less tangible organizational activity also forms an important part of the reflexive self-structuring flow. For example, the status and function of people or entities can be established by individual diktat or collective acclaim through declaration in discursive interactions (McPhee & Iverson, 2009, p. 71). Such declarations establish important norms, practices or processes through which the control may to be exercised. Key outputs from such discursive interactions may be different texts that acquire
tangible form, enabling and supporting replication of the organization through self-reference.

Browning et al. (2009, p. 103) use the concept of “integrative complexity”, defined as “the degree to which thinking and reasoning involve the recognition and integration of multiple perspectives and possibilities and their interrelated contingencies” (p. 103), to illustrate how the use of particular documents, manuals or written directives serve to empower and guide Air Force personnel to engage in self-structuring practices. The different structure elements, control processes, textual referents or power authors involved in reflexive self-structuring become “syncretized” (Browning et al., 2009, p. 106), that is fused into an amalgam of diverse ideas forming a single yet inexact impression reflective of organization. This view particularly emphasizes the systemic perspective implicit in the reflexive self-structuring flow.

4.3.3 Activity coordination

This flow is strongly grounded in relationality, with particular focus on the mechanisms through which people, material objects or processes are connected to each other. Distinct from connectivity that may have been pre-ordained or deliberately established through reflexive self-structuring, connectivity associated with activity coordination is more focused on emergent relations arising with greater spontaneity in context, as activities are aligned and coordinated with each other (Putnam & McPhee, 2009, p. 188; Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 294). Connectivity is also common across each of the flows in the 4-Flows model as emphasised by Browning et al.’s (2009, pp. 98-99) analysis of constitutive interactions in an Air Force unit.

Activity coordination is perhaps the most intuitively recognizable of the four flows, in so far as it is based in communication that addresses practical problems and visibly connects or adjusts the processes that deal with those problems (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 38). Where activity coordination may be visible and indeed conspicuous in collectives that would not be considered organizational, for example markets or networks (Sillince, 2007, p. 133), it becomes organizational when it is linked to or contributes to accomplishing some shared or common purpose of a recognizable social unit (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 39; Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 667). Where membership negotiation could be considered to take place at a meso level within organizations, activity coordination largely occurs at the micro level of interpersonal interactions, involving instructions, commands or consensus agreement on how to
achieve coordination between disparate, overlapping or shared activities (Bisel, 2010, p. 126; Taylor, 2009, p. 156).

4.3.4 Institutional positioning

*Institutional positioning* is concerned with connectivity and positioning similar to *membership negotiation* and more particularly *activity coordination*, but the primary focus is on how the organization is positioned or related to its own external environment. If *membership negotiation* and *activity coordination* are located closest to micro-level interactions, *institutional positioning* reflects the constitution of the organization at a broader macro level.

McPhee and Zaug (2009, p. 40) used the word 'positioning' in a specific and deliberate way, to convey the properties of creating, developing and maintaining institutional identity in a perpetually changing and evolving broader society. As organizational identity emerges at the intersections of the communication flows (Browning et al., 2009), internal points of connection such as post holders or departments are created that enable organizations to “constitute themselves as practical relational partners” (p. 41). Key societal activities and norms, such as procuring resources, registering property ownership, trading in markets or sourcing personnel represent just some of the external connection points with which an organization must synchronize. Communicative processes link such internal and external connection points to define the organizations *institutional positioning*.

McPhee expresses the view that *institutional positioning* especially involves “processes of individual communication that generate relations between any specified organization and its array of competitors, regulators, and so on, and the more extensive institutional system” (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 294). As with most things communicational, they often, if not always, lead back to direct acts of communication between individuals that ultimately build, merge or coalesce into processes and systems leading to recognisable organizations.

4.3.5 Extending and challenging the 4-Flows

The 4-Flows framework has its adherents and detractors. For example, Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott (2008) embraced the 4-Flows but found them deficient in accounting for the specific constitution of a particular type of organization - what they term “employee-abusive organizations” (EAOs). In their view, the four flows did not
provide or account for how larger cultural or historical Discourses (with a capital D - Alvesson & Karreman, 2000) impacted or influenced the constitution of EAOs (p. 310). They combined the 4-Flows with Fairhurst and Putnam’s (2004) concept of “general and enduring systems of thought” (p. 7), to propose a fifth flow which they call “syncretic superstructure”. Syncretic refers to the blending of partially chaotic, disparate or even contradictory meaning that creates an on-going sense of instability within an organization. Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott (2008) liken syncretic superstructure to “an ocean of discursive and nondiscursive consciousness” (p. 310), from which meaning schemas are drawn based on deeply rooted beliefs and ideologies, derived from underlying history and culture. The other 4-Flows then take place within this syncretic superstructure ‘flow’, which provides meaning schemas rather than specific message types or messaging processes, analogous to interpretative lenses (Barry & Elmes, 1997, p. 430) or ‘cause maps’ (Weick, 1979, p. 140; Weick & Bougon, 2001) as previously discussed in Chapter 3. The concept of syncretic superstructure seems more analogous of a broader system or systems’ attribute, rather than specific processes or flows of communication.

In contrast to Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott’s desire to augment the 4-Flows model, Sillince (2010) argues that CCO must be able to show how organizations are formed and maintained distinctively from other collective bodies such as markets or networks. Sillince’s (2010) principle concern with McPhee and Zaug’s 4-Flows model is that it could also apply to other collective bodies that are not considered ‘organizations’, thus rendering it insufficiently explanatory of organizations per se. Taking each flow in turn, he argues that they are evident in other collective bodies such as markets or networks that are not considered organizations as such. He thus concludes that the 4-Flows are “insufficiently organizational” (p. 132). His analysis and critique of the 4-Flows model is significantly weakened in his failure to address the fundamental aspect of the model that McPhee and Zaug draw explicit attention to from the very start, when they say “complex organizations exist only in the relatedness of these four types of flow.” (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 21). Isolating each flow from the others as Sillince does, misses the essential point that the individual flows were never argued as constitutive of organization on their own. It is the co-presence and more specifically the intersection of the flows that enables them (collectively) to account for organization, as demonstrated by Browning et al.’s (2009, p. 89) use of the 4-Flows model to analyse constitutive complexity in a military context.
The 4-Flows model attracts significantly less attention in the literature compared to some of the constructs advanced by other CCO theorists, but is nonetheless a valuable analytical tool with which to order research, particularly focused on the meso and macro levels of organization study.

4.4 PERSPECTIVES FROM THE MONTREAL SCHOOL

The Montreal School (TMS) comprises a diverse community of scholars whose thinking and scholarship is focused on how communication constitutes organization through the agency of language, text and conversation. In this context, both talk and text are defined in broader terms than their conventional definitions might suggest. In their seminal work titled The Emergent Organization, Taylor and Van Every (2000, p. 36) proposed specific definitions for conversation and text, which they characterize respectively as the site and surface of organization emerging from communication (p.34). Conversation, also referred to as talk, means the totality of “interaction-through-languaging” that serve as the foundations of relationships (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 36) which cumulatively form organizations through lamination over time (Boden, 1994, p. 137; Cooren & Fairhurst, 2009, p. 122; Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 37). Text is distinguished from conversation in that it provides the ‘surface’ through which the organization is made present and visible to its members. Text refers to words and phrases constructed into understandable pieces of language (p.37). By this definition, text can refer to both verbal and written exchanges (Putnam & Cooren, 2004, p. 324), and represents the output from conversation interactions (Putnam, 2013, p. 26). Texts are forms of communication that can extend in time or space beyond the bounds of the original conversations taking place (Taylor, 2009, p. 157).

Communication is then taken to be the intersection of both talk and text as so defined (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 38), with both holding the potential to be reflexively constitutive of each other in a self-organizing loop (pp. 201-211). The text-conversation dialectic is foundational for TMS (McPhee & Iverson, 2013, p. 119) as it provides the essential basis on which the other tenets of the school’s scholarship are established. In the context of the conversation-text dialectic, discourse is then considered in its broadest sense to mean the combination of both conversation and text (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 3; Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 7; Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 72).
Taylor, one of the acknowledged founders and leaders of TMS (Kuhn, 2012, p. 550; Putnam, 2013, p. 36), identified three previous crossroads that TMS encountered through the 1960s, 80s and 90s, and suggests that the evolution of TMS scholarship now stands at a fourth crossroads (Taylor, 2013, p. 208). Partially drawing on Actor Network Theory (Latour, 2005), he suggests the individual (person) as the previously assumed focal point of communication may be replaced by entities, actants and their associated relationships, as networks around which organizational communication scholarship may focus in the future. This thesis considers organizational meetings as one such entity or actant.

4.4.1 Textual agency

Having considered the meaning of ‘text’, to consider the concept of textual agency makes it necessary to first consider what is meant by ‘agency’. Gidden’s (1984) view of agency is specifically oriented towards “events of which an individual is the perpetrator” (p.9) and focuses on the fact that individual’s may have acted differently in any given situation. Agency in this context is confined to the actions of humans and is also differentiated from any intentions that such human actors may have had (p.11). However, TMS scholars embrace a broader definition of agency which is more congruent with identifying the discursive foundations of agency that may be attributable to meetings collectively. Taylor (2000) considered agency, co-orientation and identity as central to his original theory of organizational communication, as part of his rethinking of the concept of organization. By defining agency as acting on behalf of someone or something (Taylor & Cooren, 1997; Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 230), we can account for how apparently inanimate entities can act without attributed intentionality.

Latour (2005) identified the concept of agency as central to developing actor network theory (ANT), as an alternative approach to study social interaction and behaviour. He distilled the idea of agency down to “making a difference” (p. 71), in the sense that if an actant/actor in “doing something” (p.52) makes a difference to some other agent’s action, then it can be considered that the actant/actor has exhibited agency. ANT in general and its conception of agency in particular have been appropriated but modified by TMS scholars and used to develop different aspects of their contribution to CCO theory. One of the main modifications is visible in how Taylor and Cooren (1997)
distinguish animate from inanimate agents by referring to actors and actants respectively.

While conversation taking place between actors may be considered the primary "manufactory" for both text and agency (Taylor & Robichaud, 2004b, p. 397), texts in isolation or taken out of the context of their production will not be able to 'make a difference' or exhibit agency without interactions with other agents/actors. Agency therefore requires a sense of reciprocity between two or more actants in which one influences the other to (re)act, while the other in turn acts/acts (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 50) to exhibit agency. Cooren (2004b, p. 377) adopts Latour's expression *hybridicity* to refer to actor-actant interaction to account for the agency of both collectively that neither could exhibit alone. Action in this situation has no single point of origin, but each actor/actant can be said to have exhibited agency in accomplishing the shared outcome. Hybridicity in the context of day-to-day interactions can potentially generate an infinite number of actor/actant pairs, as multiple combinations of actor/actants provide a foundation to explain the accomplishment of organization from the most basic text-conversation interactions.

### 4.4.2 Co-orientation

TMS scholars hold strongly to the view that organization is accounted for through dyadic interactions that can be 'scaled up' to explain or account for organization, which is sometimes referred to as a 'flatland' view of organization (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 143). This stance does not deny the validity of the perspectives or scholarship of proponents of the macro view, but the greatest critique of the macro view is its apparent failure to explain the specific mechanism(s) through which the macro is actually achieved. Scaling up (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 12) accounts for moving from localised, situated interactions to larger-scale organization, without losing sight of the local in some reified view of the organization. Scaling up from a TMS perspective is something actors do in their interactions (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 295) and is a speech act accomplishment achieved in the here and now.

Taylor (2000) proposed the concept of "a coorientation system" (written as co-orientation in later literature) and represented it as the simple triad A-B-X, to account for how scaling up occurs. In this generic representation, A represents a human actor who interacts with another human actor or non-human actant B. A and B then collectively orient their interaction towards a third object X, creating the A-B-X triad.
Co-orientation can be considered to be of two distinct kinds; one in which the X is seen as the object of A-B interaction; the other in which A-B can be identified as having a “a bond of agency” in respect of X (Taylor, 2000, p. 17) that neither alone can accomplish. Viewing co-orientation as the combined agency of A-B confers constitutive force on the combination A-B, allowing that combination to be conceptualized as an agent in its own right, quite distinct from either A or B individually. This form of co-orientation, viewed as part of a triadic relationship (Taylor, 2009, p. 155), creates the basis for collective action to take place and localises where organizing begins (Taylor & Robichaud, 2004b, p. 402).

Relating the abstract A-B-X triad to organizing and organization, we can see how the two linked manifestations of communication, conversation and text, emerge with constitutive force. Conversation as “interaction-through-languaging” can be seen as coordinated activity distributed across communities of practice (Taylor, 2009; Taylor & Cooren, 1997), represented by the A-B dyad of the co-orientation system. Texts could then be viewed as the initial outcome as conversations take place, represented by the X in co-orientation. But texts can take many forms (Smith, 2001), and can be adopted recursively in subsequent iterations of co-orientation, whereby [A-B] as a singular actor, co-orient with a new text B1 as an actant, to produce a new entity X1. The triad would then become [A-B]-B1-X1.

When texts as products of co-oriented conversation become ingredients for subsequent interactions, text and conversation form a self-organizing loop (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, pp. 210-211), and can be seen to “speak” for the organization by influencing the conversations appropriating them (Smith, 2001). In pragmatic terms, co-orientation could be said to occur when people “tune in” to each other in controlling and coordinating activity (Kuhn, 2012, p. 551). Organization then emerges in conversation and through the ongoing co-ordination activity of two or more actors in relation to objects of mutual interest (Kuhn & Lee Ashcraft, 2003, p. 41).

The agency of conversation or texts (or both combined) as discussed previously, can co-orientate people to accomplish a common or shared outcome by contributing to and creating routines that come to constitute organization. In such instances, co-orientation may not be a pre-conceived objective of the conversation/textual exchanges but rather an emergent object created by them without prior intention, that contributes to the constitution of organization (Wright, 2014, p. 12). In the alternative, as increasing numbers of triadic combinations interact and become embedded within each other, co-
orientation becomes a complex, processual phenomenon, taking place across multiple locations and time spans, involving increasing numbers of people (Taylor & Robichaud, 2004b, p. 403). Co-orientation becomes an activity rather than a state, or a process rather than a product (p. 404). Co-orientation in this context is viewed as the foundation of what Taylor (2000) refers to as imbrication.

4.4.3 Imbrication

Taylor (2000, p. 11) views imbrication as “a system of embedded micro-level coorientations”. Imbrication as a process starts with dyadic interactions between two actors (A-B) co-orienting towards some third actant or entity (X), represented as the A-B-X triad. Each individual episode of co-orientation can then be considered as discrete ‘tiles’, created through interactive discourse based on communication (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Through layering or laminating one on top of the other (Boden, 1994), but also and importantly embedding one within the other (Taylor, 2000; 2011, p. 1289), these tiles become imbricated into “an infrastructure of routinized processes” (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 94), referred to as “networks of relationship” (p.132) that form an organization. The interlinked nature of the structure that emerges from the systemic process of imbrication provides stability and strength to the emerging entity or organization (Taylor, 2000).

Cooren suggests that the process of imbrication accomplished through discourse makes it somewhat compatible with social systems theory (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 293), accounting for how micro-conversation events can scale up to macro organizational form. Extending the link to the McPhee school of CCO, McPhee himself suggests that the four flows could be viewed as four dimensions of imbrications (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 294). This places imbrication as an important concept originating from TMS, but that is also consistent and compatible with the ontological and epistemological stances adopted in the other two CCO schools.

4.4.4 Distanciation

As localized texts and conversations recursively shape each other, distanciation occurs when texts are transported over time and distance, transcending their places of origin. Dislocation (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2009, p. 123; Vasquez, 2013) can be considered a particular variant of distanciation that focuses on how the actions of (non-human) actants contribute to scaling up by appearing to act outside the initial local setting in
which they occur. Adopting this view of actants requires account to be taken of how their associations take place across time and place, what motivations lie behind them and what consequences arise from them. Dislocation is a concept most often associated with the projection of an organization from a ‘here and now’ position/location, to a ‘there and then’ location - how an organization can travel/dislocate/transcend space and time to appear to be in two places at once (Vasquez, 2013, p. 130).

Distanciation also features in McPhee’s view of organizational constitution, although with some acknowledged differences. McPhee and Canary (2013) see distanciation as a simultaneous occurrence, locally and afar, both now and later, of a lived contextuality of spacio-temporal relations (p.5). They proposed a 5-spheres model to present distanciation as mediated through five spheres of influence - interpersonal encounters, the locale of occurrence, the boundaries between occurrences, counter-locale (or ‘virtual’ locales), and institutional settings. While acknowledging the limitations of their 5-spheres model and the need for its further development (p.21), they provide an interpretation of distanciation that has a broader but supplementary scope to that of the TMS view and can play a significant role in each of McPhee and Zaun’s four flows, but particularly so in institutional positioning as reviewed in Section 4.3.4.

4.4.5 Immutable mobiles

Originally proposed by Bruno Latour in his book *Science in Action* (Latour, 2005, p. 223), the term “immutable mobile” describes something that can be transported from one place to another without being distorted or changed. Where distanciation is considered to be transportation over time and space, immutable mobiles might be viewed as one means to accomplish it. Related to immutable mobiles, and of some importance in considering the way they are transported, is Latour’s (2005) distinction between intermediaries and mediators. An intermediary refers to something that transports meaning or force without transforming it, while a mediator can transform, translate, distort or modify the meaning of what it carries (p. 39).

The original conception of immutable mobile was more related to material objects (Law, 2007) but Cooren et al. (2007) adapted Latour’s original concept to account for how particular aspects of organizational discourse can transport and preserve meaning across place and time and contribute toward the constitution of organization. Considerable work is required to preserve the immutability of mobiles (Latour cited by Cooren et al., 2007, p. 166) and making discourses mobile, while protecting their
Immutability requires active management of their stability as they transport across time and space (p. 187). In the context of immutable discourses as a form of immutable mobiles, Cooren et al. (2007) refer to a particular discourse “transported without much alteration” (my emphasis, p. 175), suggesting that some alteration did in fact take place. This begs some inevitable questions - how much alteration needs to be observed before a discourse is no longer considered immutable? Can certain aspects of a discourse alter over time or space and still be considered immutable? It further calls out to identify the specific conditions under which discourses are most likely to become immutable. All of these factors take on significance when considered in relation to the previous discussions about the text-conversation dialectic, textual agency and imbrication, all as part of organizational constitution through communicative acts.

As organizational agents in their own right, meetings would be considered as mediators by Latour’s definition in that they can transform, translate, distort or modify the meaning of what they carry. While meeting minutes are one common and familiar form of an ‘immutable mobile’ associated with organizational meetings, Cooren et al. (2007) clearly had a significantly broader conception in mind for immutable mobiles, that could encompass different combinations of text, conversation fragments, and actors/actants, all engaging through acts of hybridicity (Cooren, 2004b, p. 377). ‘Immutable mobile’ helps to identify different means of connection between organizational meetings, while acknowledging that connections themselves can also be mutable mobiles (Law, 2007, p. 14 emphasis not in original; Wright, 2014, p. 13). Such mutable mobiles could be transported through or by organizational meetings acting both as mediators or intermediaries, depending on the form that the ‘mobiles’ actually take. Mutable mobiles would be expected to have shorter-term effects and perhaps less consistent effects than immutable mobiles, as they change while undergoing transportation.

4.4.6 Univocality-multivocality and ventriloquism

One of the key challenges of any theory of organization is to account for the emergence of a single organizational voice from the cacophony of voices making up the organization - the uni-vocal emerging from a multi-vocal origin. TMS deploys the various concepts reviewed in the preceding sections to account for the communicational processes that enable organizations to metaphorically transition from the multivocal noise of a crowd to the univocal harmony of a choir. Organizational
meetings could be seen as metaphorical performance theatres, in which actors can present multivocal performances but from which they can acquire univocal representations of their organization. Conversely and perhaps paradoxically, meetings may also on occasion serve the direct opposite function, appearing more like surgical theatres, in which coherent and univocal perceptions of a singular organization may be dissected and fragmented into multiple and divergent voices.

Cooren (2008, p. 27; 2012, p. 5) defines ventriloquism as an “activity that consists of making someone or something say or do something.” Ashcraft et al. (2009, p. 37) consider ventriloquism vital to the constitution of organization and Cooren (2012, p. 4) considers it one of the forms of agency always in play in the communicative constitution of organizations. Ventriloquism can be seen in virtually all forms of discourse or conversation (Cooren, 2012, p. 5; Cooren & Sandler, 2014, pp. 225-226) and it enables many organizational actors to appropriate and use a wide variety of texts to generate action. It also supports explanation of how those texts or other forms of actants may be seen to act through their human ventriloquists (Kuhn, 2012, p. 554).

While acknowledging the compatibility of ventriloquism with Structuration Theory (Schoeneborn et al., 2014) and its potential to contribute to the 4-Flows theory (p. 294), McPhee also cautions about the fallacy of believing that any one individual is literally able to speak for an organization or that such speech acts in themselves might constitute organizations (p. 301). Notwithstanding, the concept of ventriloquism provides a valuable means of describing a frequent discursive practice that links actants and actors in combined agency, contributing to our understanding of how organizations are communicatively constituted. Ventriloquism as proposed by Cooren (2008) and developed by Cooren and Sandler (2014) adds “substantial flesh to the bones of constitutive communication theorizing” (Kuhn, 2014, p. 246) and we will see in the data analysis how it manifests in the discourse of organizational meetings to engage ‘ghost-participants’ as different forms of meeting connections.

### 4.5 THE LUHMANNIAN SCHOOL PERSPECTIVE

Luhmann’s (1995) Theory of Social Systems (TSS) (Schoeneborn, 2011b), represents a specific adaptation and refinement of General Systems Theory (von Bertalanffy, 1969). The relatively low adoption of Luhmann’s ideas stems from a belief that his social and organization theories were complex and couched in terminology that was considered distinctive but somewhat obscure (Seidl & Becker, 2006b, p. 10).
Luhmann had a propensity to (re)define terms and expressions with meanings that were specific to his own theory, such that understanding of some of his ideas almost required an understanding of all of his thinking (Muller, 1994, p. 52). Consequently, key aspects of Luhmann’s work have often been misunderstood (Clam, 2000; Seidl, 2006b; Tyulenev, 2009) and had a lower level of adoption than might be expected. Notwithstanding these limitations, Luhmann’s (1995) TSS in general and his concept and application of autopoiesis in particular (Luhmann, 2006a, 2006b) have been applied in a diverse range of disciplines ranging from economics and politics, to philosophy and psychology (Hemes & Bakken, 2003, p. 1513).

In broad terms, Luhmann refined his work such that consciousness became the foundational element of psychic systems (Luhmann, 1995, Chapter 7), communication became the central tenet of his thinking on social systems (Luhmann, 1981, 1992), and he focused on organizations to a much greater extent than previously, positioning decision communication (Luhmann, 2006c) as the autopoietic basis for organization reproduction (Seidl, 2006a, p. 39). Luhmann’s concepts of autopoiesis and decision paradox are of most immediate interest, in so far as they are complementary to McPhee and Zaug’s (2000) reflexive self-structuring and activity coordination respectively, and are applied in the analysis of organizational meetings in Chapter 8 of this thesis.

4.5.1 The autopoietic turn

Maturana and Varela’s (1979) concept of autopoiesis suggests that living systems are distinguished from non-living systems by their ability to reproduce from within their own constituent elements, which elements are in turn produced by the system from within its own resources. In addition, the processes of reproduction are also determined and internally produced by the system. This allows the system to be considered ‘self-structuring’, in that it determines its own shape, form and functions in so far as its own processes enable it to self-adapt to survive in its environmental surroundings.

Luhmann built the TSS around his radical adaptation of the concept of autopoiesis (Mingers, 2002, p. 278; Seidl, 2006a, p. 21) and developed a more general trans-disciplinary concept of autopoiesis that could be applied to non-biologic systems. Under TSS, the mechanisms by which a system interacts with its environment are considered an autopoietic feature of the system that are determined and produced by the system itself. Referred to as ‘structural-coupling’ (Mingers, 2002, p. 280; Seidl, 2006a, p. 24), interactions with the environment recursively influence how a system
can interact with its environment, but system features that enable interaction are operationally determined by the system rather than by the environment. As a simple example, an organism that has not developed the capacity for sight will be limited to interacting with its environment in ways that do not require visual capacity, where visual cues may be provided by the environment and used by other organisms for interactional purposes. In this example, the organism and not the environment determined the means of interaction between the two.

Autopoiesis is not proposed as 'social cloning' or an argument for the reproduction of identical copies of elements within social systems (Luhmann, 2006b, p. 60). Rather it provides a conceptual tool to understand and explain how social systems in general, and organizations in particular, accomplish continuous change within their own processes through the production and reproduction of difference from one (internal) event to another. Through these on-going differences, the uncertainty of organizations is not reduced but renewed, supporting the on-going observation of organizations as constantly emerging entities (p. 61). If such internal differences were not continuously renewed, the organization would stagnate and ultimately die. In summary, the environment does not determine what a system conceives, perceives or responds to - the system's internal structures make those determinations.

4.5.2 The paradox of decision.

The paradox of decision has been extensively elaborated by Luhmann (2006c) and by other scholars who have studied his work, but only a very brief introduction to his thinking on decision communication can be provided here. My particular emphasis in this section is on the relevance and integration of decision communication to CCO, to inform specific aspects of the data analysis in Chapter 8 below. In early organization research, March and Simon (1993, p. 7) viewed organizations and decision-making as based on “considerably qualified rationality” or bounded rationality. In contrast, Luhmann saw rationality as a means of retrospective observation to deal with the dissonance of contingency and the paradox of decision (Nassehi, 2005, p. 186), rather than as the foundation of decisions. Luhmann conceptualized organizations as autopoietic systems consisting of interconnected communicative events (Schoeneborn, 2011b, p. 670) and particularly placed decision communication and the paradox of decision at the centre and foundation of his organization theory (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 293; Seidl, 2006a, p. 45).
Luhmann’s theory of decision in the context of his TSS eschews a common sense view of decisions as making a simple choice between alternatives (Luhmann, 1995, p. 294). His decision theory is based on the idea of a system determining the difference between conforming with versus deviating from expectations, setting aside whether an involved actor or uninvolved observer creates those expectations (p. 295). Decisions are considered a specific type of communication in TSS, distinguished from other communication in that they convey either implicitly or explicitly their own contingency (Schoeneborn, 2011b, p. 673) and by extension the contingency of the system in which the decisions are made. As with so many other Luhmannian concepts, contingency in this context has a specific meaning, representing openness to possibilities (Schoeneborn, 2011b, p. 672; Seidl, 2006a, p. 39) rather than dependence on some other factors before a decision point. Counter-intuitively, decisions do not limit possibilities after a decision point, but rather the decision point itself represents the transition between different possibilities of the past and future (Andersen, 2003, p. 13). As such, decisions are paradoxically seen as resolving past contingency within a system while simultaneously setting up future contingency by creating new and different possibilities (Luhmann, 2006c, p. 95).

Under Luhmann’s TSS, decisions arise from communication rather than being ‘made’ out of some act of conscious will. They implicitly draw attention to the alternatives (contingencies) that were ‘decided against’, while explicitly identifying the alternative that was ‘selected’ when a decision emerged (Seidl, 2006a, p. 39). Decisions for Luhmann are identified as “compact communications that communicate their own contingency” (Nassehi, 2005, p. 179), highlighting that alternative selections were available that might have been made. It is these alternative possibilities brought into focus by decisions that set the autopoietic basis for future decision communications to (re)create the organization in an on-going communicative cycle (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 293). For this reason every decision holds the potential to instigate systemic change (Kuhn, 2012, p. 567) and in very small but incremental steps, nudge the organization in a different direction.

While decisions convey a direction expected to be followed in the present, they simultaneously generate new and alternative possibilities that could be followed in the future (Kuhn, 2012, p. 563), thus ‘potentialising’ further decisions (Andersen, 2003, p. 12). The decision paradox exists because decision communications indicate that genuine alternatives existed prior to a decision, and by virtue of decision, alternatives
appear to no longer exist at the point of decision. Yet the decision did not only expunge past available alternatives but rather opened up future contingencies or possibilities that did not exist prior to the decision. While a decision has limited the social contingency that existed prior to the decision point, paradoxically it has also created new possibilities for future social contingency that otherwise would not have been so explicitly possible (Andersen, 2003, p. 11).

The paradox associated with decisions might suggest that decisions should never occur, often referred to as the ‘undecidability of decisions’ (Andersen, 2003; Schoenebom, 2011b; Seidl & Becker, 2006b, 2006c), but we know empirically that they occur in organizations all the time. The paradox of decision is added to by two additional questions - what criteria are used to enable decision making to take place and how do we determine if a decision has actually been made? Viewed empirically, Andersen (2003, p. 12) cites the common practice in meetings of ratifying the minutes of previous meetings as an example of past ‘decisions’ only being validated as decisions by another decision taken in a ‘present’ meeting. This has the effect of a ‘present’ decision communication effectively deciding what previous communications can be considered decisions! Adopting a prospective view, previous decisions always create a specific new pretext for future decisions, suggesting that decisions can only arise if prior decisions have already been made. These dual perspectives on decisions highlight the concept of ‘decision premises’ (Andersen, 2003; Kuhn, 2012; Luhmann, 2006c; Seidl, 2006a) - the basis on which decisions are made and come to be seen as decisions. Luhmann advanced each decision made as a premise for some future decision(s) yet to be made (Luhmann, 2006c, p. 95). He also identified the recursive relationship between decisions and decision premises, whereby each is necessary to contribute to the existence of the other (Kuhn, 2012, p. 545; Seidl, 2006a, p. 42).

Luhmann saw organizational plans, communication channels and personnel as three distinct types of decision premises from which organizational decisions can emerge or on which decisions can be based (Seidl, 2006a, p. 43). Positions within organizations, that is posts held by individuals (Luhmann, 2006c, p. 94), are intersection points to express these types of decision premises since they hold responsibility for implementing plans and using communication channels (Seidl, 2006a, p. 44). The recognition that decision premises also derive at least in part from less tangible organizational factors such as culture and established cognitive routines brought Luhmann to identify a fourth type of decision premise he called undecidable decision
premises, which focus on the decision making processes employed by a given organization (Seidl, 2006a, p. 44). The effect of decision premises is to remove the paradox or at least put paradox at a safe distance such as to enable decisions to take place. They effectively deparadoxify decisions and decision making.

### 4.5.3 Resolving decision paradox

Decision paralysis due to apparently insurmountable paradox is avoided and overcome by various means that ‘deparadoxify’ communication (Andersen, 2003; Schoenebom, 2011b; Seidl & Becker, 2006b, 2006c). Andersen (2003, p. 13) specifically identifies three types of deparadoxification: temporal, social, and factual.

Temporal deparadoxing takes place through the sub-division of decisions into smaller and more manageable decisions, spread out over time. The implications of these smaller decisions may appear less laden with paradox and therefore more manageable, and the chain or even cascade of decisions may confer an aura of necessity or even logic on the cumulative larger decision they come to represent.

Social deparadoxing typically takes the form of social processes that need to be followed to arrive at decisions. Paradox is partially removed by surrendering the act of ‘decision making’ to the unaccountable process, negating the requirement to deal with the paradox of decision and making the decision feel more like an inevitable outcome. Alternatively, the ‘fiction of the decision maker’ (Seidl & Becker, 2006b, p. 29) may be used in organizations to attribute motives, rationality and ultimately decision ownership to a single psychic system (person). Andersen (2003) frames it thus: “By pointing out central players in the environment and attributing them with authority, preferences, and strategies, the decision eventually takes the shape of social imperative.” (p. 15)

Factual deparadoxing leans back towards a rationalist model of decision making, setting decisions up as simple choices between (factual) alternatives. This conveniently avoids having to address the obvious question of who decided the choices that were available or how these alternative options were themselves decided on. It is often the case that such selection of available choices are taken to be imposed by ‘the environment’, again conveniently shielding the decision maker from one of the paradoxes of decisions.

Organizational structures and processes, particularly organizational meetings, can be set up to deparadoxify decisions (Seidl, 2006a, p. 46), which could be categorized under
any or all three headings, depending on the role attributed to meetings in the decision making process. All of these measures have the effect of deflecting attention away from the paradoxes of decision communications, enabling the paradoxes to be moved out of sight rather than resolved (Seidl, 2006a, p. 46; Seidl & Becker, 2006b, p. 29), and freeing up decision communications to continue their autopoietic emergence in ongoing flows of communication. Schoeneborn (2011b, p. 674) sees Luhmann’s contributions on organizational decision communication as a specific type of communication that holds McPhee and Zaug’s (2000) ‘Four Flows’ together in the wider CCO context.

As with all theories, Luhmann’s TSS has strong proponents (Helge Becker & Seidl, 2007; Herting & Stein, 2007; Seidl & Becker, 2006c) but is also not without its limitations (Mingers, 2002) or its outright detractors (Østerberg, 2000). Luhmann’s TSS has been acknowledged as challenging to understand due to its use of obscure language (Seidl & Becker, 2006a) and difficult to apply empirically outside the realms of more abstract or conceptual theorizing (la Cour, Vallentin, Højlund, Thyssen, & Rennison, 2007). Where la Cour et al. (2007, p. 930) lament an apparently missed opportunity to position Luhmann’s work closer to empirical inquiry, Helge Becker and Seidl (2007, p. 943) suggested that individual concepts from Luhmann could be used independently of their originating context to address particular empirical research questions.

Organizations in general and their meetings in particular are synonymous in many people’s minds with decision making although some research suggests that significantly less decisions are made at meetings than they (meetings) are given credit for (Asmuß & Svennevig, 2009; Scott et al., 2012; Wodak et al., 2011). This thesis adopts a variation of Becker and Seidl’s (2007) suggested approach by combining autopoiesis and decision paradox with McPhee and Zaug’s (2009) reflexive self-structuring and activity coordination respectively, to analyse the paradox of decisions and the transportation of decisions in the data analysis in Chapter 8.

## 4.6 MEETINGS AND CCO

### 4.6.1 Meetings as communication mediators

In living organisms, electrical impulses provide the means by which inert matter becomes “living” or “psychic” (Seidl & Becker, 2006a). Through connecting elements
in specific ways, such electrical impulses initiate and support a cascade of ongoing connection of elements that define the essence and identity of living entities. Luhmann (2013) viewed communication as an operation that meets three criteria he identified as necessary to define a social system - a single operation, consistent “sameness”, and possessing connectivity - summarising it as “the structural equivalent of biochemical statements” (p. 53). Combining Seidl and Becker’s position with that of Luhmann supports viewing communication in the constitution of organizations as analogous to electrical impulses in the constitution of living organisms. In this sense, communication brings organizations to life and CCO provides a means to study organizations as living entities (McPhee & Zaug, 2000, p. 5), accounting for how they form, grow and even how they die. Meetings in this context could be seen as essential junctions or intersections through which constitutive communication is generated, flows or is amplified throughout an organization.

Meetings are acknowledged as significant communicative events in general (Asmussen & Svennevig, 2009; Köhler, Cramton, & Hinds, 2012), while reflecting in particular, the essence of the organizations in which they take place (Schwartzman, 1989). Viewed as “social practices across space and time” (Giddens, 1984, p. 2), meetings can be seen as an organizational practice exemplifying a duality of structure in which “the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the same practices they recursively organize” (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). In this thesis, meetings collectively are at once seen as reflections of the organization writ small (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 39) and also as fundamental building blocks of that same organization - they are recursively constituted by and constitutive of organization. Communication is central to the dual nature of meetings as individual events and also as constituents of an interconnected systemic process, necessitating a bifocal perspective to understand how they contribute to the constitution of organizations at both micro and macro levels. CCO provides an integrated analytical framework to adopt Nicolini’s (2009) zoomed-in perspective to examine the agency of meetings collectively.

Putnam and McPhee (2009) identify a number of key areas that should be developed to progress CCO as an organizational theory, including; how multiple distanced ‘sites’ become integrated (p. 198); the transportation of interactions across time and space (p. 199); the accomplishment of representing and referencing multiple communities within organizations (p. 201); and the entwine ment of material objects and communication in practice (p. 202). Meetings collectively speak to all four areas.
4.6.2 Communication - necessary but not sufficient for organizing

The tendency in some scholarly pursuits to argue a certain perspective into obscurity in favour of the primacy of another, runs the increasing risk of over-simplification of issues that are necessarily complex, or the bracketing-off of certain phenomena by one group of scholars at the potential expense of excluding necessary details favoured by another (Kuhn, 2012, p. 544). This raises an important question in respect of the necessity and sufficiency of communication to account for organization. In its simplest form a necessary condition is one that must prevail or be present for a particular phenomenon to occur. A sufficient condition is one whose presence alone assures that a particular phenomenon being studied will be realized (Bisel, 2010, p. 127).

Notwithstanding the centrality of communication to the CCO perspective on organizations, there is no universal claim made that communication is the only constituent of organization (Conrad, 2004). In this context, it is also important to distinguish between the processes of organizing versus the organizations that emerge as the product or output of such processes (Weick, 1979). Whether one subscribes to a reified view of organizations as discrete, clearly-bounded entities (March & Simon, 1993) or to a view of organizations as never-complete accomplishments emerging from on-going processes of organizing (Taylor & Van Every, 2000; Weick, 1979), communication is central to and a necessary input to the accomplishment of both.

In so far as organizing takes place, and acknowledging that organizing does not necessarily result in organization per se (Bisel, 2010, p. 127; Cheney, 2000, p. 25), Cooren and Fairhurst (2009, p. 121) acknowledge that organizing is necessary but not sufficient to constitute what we have come to understand as organizations. While communication may be necessary for both organizing and organization, it cannot be taken as axiomatic that it is sufficient (alone) to account for the accomplishment of either. In fact Bisel (2010) concludes that communication is necessary for both but not sufficient for either.

While communication is necessary for organizing to take place, it may not always result in becoming organized. Equally, organizing activity specifically aimed at forming an organization must involve communication of some sort, but organization is not a foregone conclusion of such efforts. Sometimes organizing fails to produce organizations. The ‘disorganizing’ characteristics of communication (Bisel, 2009b, p. 632) lead us to acknowledge that communication may contribute as much to disorganizing as it does to organizing, depending on the communication taking place.
In summary, communication is foundational and indispensable for the accomplishment of organizing and organization, making it necessary for both, but communication does not pre-ordain and may even occasion the failure of organizing or organization, making it not sufficient to the accomplishment of either.

4.7 CONCLUSION

The principal points of convergence between the three CCO schools is the concept of connectivity. Where Luhmann’s focus is on the conceptual significance and accomplishment of connectivity, the McPhee School focuses on the processual relevance and impact of connectivity. In contrast to both, TMS tends to focus on the detailed mechanisms through which connectivity is communicatively accomplished. Proponents for each school also have their points of ongoing difference (Schoeneborn, 2011a). McPhee and Poole (2001, p. 534) critique Taylor et al.’s (1996) work for its apparent assumption that if organization and communication are equivalent then all communication should be organizational, which they argue it is not. Cooren and Fairhurst (2009) consider that the McPhee and Zaug (2009) model is too reductionist in adopting a top-down stance toward organizations, while “Cooren and Fairhurst instead propose applying a bottom-up perspective, from which the organization should be conceived as an emergent phenomenon, fundamentally rooted in local interactions” (Schoeneborn, 2011b, p. 668).

Notwithstanding the ontological and epistemological differences between the three CCO schools (Schoeneborn et al., 2014), concepts from each can be integrated and used to show the complementarity between them in accounting for the communicative constitution of organizations, rather than emphasising their ontological or epistemic differences. Recent research and publications from within the CCO community (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009a; Robichaud & Cooren, 2013) show convergence between aspects of the CCO schools and how different features of the three CCO schools can be combined and interact to develop our understanding of how organizations are communicatively constituted, all without surrendering their underlying differences. This approach is specifically adopted in this thesis in so far as the 4-Flows model from the McPhee School is adopted as the broad analytical lens, but specific concepts from TMS and the Luhmannian Schools are used to elaborate these flows from the available meetings data. Chapter 5 elaborates how CCO is adapted into the overall research methodology.
CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY
5 METHODOLOGY

As there was a gap in the literature concerning the agency of meetings collectively, the orientation of this PhD research is towards theory-building rather than theory-testing. For this reason the overall research methodology is a synthesis of different methods adopted from different methodologies. The research was also conducted as a participant observer (Pacanowsky, 1988), partially embedded in an organizational context over an 18 month period, and while not designed as an ethnographic study, the data collection had many characteristics reflective of that tradition. In the context of this research, it is appropriate to reflect on Hibbert, Sillince, Diefenbach, and Cunliffe's (2014) proposal that researchers should critically question their connections with their surroundings, their limits and prejudices, the reflexive influences between researcher and surroundings, and "the constitutive role of researcher-participant relationships" (2014, p. 283). Such reflections are provided, as well as other limitations on the research, throughout this chapter.

In a broader context, Hibbert et al. (2014) reflect on the barriers to generative theorizing in current research paradigms and thinking, particularly within management and organization studies. They identify conservative knowledge communities, misleading rhetoric about 'progress', and ideological constraints, as three epistemological issues that make it more difficult for new theories to emerge (p. 279). Breaking free from these constraints creates the risk of falling between different paradigms, or floundering from insufficient rigour if viewed only from the perspective of a single knowledge community (Hibbert et al., 2014, p. 285). A particular challenge in this respect is positioning one's thinking on a spectrum - viewing organizations as ongoing accomplishments of micro-discursive interactions on the one hand, or seeing organizations as macro-emergent outputs with distinct characteristics from those of their constituent parts. This issue is addressed in the first section of the chapter, before providing an overview in Section 5.2 of the methodology adopted in the research. Section 5.3 outlines the three types of reasoning used as part of the theory building on meetings collectively, followed by an account of sourcing and collecting the research data in Section 5.4. The challenges associated with being a participant observer are considered in Section 5.5, while Section 5.6 details the use of Discourse Analysis and how it was combined with conceptual model-building both during data collection and in the more detailed data analysis later in the research. A short conclusion completes the chapter.
5.1 THE MACRO-MICRO SPECTRUM OF ORGANIZATIONS

Different theoretical concepts and language are required to engage with and account for the idea of macro organization versus the micro constituent elements that interact to make up organizations. In much the same way that we reference bricks, cement, or plumb lines to convey how buildings are constructed from fundamental elements, these concepts or words are not appropriate to describe the final shape, dimensions, or layout of the building that is constructed. In accounting for the constitution of organizations we face a similar problem, in so far as the degree of detail to be examined requires different concepts, methods and language to convey the outcome of the analysis undertaken. The levels of detail examined can be considered to exist along a micro-macro organizational spectrum. The differences between points on that spectrum only become problematic if we choose to see them in isolation of the totality to which they contribute.

There has been a long-standing debate within the social sciences on the distinction and significance of what are characterised as micro and macro perspectives in studying social phenomenon (Boden, 1994; Collins, 1981; Giddens, 1984; Kuhn, 2012). The same considerations and sometimes debate has permeated other areas of study such as institutional theory (Lammers & Barbour, 2006), actor network theory (Latour, 2005), sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and strategy-as-practice (Johnson, Langley, Melin, & Whittington, 2007). In the more specific context of studying organizations, Boden (1994, p. 5) emphatically asserts that there is no such thing as 'micro' or 'macro' within organizations, attributing its existence to the theories and analytic strategies of researchers. This apparent micro-macro dichotomy also permeates debate in the three areas of meetings, sensemaking and CEO adopted in this thesis, being least pronounced in the meetings literature and most evident within the CEO literature.

It has been argued that boundaries around phenomena are the analyst's artificial impositions intended to limit and define the area being analysed (Scott, 2003; Weick, 1979). Micro or macro views may well be a similar imposition of the analyst (Boden, 1994, p. 5) to avoid having to account for two features of the subject matter being studied. In what Weick (2009, p. 21) calls "a breach of postmodern sensitivity", he deliberately chooses to ignore the discontinuity of micro and macro phenomenon. Instead, he emphasises the patterns of interactions that are inherent in adopting a processual or systemic view of organizations, rather than emphasising the 'acts' of
individuals (Weick, 1979, p. 35) when accounting for organizing, but without in any way denying that such individual acts take place.

Proponents of the argument that the micro-macro divide does not exist (Boden, 1994) tend to exclude analysis of activities at the macro level in favour of concentrating on the details of activities such as talk and interactions at the micro level (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2004). They argue that individual contributions through talk and interaction will sediment or laminate over time (Boden, 1994, p. 22), in processes of “tiling” or “imbrication”, to form “an infrastructure of routinized performances” (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 94). Broader schemes of organization, processes or events will always comprise micro-level constituent parts. We can explain how the parts conjoin to form larger structures within which the constituent parts are still visible. But neither explanation of the individual parts nor how they are joined is always sufficient to account for the emergent properties of the whole that is finally formed. For example, a simple sundial or a complex watch will both tell the time, but merely describing how both are an accumulation of constituent parts will fall far short of explaining how they come to tell the time. In calling the micro-macro divide a phoney war, Giddens (1984, p. 139) acknowledges the existence of both ends of this spectrum but also asserts that neither has any priority over the other. His structuration theory argues that both are necessary and recursively dependent on each other to account for the totality of the social phenomenon we study, but he acknowledges that “an unhappy division of labour” (p. 139) exists even where there is no conflict between the micro-macro perspectives. Whether one subscribes to the primacy of one over the other or to the existence of a phoney war between them, one is still left with the challenge of understanding the details of accomplishing each level of organizational activity while also accounting for how they are connected to define the holistic being and emergent outcome of an organization.

I adopt a more pragmatic approach, acknowledging the spectrum of perspectives on the micro-macro issue, largely for the purpose of locating the research on that spectrum rather than arguing for one view of the micro-macro divide over the other. The study of meetings as systemic process adopts a meso-level perspective, metaphorically bridging the micro-macro divide. Meetings are considered as loci for the accomplishment of micro-discursive interactions, while simultaneously being meso-level constituent elements of macro-level organizations, connected across time and space through the communicative acts of their participants. To consider the agency of
meetings as systemic process, it is necessary to analyse them at both the fine-grained level of their formation and at the broader level of their agential role in forming and sustaining organization. Sensemaking and CCO provide a suitable array of conceptual tools to analyse meetings from these different but complementary perspectives.

5.2 METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

As I have worked through the apparently disparate fields of systems thinking, process studies, meetings research, sensemaking and communication studies, I have struggled between the appeal of developing a contribution within their tightly defined boundaries, versus using their overlaps and potential synergies to explore our understanding of organizational meetings from a new perspective. Practicing as a management consultant exposes me to multiple organizations, providing a diverse range of experience and possible theoretical explanations for the agency of meetings collectively. It is difficult to see how meetings and the way I have studied them could lend itself to any single knowledge domain or methodological approach, a point explicitly acknowledged by Olien et al. (2015, p. 15) in respect of meetings research in general.

Meadows (2009), in speaking about systems, observed that “It's easier to learn about a system’s elements than about its interconnections” (p. 14). Connections between meetings collectively cannot be explored without entering the detail of individual meetings, because it is those very details that provide the points through which connections are created and sustained. In my previous research on discursive activity in a strategy workshop (Duffy & O'Rourke, 2014), an executive team referred the conclusion of their workshop to a meeting of an entirely different group, but only did so in the final two minutes of their workshop (2014, p. 16 Transcript extract 17). Connection to an entirely different meeting was talked into existence at the last minute. Pursuing such connections would seem necessary to build a clearer understanding of how the combination of meetings might influence the development of both the topic and the overall organization. More abstractly, it raised questions about connections between organizational meetings in general, how they impact the topics handled at meetings (i.e. sensemaking), and how they impact collectively on the ongoing constitution of the organization. The methodological challenge arises in how to access and account for connectivity between meetings, the origin of such connections within

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meetings, and the final state and impact of these connections as embedded and persistent features that constitute the organization over time.

It would be novel to write an account of research that does not make reference to any other writings or authors and just stands on its own merits, seeking neither justification from someone else's work nor being constrained to justify fitting in to any particular school of thought. Gioia (2004, p. 109) reflects on this perspective as he recounts the challenges he experienced when he first joined the research community following a career in industry. He particularly reflects on sparring with editors and the associated struggle to have his sensemaking/sensegiving paper with Chittipeddi published (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). It is clear from his account that a thoughtful, insightful and valuable paper came close to being lost to the community of scholars, but his questioning of received wisdom (Gioia, 2004, p. 108) by challenging a conservative knowledge community (Hibbert et al., 2014) ensured that new thinking prevailed over an older orthodoxy that appeared to put form before substance.

Gioia's reflections reinforced for me that a written account of our research is relevant only in so far as it relates to or can be related to by others. Accordingly, it must be contextualized to enable a reader to at least orient to where it has come from and to where it may ultimately contribute, in order for the reader to form a view as to its usefulness. Struck by the simplicity of Carlsen and Dutton's (2011a, p. 13) observation that "We become researchers through the accumulation of experienced moments", I speculate that the material we choose to research is also the product of similar accumulation. How can we say what influence and impact our diverse life experiences bring to bear on selecting our research topics or the final output of our research efforts, and more specifically, how can we fully or even adequately account for it? Yet in the very process of codifying our findings into a communicable form, we cannot escape the imposition of artificial boundaries around the material we study. We will always have to fit a greater volume of experience into a lesser communication space, and to wrestle with the constraints of the language we use to simply communicate what we are doing, how we are doing it and why we do it. These artificial boundaries ensure that we will always fall short in conveying the full extent of what we have encountered or in accounting for the depth of what we have learned.

Convention dictates to a large extent the form our writing should take, yet the same convention may hamper the very purpose we set out to achieve. Through the perpetuation of conservative knowledge communities (Hibbert et al., 2014, p. 280) we
may feel compelled to avoid telling our story in ways that appear unconventional, or that may not gain favour with our examiners, or may not be accepted by the communities of practice we ultimately seek to inform. At the risk of infringing convention, this research adopts Nicolini’s (2009) zoomed-in and zoomed-out perspectives that were considered necessary to comprehensively present a new perspective on organizational meetings collectively, but that were each necessarily informed by quite different literature bases.

5.2.1 A double vision perspective

Seeking to understand organizational practices as constitutive of organizations, Nicolini (2009) developed a bifocal framework to deal with the challenges of using multiple theoretical influences to inform his analytical work. In recognising that the integrated nature of practices required simultaneous adoption of both micro and macro perspectives, he acknowledged that “studying practice requires choosing different angles for observation and interpretation frameworks without necessarily giving prominence to any one of these vistas” (p. 1396). He used two ‘theoretical lenses’ to guide and inform what he called a ‘zoomed in’ or micro view of practice, and two alternative theoretical lenses to examine the broader macro inter-practice phenomena or connections that he observed, referred to as a ‘zoomed out’ perspective. By adopting the zoomed-in and zoomed-out approach, Nicolini overcame the limitations of one theoretical frame by levering the strengths of another. He characterized the zooming in and out approach as “fore-grounding and back-grounding boundaries in the programmatic attempt to complexify practice against all types of reductionism, including what Levinson (2005) calls ‘interactional reductionism’ (the tendency of reducing all social phenomena to local interaction)” (p. 1396).

Conversations in meetings don’t stop when the meetings end. Identifying the threads to be followed, without becoming immersed in the topics being discussed, suggests a need to delve into the detail of the discourse taking place in individual meetings while at the same time maintaining visibility of how that discourse feeds into related discourses in other meetings. As topics span multiple meetings, there is a need to also hold in view a much wider perspective on the whole meetings data set. This simultaneous scrutiny of both micro and macro level activity is accommodated by adopting Nicolini’s (2009) ‘zooming in’ and ‘zooming out’ approach.
5.2.2 Reflection on the research question and objectives

At the end of Chapter 2 of this thesis it was clear that how meetings are collectively connected was worthy of more detailed examination than is currently apparent in the meetings literature. Having drawn also on the systemic, process, sensemaking and CCO literatures, and using Nicolini’s (2009) ‘zooming in’ and ‘zooming out’ approach to manage micro-macro issues, the research question is formalised as:

How do organizational meetings collectively contribute to the constitution of the organizations in which they take place?

The brevity of the question hides additional components that inform the more detailed research objectives:

RO 1. To conceptualize meetings as a collective organizational phenomenon.

RO 2. To explore the systemic and processual nature of organizational meetings collectively.

RO 3. To examine the contribution of meetings collectively to organizational sensemaking.

RO 4. To identify mechanisms through which meetings collectively contribute to the constitution of organization.

RO 5. To develop a theoretical proposition to account for the agency of organizational meetings collectively.

Addressing the research question and objectives leads to the development of a framework to account for the agency of organizational meetings collectively and the deduction of the initial practice implications if the research findings were adopted.

As stated at the outset, research by its nature cannot have a pre-determined outcome and should remain open to following unexpected paths. The initial focus of the research changed from ‘meetings as research resource’ to ‘meetings as research topic’. In consequence, the analytical work was conducted in two broad stages – the first stage involved reconceptualising meetings as a collective phenomenon while data collection was still taking place. The second stage involved more detailed analysis of the data following its collection.

The detailed data analysis had itself, two distinct parts – one taking the ‘zoomed out’ perspective on meetings, analysing them from the broad perspectives of systems thinking, processual thinking and sensemaking. The ‘zoomed in’ view was adopted using the CCO lens, with the 4-Flows providing a meso level framework to structure
the analysis while borrowing specific concepts from the Montreal and Luhmannian schools to focus micro-level consideration of the data. The evolution of the research question and the associated research objectives was strongly informed by the changing perspectives that occurred as the data were being collected, combined with the multiple iterations through the zoomed in and out analytical cycles.

5.3 AN APPROACH TO THEORY BUILDING

Theory development is a process that requires different patterns of reasoning (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 20), applied through iterative cycles (p. 102), and is dependent on the purpose sought and the phase of development being contemplated. Abduction, induction and deduction are three principal patterns of reasoning, each of which was used in an iterative cycle in this research. Abductive reasoning (Shepherd & Sutcliffe, 2011, p. 362; Van de Ven, 2007, p. 64) can be considered to bring a speculative ‘what if ...?’ perspective to initial theorizing. Its speculative nature requires more creative and imaginative thinking to spark associations between observations and ideas that otherwise may not have been observed or considered. In marked contrast, inductive thinking (Shepherd & Sutcliffe, 2011, p. 361; Van de Ven, 2007, p. 42) could be said to apply a ‘therefore’ mind-set to observations from a specific case, to identify what might be applicable to cases more generally, while making no claim as to the certainty of any expected outcome. Similarly, deductive reasoning (Shepherd & Sutcliffe, 2011, p. 361; Van de Ven, 2007, p. 41) also adopts ‘therefore’ in the thinking process, but in the opposite sense to induction - deduction starts with observation of multiple cases and therefore deduces what should apply to a specific case. While the degree of certainty of a deductive outcome is expected to be greater than one generated from inductive reasoning, it will still require testing to ensure the deductive process has not in fact produced an exception to an expected rule. Each of these three modes of thinking are now considered in turn.

5.3.1 Abductive reasoning

Immersion in a particular organizational context, observing and engaging with unfolding processes as they occur, enables ‘withness-thinking’ to occur (Shotter, 2006). Shotter best captures the effect of withness-thinking when he writes –

...instead of thinking with a focal awareness of the structure of a process in mind, we think along with a subsidiary awareness of certain felt experiences as
they occur to us from within our engaged involvement in a particular unfolding process, and that these inner feelings play a crucial role in guiding our actions. (Shotter, 2006, p. 586)

Such ‘withness-thinking’ can be considered a form of abductive reasoning, in which ideas are initially generated and developed from the experiences and impulses encountered in our immediate surroundings.

Abduction in the context of this research refers to applying “creative intuition” (Taylor & Van Every, 2011, p. 20; Van de Ven, 2007, p. 46), “speculative ideas and deductions” (Weick, 1989, p. 518) and what Langley (1999, p. 691) describes as an “uncodifiable creative leap”, to develop a view of meetings as a systemic process within organizations. Abduction could be seen as inviting imagination and intuition back into the craft of theory building (Carlsen & Dutton, 2011b), or as an interplay of multiple perspectives and assumptions as part of pre-research conceptualization (Hibbert et al., 2014, p. 284).

Responding to an intuition that there was something holistic occurring in the data, system and processual perspectives were adopted. Adopting a ‘systems perspective’ focused initial speculative thinking on whether and how meetings were connected to each other in one organization. Previous research that treated meetings as a resource (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Samra-Fredericks, 2000a; Spee, 2011) indicates they are connected through some of the subject matter they deal with, but it did not focus on meetings themselves or their more general interconnections as the topic of research. From a processual perspective, an abductive approach is required to untangle the significance and insights about process from the complexity of the empirically observed context as processes are happening (Langley et al., 2013, p. 11). The resulting insights should go beyond mere description to provide a theoretical insight that is applicable to other situations. Chapter 6 in this thesis sets out the industry and company context from which data were gathered, along with the initial abductive theory development and reconceptualization of organizational meetings that was based on that data and context.

5.3.2 Inductive reasoning

Theoretical development from empirical experience is loosely analogous to creating a map of a physical landscape. A map is not the territory (Latour, 2005, p. 133; Weick, 1979, p. 249) - it is only a partial representation that can never be fully complete. In
the same way, theory developed from empirical research is an abstracted representation and may be made more widely applicable through the use of inductive reasoning. The data in this research come from one organization and the generalizability of theory based on one organization is an important methodological consideration. In general, theory becomes more generalizable as the level of abstraction is increased (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 114; Weick, 1979, p. 62). An inductive approach was used to develop the models to aid the wider application of the initial theoretical proposals.

Induction guided and informed the zoomed-out and zoomed-in data analysis. The focus was to ascertain two things: were the original conjectures in any way reflected in the available data?; did the data itself provide any grounding for further elaboration of the original abductive thinking? In simple terms, the data answered ‘yes’ to both questions, which prompted more iterations into abductive thinking to further develop the conceptualization of meetings as a collective organizational phenomenon. Induction and abduction combined in an iterative cycle (Weick, 1989, p. 518), each informing the other, to develop and refine the theoretical insights arising from the research.

Another important part of the abductive reasoning was also the way in which sense was made of the data being gathered. Due to the nature of sensemaking, as elaborated in Chapter 4, it necessarily requires a degree of (re)enactment, selectivity and retention to make sensemaking possible. Preliminary data analysis also prompted a more detailed examination of the effects of communication across and between meetings. The constitutive nature of meetings as discursive events (Duffy, 2013; Duffy & O'Rourke, 2013a, 2013b, 2015) became a parallel focus of the research arising from the inductive insights arising from the initial data analysis. The acknowledged limitation of induction as a predictor of future events based on past or present observations (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 42) also prompted an extended iterative cycle involving all three forms of reasoning as part of the overall theory development process (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 102).

### 5.3.3 Deductive reasoning

Many concerns have been raised over the years about the gap between theory and practice (Russell Crook, Bratton, Street, & Ketchen Jr, 2006, p. 418). These concerns have become more focused on the relevance of management theory to the everyday practice of organizational management and have resulted in repeated calls to fill the gap between the theoretical knowledge generated by management scholars and the
applied knowledge required by practitioners (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011, p. 338). Deductive reasoning (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 102) helps to complement the abduction and induction thinking cycles, supporting the development of practice implications from the emerging insights gained from the research. The latter stages of the research involved a deductive approach, to consider and project the possible practice implications arising from the original theoretical foundations. The initial holistic conception of meetings collectively required elaboration into practice-based activity that could be tested in subsequent research. This required consideration of the implications for practice, in the form of proposals reflective of and supported by adopting a systemic process approach to conducting meetings. It also required reformulation of approaches to existing and familiar practices associated with meetings which are detailed in Chapter 10.

5.3.4 Generalisability.

Payne and Williams (2005) point out how difficult it is for any researcher, including an interpretative one, to avoid generalizing and argue that appropriately modest generalizations are both viable and valuable. The theory presented in this thesis comprises abstractions from empirical data but are not proposed as abstract laws that can be procedurally applied to determine outcomes in all situations. Rather, I propose a broader conceptualization of meetings collectively to be adapted and moulded as appropriate to support and complement the conduct of organizational meetings within their unique cultural and organizational context. To support appropriate adaptation and interpretation of the research findings, Chapter 6 provides what Seale (1999, p. 468) calls a “rich, detailed account of the 'sending' context” that will facilitate potential users of this work to judge what lessons from it may apply elsewhere or to test its reliability and validity in future research.

5.4 DATA SOURCING AND COLLECTION

Extracts from the meetings data are introduced in this chapter and used throughout Chapters 7 and 8 to illustrate the data analysis carried out. Each Extract reflects the actual words spoken by meeting participants and have not been edited to remove repetitions or idiosyncratic expressions. Figure 5.1 indicates the conventions used for presenting Extracts.
5.4.1 Challenges collecting ‘live’ meetings data.

Field notes, survey data or written texts from organizations are significantly relied on for conducting organizational research (Cooren, 2007), making audio or visual recordings more exceptional resources for developing theory from empirical data. Since data obtained from experimental contexts cannot be assured to be representative of talk in the real world (Cheng & Warren, 1999, p. 10; Taylor & Cameron, 1987, p. 52), it further reinforces the value of recordings of the naturally-occurring speech acts available for this research.

The difficulties associated with gaining access to record live organizational discourse as primary data are well recorded in the literature (Barley, 1990, p. 227; Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 75; Johnson et al., 2007, p. 65; Langley, 2007, p. 11; Russell Crook et al., 2006, p. 418; Smith, V., 2001, p. 226). Gaining access to record organizational meetings is a “daunting task” (Langley, 2007, p. 11), while getting access to record board meetings represents “an impossible method” for data collection (Clarke, 1998, p. 58). In seeking access for data collection to compile the Cambridge and Nottingham Business English Corpus (CANBEC), Handford (2010, p. 4) reported that 95% of businesses approached refused permission to make recordings of their meetings. In an even more surprising twist, Handford reports that some organizations requested
recordings to be returned after they had been made due to the sensitivity of their content. In this research, I was fortunate to overcome these well documented challenges and was afforded access to all organizational meetings over an eighteen month period, in a company I will refer to as KT-Inc.

As a participant-observer, Pacanowsky (1988, p. 359) refers to occasional queries from organizational members seeking his opinion on how they were communicating, which is an open possibility for researchers engaged in any form of ethnographic engagement. It is an ongoing challenge to separate the role of observer from participant in such circumstances. When asked directly, any failure or refusal to provide an input can have as profound an influence as the most effusive of replies. Any response, or even no response, will inevitably be interpreted in some way by the organization members and thus have some form of impact on what they think, do or say thereafter. This was clearly encountered in the following exchange at one of the weekly operations team meetings in KT-Inc, when the Operations Director, Pete, sought my input from discussions we were both party to in another group’s meeting:

**Extract 5.1**

| :04:49:18.3 | Pete (OpsD): From the meetings that you have been part of, how would you feel he has been described or his profile and that? |
| :04:49:30.5 | [Audible breath, followed by laughter] |
| :04:49:32.5 | Millie (LabM): That said [ooh] it all [laughter] |
| :04:49:33.0 | Jason (PrM): You're probably better off. |
| :04:49:44.9 | Pete (OpsD): That's the first time that you've ever, have ever closed up on us, and I have [to |
| :04:49:48.4 | Martin (Res): No] and I'm not closing up. I think I'm honoring, I'm honoring the undertaking that I've given everybody [Pete (OpsD): yea], cm, about what goes on in meetings. You, you ask me to contribute anything about your group and your meeting, [Pete (OpsD): yea] I'll be absolutely[ full and frank |
| :05:00:03.0 | Pete (OpsD): yea, but, ok] eh, no that's fair enough, and I'm not going to put you on the spot or anything like that, but but the pedigree of the person, in |
general, the company are looking for serious pedigree at the moment, for those two positions, [Martin (Res): yea], that’s fair enough comment?

(0:50:22.7) Martin (Res): I’m not going to dispute that comment

Source: Ops team meeting, 20th September 2011

These considerations highlight three risks associated with researcher proximity in an ethnographic setting (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 67) - contamination, ‘going native’ and political alignment. Pacanowsky (1988, p. 359) provides an explicit example of what might be considered ‘going native’, when he describes being engaged as part of a task force to examine a particular problem encountered by the company. Section 5.5.3 sets out specific details of my own experience of ‘going native’ in the course of conducting this research.

Contamination is the risk I was most acutely aware of during the research. After the company owner agreed to take part in the research, as a gesture of appreciation I offered a number of consulting days to the company to be used as they considered appropriate. This was agreed on the basis that I would provide assistance if requested and if I felt competent to assist. Otherwise, it was agreed that I would simply attend their meetings with a view to observing and recording the proceedings. Assistance was requested in different ways: invitations to contribute at meetings, informal individual or group meetings ‘off the record’, formalised workshop training/facilitation, and individual coaching. Each of these posed personal challenges in the three risk categories identified (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 67). Contamination is of particular concern when contributing at meetings or conducting workshops. This is mitigated by avoiding any tendency to ‘follow-up’ on implementation of any ideas introduced unless expressly asked. ‘Going native’ and political alignment pose potential risks through ‘off the record’ meetings and coaching type interactions. In all cases risk mitigation is helped by ongoing awareness of the potential issues and open reflection on the impact they might have. Where data reflects the researchers inputs it is open to full analysis as an integral part of the rest of the data set.

5.4.2 Data source

Given my aspiration to access meetings at all levels of an organization, I initially planned for an extended period of up to one year (Smith, 2001, p. 226) to build the trust and confidence of participants, in order to negotiate access to the data required for the
study. A number of organizations were identified as possible targets, with the following criteria in mind:

1. Organization scale - large enough to have meetings ranging across multiple groups, but small enough to enable specific topics to be ‘tracked’ through the meetings of different groups if necessary.

2. Meeting frequency - sufficient number of formal meetings to enable attendance and tracking of suitable topics for research purposes.

3. Level of access likely to be granted - to enable the ‘tracking’ of topics as initially planned, it would be important to gain access to all meetings at which such topics would be discussed.

4. Flexible time scale - access to record at least one annual cycle of meetings, and longer if necessary to continue tracking strategic topics of particular interest.

The primary data relied on in this research was collected in a company referred to as KT-Inc. Anonymity of the company and participants was assured when access to the organization’s meetings was negotiated. The details of the commitments made are available in Appendix 1. An exceptional level of unrestricted access was granted for this research, covering meetings at every level of the organization. Sensitive commercial information was made available to me and discussed openly at the meetings I attended. For these reasons every effort is made to protect the identity of the organization involved. This necessitated anonymising the company name, its products and its specific industry sector, as it would be readily identifiable from disclosing these attributes. Chapter 6 provides a detailed account of the industrial context and the makeup of KT-Inc.

5.4.3 Negotiating access

With the forgoing factors in mind, an initial approach was made to the owner/general manager (GM) of KT-Inc which was a Small to Medium sized Enterprise (SME). A personal contact with an existing board member facilitated the initial introduction. The owner/GM and I were already peripherally known to each other. We had met previously at a number of social occasions but did not have any routine, ongoing or regular contact. A meeting was held on Friday 11th February 2011, at which I explained the proposed research, the initial topic of interest and that the topic was likely to change as the research progressed. I also took time to explain the principles behind discourse
analysis and in this context, the requirement to make audio recordings of the proceedings of meetings. Quite unexpectedly, he immediately agreed to take part in the research! He invited me to attend the company annual general meeting (AGM) which was scheduled to take place just four days later, on Tuesday, 15th February 2011. Significantly, he explained that the AGM was scheduled to consider and adopt the company annual strategic plan.

The AGM was scheduled to be in two parts - part 1 would deal with the company’s trading and financial details and part 2 would involve managers (non-board members) in reviewing and planning future strategy. The GM agreed to discuss my research with the other board members during part 1 of the AGM, to seek their approval and agreement to participate in the research. I prepared a briefing sheet (see Appendix 2) for the board members to explain the research, which was circulated to them in advance of the AGM. Approval for the company to engage in the research was agreed at part 1 of the AGM on the 15th February 2011 and I attended and recorded part 2 of the AGM in the afternoon.

Part 2 of the board meeting was also attended by managers from the company, providing a valuable opportunity to brief them about the research and to seek agreement to attend the meetings of their respective groups. As the first of each group’s meetings were attended, meeting participants were briefed on the research and provided with the briefing material and participant consent forms.

The positioning of the AGM at the start of the company strategic planning cycle informed the decision on how long to remain in the field collecting meetings data. As described earlier, the initial focus of the research and associated data collection was reasonably clear. However, it was also always likely that the focus could change depending on the content of the data being collected and the dynamics within the company. In order to keep options open for altering the research focus, I decided to continue data collection for an 18 month period, to ensure an overlap into a second consecutive planning cycle. This enabled the planning cycle itself to become a topic of research focus if that was considered useful. It also afforded an opportunity to see how a range of issues or topics developed across two planning cycles.

5.4.4 Data recording

The first meeting in KT-Inc was recorded on the 15th February 2011 and the final meeting on the 17th July 2012. The recordings were made on a Sony ICD-SX700 digital
recorder. I normally took a seated position to one side in the meetings. Some groups invited me to sit ‘around the table’ with them. Personal notes were also written by hand during the meetings. Basic details about the topic under discussion, along with an associated time mark, were recorded to aid later cataloguing. Personal notes and comments from an analytical perspective were also recorded, where a relationship to events in other meetings could be recalled or where personal insights came to mind during the meetings. Following meetings, audio recordings and personal notes were loaded into Transana software for later review, coding and analysis.

5.4.5 Data limitations in context

Data gathering for any research can only ever be described as partial. Defining when to start and when to stop data gathering can be dictated as much by circumstance or resources, as it can by academic rigour or necessity. In the context of collecting live discourse at meetings, it is reasonable to ask - when does the meeting discourse actually start? Is informal ‘chit-chat’ (Yoerger, Francis, & Allen, 2015) outside the meeting room a part of the meeting discourse? Does this view change if they are talking about agenda items to be discussed at the meeting? And what about the discourses taking place during meeting breaks?

These specific aspects, referred to as ‘pre-meeting talk’ (Allen, Lehmann-Willenbrock, & Landowski, 2014), have been the subject of research for their impact on the effectiveness of the meetings they are associated with, but including such data as part of meetings’ discourse remains a contested issue (Yoerger et al., 2015). The challenge is establishing an appropriate balance between limiting the amount of data without compromising the purpose for which it is being recorded.

One solution might be to wire every individual participant for sound (Cheng, Greaves, & Warren, 2005; Cheng & Warren, 1999, p. 11), for a defined period of time, in specific circumstances, and to record their every utterance. Such an approach, while capturing more data within a defined time period still leaves two challenging questions to be addressed - when to start and stop such ‘micro’ recording? ; and how to meaningfully handle the analysis of such an increasing volume of data? In the case of the corpus studies carried out by Cheng and Warren (1999), the defined purpose of the recordings was to collect the “spontaneous naturally-occurring conversations in which the participants could be assumed to be behaving normally” (p. 10), and determined the recording methods to be used. In the case of KT-Inc, the recordings were made on the
basis of when the meeting participants considered their meeting to start or stop. Accordingly, discourse immediately prior to or after the meetings, or taking place during meeting breaks went unrecorded. This represents a limitation of the data record in light of the purpose for which the data is used in the analysis.

A further limitation arises in that it was not possible to attend every meeting that took place within the eighteen month period, although members of some groups kindly recorded one or two meetings that I was unable to attend. The data set cannot be described as a complete record of all meetings in KT-Inc in the specified period but it represents a significant cross section of those meetings that did take place.

5.5 CHALLENGES OF THE PARTICIPANT-OBSERVER

What Hibbert et al. (2014) call Relationally Reflexive Research Practice aptly reflects my personal experiences as this research progressed. The emphasis in Hibbert et al.'s approach is ongoing attention and reflection by the researcher to their positioning with respect to the methodologies used, the research topics undertaken and the final accounts being written (p. 279). Reflexivity requires self-consciousness with respect to the methodologies used, while relational practice refers to the day to day social and personal relationships and interactions between researcher and participants (p. 283). The personal prejudices and limits of the researcher and how they influence or are influenced by the researcher-participant relationship should also be considered, to inform their impact on the research outputs. In this context, greater attention should also be paid to interactions and experiences that occur outside the immediate research site but that may also influence or inform how the data are interpreted.

5.5.1 Reflexivity and the participant observer

Working as a management consultant while simultaneously conducting research proved challenging in terms of time management but entirely symbiotic in complementarity of purpose. More than ten years of consulting practice involving facilitation of organizational meetings in the context of strategy, change and organizational development, has imprinted views, opinions and observations that have become personally heuristic but methodologically unvalidated. Engaging in this research provided an opportunity for a prolonged period of ongoing reflection on my experience of organization meetings and there can be no doubt this experience informed and guided my approach to the research, while the research itself has
significantly altered my own perception of meetings collectively. That very reflection enabled a new conceptualization of meetings not previously reported in the literature nor personally observed in practice. The challenge is to adequately account for what those influences are, how they may have shaped my methodological approach and how they impacted the analysis and conclusions I have drawn. Within the constraints of space and the specific context of my research site, these details are covered as comprehensively as possible in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

My areas of consulting practice included strategy development, operational reviews, project planning and rescue, and conflict resolution in the workplace. A significant focus of my work was the facilitation of executive strategy workshops and meetings. For this reason, I was particularly interested in developing a more detailed understanding of the dynamics of organizational meetings and their impact on and contribution towards strategy implementation. Having just completed research focusing on interactions in strategy development workshops (Duffy, 2010; Duffy & O'Rourke, 2014), I developed a particular interest in discourse within meetings and discourse analysis as a methodology to understand more fully what was taking place within them. This interest significantly informed my approach to KT-Inc, as well as informing my desire to record the live details of individual meetings.

In the initial discussions with the GM, I made known my academic research interests and my professional background. My offer to provide some consulting time to his company was availed of in two distinct ways - through spontaneous requests to contribute at various meetings as they were taking place, or through pre-planned engagement on specific activities that were outside, were part of, or were additional to routine meetings. It is not uncommon for such a relationship to develop in longitudinal research (Pacanowsky, 1988; Tuckermann & Rüegg-Stürm, 2011, p. 231).

### 5.5.2 Engagement during meetings

Engagement during meetings typically took two forms - requests for my input in relation to a particular topic under discussion, or invitations to comment on the overall conduct of the meetings themselves. Each type of contribution is recorded as part of the routine meeting discourse and as such is available for analysis along with that of any other participants' contributions. In the case of the latter contributions, I made a number of suggestions on issues such as meeting agendas and post meeting reviews that form part of the more detailed analysis in Chapters 7 and 8.
5.5.3 ‘Going native’ - Consulting engagement

Over the 18 month engagement with KT-Inc I was asked to work with company managers and staff on specific initiatives, which could be considered ‘going native’ (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 67). This accounted in part for the ‘participant’ aspect of the participant-observer role (Pacanowsky, 1988). I was requested to make five specific interventions in KT-Inc, while data were still being collected:

1. At the invitation/request of the GM, I provided an analysis of the existing strategic plan and associated planning process to the board at its meeting on the 11\textsuperscript{th} May 2011.

2. I was requested to facilitate a sales team workshop in June 2011. I was unable to accommodate this request due to personal travel commitments but I coached one manager in approaches for facilitating the workshop in my absence.

3. I supported one individual manager in a self-review of individual performance.

4. I facilitated/delivered a half day strategic planning workshop to executive managers on the 24\textsuperscript{th} April 2012.

5. I facilitated a strategic planning session for one Strategic Business Unit on the 09\textsuperscript{th}/10\textsuperscript{th} May 2012.

Three further interventions took place following the data collection:

1. On the 16\textsuperscript{th} October 2012 I facilitated/delivered a half day workshop on strategy implementation, with a group of senior managers.

2. I facilitated/delivered a separate workshop dealing with managing change for middle managers on the 13\textsuperscript{th} November 2012.

3. I participated in a workshop on the 13\textsuperscript{th} June 2013, preparing a performance development system for the company.

5.6 DATA ANALYSIS AND METHODS

The data analysis took place in three distinct phases, each of which is elaborated in this section. The three phases were equally informed by discourse analysis which is reviewed initially. This is followed by a description of how the data were analysed to support reconceptualising meetings as a collective phenomenon. The analysis then
focused on the modalities of connections between meetings that supported their systemic and processual operation and refinement of the conceptual meetings models.

5.6.1 Adopting a discourse analytic approach

Discourse Analysis (DA) guided the data analysis in this research. DA as methodology is a philosophical approach to empirical research which includes “a concern with text, discourse and context” and accommodates a “social constructivist view of the social world” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 5). Due to the absence of prescribed methods for data analysis in DA, Phillips and Hardy (2002, p. 74) call on researchers “to develop an approach that makes sense in light of their particular study and establish a set of arguments to justify the particular approach they adopt.”

DA can be viewed along a spectrum of discourse analytic approaches, depending on the definition of ‘discourse’ adopted (Grant, Keenoy, & Oswick, 2001). At its simplest, discourse could be viewed as ‘spoken dialogue’, but this appears artificially constrained since discourse also takes place outside the confines of spoken dialogue, through gestures, body language and many other forms of interaction. Discourse may also occur through the medium of written texts and so it could encompass both spoken and written interactions. Taking a still wider view, DA could seek to include all forms of communicative interactions between people and their surroundings.

The expression ‘discourse’ does not enjoy a universally accepted definition when used in the context of discourse analysis in social or organization studies, while ‘discourse analysis’ also suffers the same fate (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000, p. 1127). For the purpose of this study, three definitions of discourse, drawn from the DA literature, are particularly relevant as they reflect the breadth of discursive data gathered for the research. Potter and Wetherell (1987, p. 7) define discourse broadly as “all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds.” Phillips and Hardy (2002, p. 3) refine this definition somewhat, describing discourse as “an interrelated set of texts and the practices of their production, dissemination and reception, that brings an object into being.” The third definition comes from Sillince (2007, p. 365) which he adopts from Grant, Hardy, Oswick, and Putnam (2004, p. 3) as “structured collections of text embodied in the practices of talking and writing”. The discourse taking place in organizational meetings readily fits under any or all of these definitions of discourse for the purpose of using DA as a methodology.
In the context of this research, Nicolini’s (2009) bifocal approach towards data analysis supported development of a new systemic processual conception of organizational meetings. This required selection of appropriate lenses through which to conduct the analysis, using systemic process and sensemaking for the analysis in Chapter 7 (adopting a zoomed-out perspective), followed by more detailed data analysis in Chapter 8 to examine the specific modalities of connectivity of meetings (using a zoomed-in perspective) informed by CCO.

DA is used in this thesis to study how organizational meetings as socially constructed events are created, maintained and held in place over time as an integrated whole (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), which then informs the development of the MaSP framework. The DA approach adopted reflects a meso-discourse approach as identified by Alvesson and Karreman (2000, p. 1133), being relatively sensitive to language use in context but seeking broader patterns by going beyond the details of individual meetings to identify how discourse within meetings contributes to the construction of inter-meeting connectivity.

The challenges of linking micro level discourse practices, such as discourses reflecting individual interactions, to macro level outcomes such as Discourses reflecting societal or cultural norms or behaviours (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000, p. 1134), also pose challenges when DA is adopted as part of the analytic methodology at organizational level. (Alvesson and Karreman use capital ‘D’ to distinguish between micro and macro level discourse). Within the spectrum of detailed analytic approaches, from conversation analysis (CA) (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001, pp. 84-87; Woffitt, 2005, pp. 2-13) to critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1993), DA differs from CA in having a broader focus on the empirical data being used and accommodates a broader range of intellectual influences (Woffitt, 2005, p. 89). While specifically referring to the challenges of accounting for micro discourses versus macro Discourses within the same study, Alvesson and Karreman (2000) suggest that “Rigour should sometimes be down played for the benefit of social relevance” (p. 1134). In the context of this thesis, it is acknowledged that some rigour at micro-analytic levels is down-played for the benefit of organizational relevance, ensuring the data is analysed at the same level of detail that was relevant to the participants and researcher when it was being recorded (Woffitt, 2005, pp. 79-80). The MaSP framework arising from the research is pitched at the same meso-organizational level.
In adopting a DA approach, particularly when combined with CCO to analyse empirical data, care is needed to avoid some of the criticisms attributed to adopting discoursism or discourse-centred perspectives (Conrad, 2004; Reed, 2000). At the core of these criticisms is the marginalisation of materiality and intentionality and the promotion of discourse flows and flux as the exclusive basis on which social reality is created (Alvesson & Karreman, 2011, p. 1124; Reed, 2000, p. 528). More specifically, Conrad (2004, p. 432) draws attention to the limitations created by coding discourse-based empirical data, emphasising that the coding is inherently influenced by the cultural or intellectual biases of the analyst, but may be represented as an objectively accurate representation of the situation being analysed. In addition, excessive focus on discourse alone heightens the risk of marginalising or excluding other non-discourse features of a situation whose contribution may be equally important to the overall picture the analysis is trying to establish (Conrad, 2004, p. 438). These factors prompted consideration of a number of questions such as: Could sticking too rigidly to a single methodology result in the undesired consequence of providing an insufficiently rich account of what happens in practice? Or can an attempt to apply too many analytical perspectives lead to confusion of the final outcome, with the findings orphaned from any founding intellectual base? Olien et al. (2015) identified the diverse literature base from which meetings studies must draw and to which they potentially contribute, with the attendant need to use a wider range of methodological approaches than may be required for other research topics.

The potential limitations of DA are mitigated in two main ways in this research. First, CCO in general and its Montreal school in particular were used in the analysis, having developed in a direction that explicitly and increasingly seeks to integrate communication and materiality as co-constituents of organization (Alvesson & Karreman, 2011, p. 1124). Secondly, DA is used in conjunction with Nicolini’s (2009) bifocal approach, and the fine grained focus of CCO is complemented by the broader perspective of sensemaking as the analytical lenses through which the data were analysed. Accordingly, neither CCO nor Sensemaking are given exclusivity in accounting for the MaSP framework developed from the research, but rather contribute complementary analytic perspectives while recognising that the same research topic (meetings) and unit of analysis (meetings collectively) can always be approached from many other analytic perspectives (Cooren, 2007).
5.6.2 Conceptualization from the data

At a practice level, the role of participant observer in this research provided a unique opportunity to engage in a first-order analysis of the data during collection. While attending and observing the initial meetings the focus of the research changed from meeting content to the meetings themselves. By adopting a systemic and processual perspective, attention progressively shifted towards the nature and extent of connectivity between meetings and their individual and collective agency.

In the first phase of analysis the meetings data were analysed as the meetings were being recorded. This involved ongoing reflection on meetings as they occurred, viewed in the changing context of the increasing number of meetings that had already taken place. The data were also (re)presented in the form of diagrams from both systemic and processual perspectives. Patterns of sensemaking involving successive cycles of enactment, selection and retention also became evident within individual meetings but more particularly across meetings. Sensemaking was then used as the lens through which the next level of detailed analysis took place.

5.6.3 Building and refining the conceptual models

Consideration of the data diagrams from Chapter 6 was supplemented in phase two with a more detailed analysis that considered the data holistically from a sensemaking (ESR) perspective. This required coding data using enactment, selection and retention as analytic themes. Consideration from an enactment perspective enabled identification of data flows from outside KT-Inc to inside, flows through interactions internal to KT-Inc, and finally flows from internal to external. KT-Inc’s strategic planning and project management processes, as referenced in meetings, were used to consider how meetings played a role in ‘selection’ as one of the three sub-processes of sensemaking. Meetings were finally reviewed from the perspective of ‘retention’, to understand how they contributed to ‘retention’ of sense already made that enabled indexical referencing at future organizational events. The emergence from meetings collectively of a single process for reviewing individual meetings was then considered as an example of cross-meeting integration of ESR.

The zoomed-out analysis, informed by sensemaking, supported identification of different means of connectivity between meetings and the abductive development of the Systemic Meetings Model (SMM) as set out in Chapter 7. Further development of the initial SMM required greater elaboration of the nature and function of the
connections between meetings that were initially identified. The third phase of data analysis used CCO as a fine-grained lens through which the data were analysed in more detail (Chapter 8). The principal focus of this third phase was to understand how the different modes of connection between meetings operated. Specific concepts drawn from CCO theory enabled the ‘zoomed-in’ analysis reported in Chapter 8. McPhee and Zaug’s (2000) four flows model was used to structure the meso level analysis of the data, reflecting the contributions meetings make to different ‘communication flows’ that collectively constitute organizations. Each of the four flows were used to code the data, but were supplemented by other analytical tools from the Montreal School.

5.7 CONCLUSION

An ethnographic approach was used to record live meetings data for this research through engagement as a participant observer in a single organization, over an eighteen month period. Attendance at meetings as a participant observer enabled a more holistic perspective to be taken than originally intended, resulting in the research topic shifting from the meetings’ content to the meetings themselves.

Initially, an abductive approach was speculatively taken to envisage how meetings collectively might exercise some form of collective agency within the organization, giving rise to a bifocal approach to the data analysis. Initially the data were viewed holistically to reconceptualise meetings collectively and then through a systemic process lens (zoomed-out), using sensemaking to focus the analysis.

The broad systemic and processual patterns of interaction and connectivity between meetings as identified in the zoomed-out analysis were then examined in more detail in the zoomed-in analysis, to explore the nature and potential significance of the connectivity between meetings using CCO as a different theoretical lens appropriate to the level of detail being examined. Figure 5.2 summarises the analytical tools used from CCO.
Discourse Analysis provided a consistent approach for data analysis at both the zoomed-out and zoomed-in levels. Cycling between these two perspectives reflected a "kind of iterative/dialectical process" (Conrad, 2004, p. 435) that made both perspectives mutually informative to support an inductive approach to developing the MaSP framework as a conceptual tool for considering meetings collectively as an organizational resource displaying a degree of collective agency. A deductive approach was finally used to consider the implications for practice of adopting the MaSP framework.
CHAPTER 6

SECTORAL CONTEXT AND ABDUCTIVE THEORIZING
The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the context in which the primary data were recorded and to show how immersion in that situated context prompted the abductive development of a reconceptualization of organizational meetings. The chapter begins with an outline of the economic climate in Ireland in the period leading up to the eighteen months during which the data were recorded. This is followed by a short description of the industrial context in which KT-Inc operated. The economic and industrial contexts were significant as they were key drivers of the level and scope of change that took place in KT-Inc during the data-recording period.

Section 6.2 provides an outline of the company, along with a summary of the significant change that occurred in KT-Inc while data collection was taking place. A short outline of how the meetings in each part of KT-Inc were carried out is also provided. In Section 6.3 I briefly set out some of the considerations relevant to my dual 'participant observer' role (Pacanowsky, 1988, p. 359) in terms of being a research observer but also exercising a limited occasional role as a consultant/participant. The first three sections of the chapter comprehensively describe the ‘sending context’ that contextualizes the abstract models developed from the data analysis, to aid generalizability of the research findings (Seale, 1999, p. 468).

The fourth section of the chapter presents systemic and processual views of the data set holistically. It is important to emphasise that systems and process-thinking as reviewed in Chapter 3 are used to inform an initial conceptual approach to reviewing KT-Inc’s meetings data, rather than to suggest KT-Inc’s meetings operated as discrete systems or processes. The chapter concludes with a metaphorical representation of the data that reflects immersion in the systemically and processually related flows of discourse taking place within KT-Inc and through its meetings.

6.1 ECONOMIC AND INDUSTRY CONTEXT

The broad economic climate was overshadowed by a housing boom in the US that reached its peak in 2005. The boom was followed by a progressive economic decline and financial turmoil by the end of 2007 (Mishkin, 2010), when a series of significant corporate failures (Mishkin, 2010, p. 4) created a ‘perfect economic storm’ precipitating a financial crisis in the US that rapidly escalated into a global economic crisis from 2008 (Mishkin, 2010). This crisis was generally accepted by many
economists as the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s (Mishkin, 2010, p. 10; Pendry, 2009). Ireland was particularly exposed to the impact of this world crisis, which subsequently had a dramatic, long-term impact on KT-Inc.

6.1.1 National political, social and economic considerations

At the time of data collection (February 2011 to July 2013), Ireland had a highly globalized developed economy at the cutting edge of the world economic crisis (Timoney, 2010). A climate of crisis and rapid change also prevailed in Ireland from 2008 (Lane, 2010), reflected in the effective collapse of the banking sector, financial bailout from the European Union and International Monetary Fund, dramatic reductions in pay for both private and public sector workers and an explosive increase in unemployment (O'Rourke & Hogan, 2013). This economic context provided an important backdrop that significantly influenced the meetings’ discourse in KT-Inc.

Ireland was highly dependent on its construction and property industry in the years leading up to the economic crisis (Kelly, 2009) and KT-Inc’s products had high dependence on the property market. The collapse of that market in Ireland (Lane, 2010, p. 2), commencing in mid-2007, precipitated a progressive decline in KT-Inc sales that accelerated between 2009 and 2011. The difficult economic climate was frequently referred to in many of KT-Inc’s meetings but the more detailed commentary was generally reserved for Board meetings. This was particularly made relevant in the chairman’s practice of commencing each board meeting with a broad economic summary that contextualized the board’s discussions. In many ways, this complex and fast-changing external environment set the scene and requirement for ongoing sensemaking throughout the organization, consistent with Weick’s (2009, p. 183) observation that “When the unexpected occurs sensemaking intensifies”. These environmental changes provided the backdrop to identifying patterns of enactment, selection and retention that became evident throughout the discourse taking place in the organization’s meetings.

6.1.2 The industry context

Due to the limited number of competitor companies in KT-Inc’s industry sector in Ireland, the company is readily identifiable even by reference to its wider industry sector. Consequently, only limited details about this sector can be provided, without inadvertently identifying the company in question. However, every effort is made to
provide as much information as possible to convey the wider industry context in which the data were gathered.

The industry sector has trade associations at National, European and World levels. These associations enable smaller manufacturers in particular to cooperate with each other in areas of mutual benefit, in spite of competing in the key areas of sales and seeking market share. One of the main areas of cooperation is generating and sharing market intelligence in respect of economic indicators about their products, along with monitoring essential raw materials required for the manufacture of their product range. A small number of highly specialised ingredients are particularly price sensitive due to relative scarcity of supply. For smaller manufacturers, these trade associations are the only cost effective way to gather important market intelligence. They also use the trade associations to exercise bulk buying power of scarce and highly price-sensitive ingredients. This enables delivery of significant price reductions for key raw materials, which would not be possible without the buying power of larger trade groups. They also assure a supply chain which could be impossible to guarantee for small independent operators such as KT-Inc.

In spite of KT-Inc’s relatively small size, the GM had a high profile as the elected chairman of one of these trade groups. The significance of this is reflected in KT-Inc’s meetings through the ‘market intelligence’ the GM provided to board and staff meetings, when he reported on external developments. The data analysis in Chapter 8 reveals how meetings mediate the flow of such information and how meetings use such information to inform the negotiation of the GM’s internal membership or the external institutional positioning (McPhee & Zaug, 2000) of KT-Inc.

6.2 THE COMPANY – KT-INC

KT-Inc is a small to medium sized enterprise employing between 50 and 100 staff. The company has been operating in the same industry sector for in excess of fifty years. The core activity of the business was driven by the manufacture, sale and distribution of a diverse range of products within a single category of product type. The product type is extensively used in society, which partially accounts for the multiple channels through which their products were sold. This in turn informed the diversity of distinct structural and operational elements within a relatively small organization. The business comprises a Board, three strategic business units (SBUs) and the company administration department, each of which is briefly described below. This represents
a diverse range of activities relative to the organisation size but they are necessary to support the different industry sectors the company supplies.

6.2.1 The company board

The KT-Inc board comprised four executive directors, one director with limited executive responsibilities and two non-executive directors. The board initially held meetings every three months, which changed to every two months just six months after the start of data recording. The chairmanship changed from the owner/GM to one of the non-executive directors, co-incident with the change of meeting frequency.

Board meetings were scheduled at least two meetings ahead and typically lasted a full day. The meetings were conventional in so far as agendas, minutes and procedures were conventionally handled. Where minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed and approved at the start of each meeting, this section of each meeting was quite loosely chaired and could often last up to ninety minutes, as discussions could meander around many topics or issues arising. Data were collected at ten board meetings, two of which were annual general meetings.

6.2.2 Operations SBU

The operations department comprised manufacturing, distribution and R&D. Manufacturing and distribution activities were co-located but had separate managers. KT-Inc maintained a small but very active R&D unit which was an integral part of manufacturing and operations. They were closely involved in overseeing quality control and the development of new and innovative products. This helped to maintain a small company as a significant presence in competitive retail and industrial sectors.

The operations team meetings were held weekly. Uniquely in the company, chairing the meetings rotated through the five-strong team of managers. Meetings were planned to last one hour, on a fixed day and at a fixed time slot every week. Meetings were lively events with considerable amounts of personal banter but a recognisable and consistent structure. Each sub-section contributed as they worked their way around the table, typically reviewing any issues outstanding from the previous week and addressing any logistic or other issues anticipated two or three weeks ahead. When necessary, the Director Operations spoke on issues raised at the board or considered to be of strategic importance. There was no written agenda and minutes were not taken. Data were recorded at twenty two operations meetings over eighteen months.
6.2.3 Sales and marketing SBU

The sales and marketing SBU divided into three sub-units: retail, resellers and international. The company had a portfolio of retail shops which sold their products directly to the public. The shops were owned and operated by the company and the company continued to expand sales through this channel. It was expected that this group would have periodic meetings of the shop managers, but none took place in the eighteen months of data collection. This seemed to be largely due to the very wide geographic spread of the retail shops and an insufficient number of replacement staff if the managers were away from their posts. No data were recorded for this sub-unit.

In addition to their own retail outlets, KT-Inc had a large client portfolio of re-sellers—a 15 to 1 ratio relative to the number of retail outlets. The resellers carried the same KT-Inc product range as the retail stores and were a key retail distribution channel. Many of the resellers also carried competitors’ products within the broad product category manufactured by KT-Inc.

A team of three salesmen were on the road full time in Ireland to support the resellers’ needs, both logistically and for technical product support. This team’s meetings normally spanned two days, starting at lunch-time on day one and ending at lunch time on day two, to enable participants travel to and overnight at the company’s main office. Meetings were chaired by the GM or the sales and marketing director, whose role changed during the data collection period. Meetings were less structured than board meetings, with agendas used and action points recorded but without the preparation of formal minutes. Meetings were generally scheduled two or three months apart with some degree of seasonal variation. Data from ten of their meetings were recorded which included one of the company’s annual sales meetings.

KT-Inc’s retail and reseller distribution model also had a limited international exposure, with serviced resellers in three EU countries, of which the UK was its largest by a significant margin. The UK was supported by a shop manager and two full-time sales representatives based in the UK. This distribution channel was undergoing development as part of an overall plan for organic expansion while the data were being collected between February 2011 and July 2013. Meetings for this sub-unit were of mixed type—some occurring as periodic but infrequent routine meetings, while others were special planning meetings to support strategic development of the sales channel. Chairing of meetings varied considerably over the eighteen month period, agendas
were not generally well-structured and minutes were not kept of each meeting. Six meetings in all were attended and recorded from this group.

6.2.4 Industrial SBU

KT-Inc had specialised sub-products that were suitable for application in an industrial context and on an industrial scale. The company had a small dedicated unit to service and exploit opportunities for development and expansion in this area. It covered both domestic and international sales and provided potential for significant future growth. A number of meetings for this group were scheduled but only one took place for a variety of reasons. The meeting was short, informal, with no structured agenda and no minutes recorded. Participants in the meeting included managers from other areas such as R&D and distribution because they were required without being specifically members of the Industrial team. Just one industrial team meeting was recorded.

6.2.5 Company administration

The administration of each of the units described above was carried out from one central location. Administration staff provided normal HR, financial, sales and operation support services across the different SBUs. Regular meetings were not held for this group, but members of the group such as the HR and Administration Managers or Finance Director regularly attended other groups’ meetings as required. They also played active roles on different company projects.

A number of meetings were attended and recorded that could not be classified as meetings of particular SBUs and equally could not be called administration meetings. They involved the Project Advisory Group (one meeting recorded), the marketing forum (two meetings recorded), the Officers group (one meeting recorded) and a general staff briefing (one meeting recorded). The company managers arranged to meet on a quarterly basis, at which the GM provided a strategic briefing and addressed managers’ questions. Individual managers also gave short updates on any relevant issues to report from their respective areas. The agendas for these meetings were defined by the GM, the procurement manager chaired all of the meetings and no minutes were taken. Six of these meetings were recorded and they typically lasted no more than one hour.
6.2.6 The cost of KT-Inc’s meetings

The meetings literature provides various estimates about the cost of organizational meetings, particularly in terms of time spent at meetings (Scott et al., 2015, p. 23). At a meeting of the four officers in KT-Inc, as shown in Extract 6.1, the General Manager explicitly questioned the monetary cost of one of their meetings in particular, and provided his own cost estimate:

Extract 6.1

(0:59:33.7) Ken (GM): And, and, from, the thing that bothers me about that meeting last week was, I'm looking at the cost of that meeting [Sil: yea .. Gavin (MarD): jaysus]. The cost of taking people off the road, the cost of bringing the UK people over, the cost of that meeting runs into the thousands, I'm sure it's probably about ten grand when ya take everybody's salary and, and their lost time, the opportunity cost, they're not out in the market selling while they're here, and you have to ask, somebody has to ask the question, are we getting value for spending that amount of money at a meeting.

Source: Officers meeting, 22nd June 2011

In order to gain some perspective of the base-line costs associated with KT-Inc’s meetings, the Finance Director agreed to work with me on a strictly confidential basis, to tabulate a breakdown of the costs of meetings attended for this research. For both consistency and convenience only salary costs of meeting attendees were calculated. The following criteria were used to prepare the calculations.

1. The costs refer to basic salary costs only, taking a rounded annual salary, an average of 220 work days per year and 8 work hours per day, to calculate an hourly rate for each meeting participant.

2. Additional costs such as catering, room hire or opportunity costs as referred to by the GM in Extract 6.1 etc were not included.

3. Where individuals attended meetings for a short duration to present on a topic, they have not been included. Only participants who attended for the full duration of the meeting are included.

A summary of the estimated cost of meetings attended for each of the groups in KT-Inc is provided in Table 6.1. A more detailed breakdown, but still a summary of the underlying calculations, is set out in Appendix 3. This short analysis was not intended to be detailed or rigorous but merely to illustrate part of the monetary cost of a known

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set of meetings using a minimal but reasonably clear set of criteria. While the data shows that the GM’s estimate for the cost of a single meeting may have been somewhat exaggerated, there is no doubt that meetings can represent a real and substantial cost in terms of both time and money for organizations in general and for KT-Inc in particular.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting group</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Board</td>
<td>€15,672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resellers &amp; Retail</td>
<td>€11,715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations</td>
<td>€3,257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Export</td>
<td>€6,204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management team</td>
<td>€2,162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing forum</td>
<td>€1,728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single (once off) meetings</td>
<td>€3,231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>€43,972</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.1 – Meeting costs in KT-Inc

6.3 COMPANY CHANGE

KT-Inc was significantly affected by the adverse economic climate in Ireland between 2008 and 2012. In response to increasingly challenging trading conditions, company-wide change was instituted from June 2011, approximately four months after data recording commenced. These changes significantly impacted the company’s internal structure, how it serviced its customers and how it planned to develop in the future. Changes also occurred in key personnel and the management leadership roles they fulfilled at board and SBU levels. The changes are summarised below.

1. The owner and general manager (GM) relinquished the Board chairmanship to one of the non-executive directors, but remained on the board and retained his GM role.

2. A major industrial product line was shut down, making three staff members redundant, including one manager.
3. Following detailed economic analysis of performance of re-seller agents, approximately 15% of the lowest performing re-sellers were culled.

4. Resellers were migrated onto service-level agreements, emphasising a mutually dependent relationship rather than a simple wholesale-retail relationship.

5. A management training and development programme was instituted.

6. A performance management system was developed, explicitly integrating with the company strategic plan and planning cycle.

7. New shop units opened in Ireland and the UK. (The UK shop unit closed shortly after data recording ceased.)

8. The head of sales/business development manager position was made redundant, replaced by a head of sales and marketing.

9. The head of marketing moved to head of international sales and special projects.

10. The special marketing forum dissolved on appointment of a new head of sales and marketing.

11. A new head of industrial production and sales was recruited but resigned within a four month period due to an unexpected job offer outside Ireland.

Individually, each of these changes might be considered routine. Taking place together, in such a relatively small organization and compressed into an 18 month period, attests to the scale of change that was considered necessary and implemented by KT-Inc.

Three key features are noteworthy within KT-Inc and significantly informed this study:

1. the organization was undergoing significant change;

2. strategizing was ever present over the course of the 18 months of data collection;

3. meetings were prolific for a relatively small company, and were central to defining, implementing and managing the evolving change programme.

The change agenda for the company was principally driven by three different considerations:

1. Economic survival and consolidation;
Responding to an adverse economic climate, KT-Inc restructured for survival in the short term and positioned itself for expansion in the longer term when economic conditions improved. KT-Inc’s meetings were infused with the debates, arguments, discussions and decisions associated with this complex and diverse operating environment. They were also central to the annual planning time frame and process, which changed over the course of the data collection.

6.4 ABDUCTIVE DEVELOPMENT OF A MEETINGS THEORY.

Sections 6.1 to 6.3 of this chapter provide the macro-environmental and micro-organizational contexts in which the research took place. As previously discussed in Chapter 5, a key feature of being a participant-observer during this research was having the time and capacity to reflect on the data while they were still being collected. This facilitated a change in the research focus, from treating meetings as a research resource to meetings collectively becoming the topic of research and unit of analysis. More specifically, it prompted development of a systemic processual view of meetings I had not previously considered, nor had I encountered in reviews of literature or in organizational practice.

This section sets out the details of the initial abductive theory development by (re)presenting the data from a processual perspective initially, followed by a systems-informed view. Configuring and presenting the data from these complementary perspectives stimulated associative and comparative thinking which helped to develop fresh insights from the data. It resulted in a reconceptualization of the meetings, as presented in the concluding section of this chapter.

6.4.1 (Re)presenting the data

Processual and systemic views provide initial “juxtaposed” perspectives (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 21) enabling comparative thinking about the meetings data. Inter-connectivity of events is the most striking overlap between the two modes of thinking. The two greatest differences are: (1) an emphasis on purpose which defines a system is not as explicit in the process view, and (2) the temporal imperative in process thinking that is not explicitly called for in system’s thinking. The data are represented as figures,
tables and diagrams to create a holistic visualization of the meetings from which the data were collected (Langley, 1999; Meadows, 2009).

6.4.2 A process representation

From a processual perspective, meetings could be viewed as communication episodes or as a “flow of events” (Hernes, 2014, p. 42) unfolding through time. Table 6.2 summarises the primary data recorded between 15th February 2011 and 17th July 2013.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Number of meetings</th>
<th>Meeting time recorded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Board</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>48:55:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resellers &amp; Retail team</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34:45:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exports team</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29:35:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations team</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21:50:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing forum</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7:20:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Team</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5:21:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings with individual managers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4:15:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy workshop (Senior managers)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4:05:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officers group (Exec Directors - GM/ Fin/ Mkting/ Ops)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2:00:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resellers special initiative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2:00:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers meetings PMI</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1:10:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Products team</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0:55:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Project Group</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0:55:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General staff briefing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0:30:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resellers special training meeting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0:30:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>63</strong></td>
<td><strong>162:56:00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.2– Summary of recorded meetings data.

Appendix 4 contains a more detailed representation of the meetings recording schedule in which the dates, duration and sequence of all the meetings makes more explicit their sequential and temporal relationships and general processual nature. The meetings of each group in KT-Inc can be viewed as streams of meetings, with each stream differentiated by the role of the cohort group.

However, observing the unfolding discourses from within these groups and attending meetings that represented intersections of the activities of the different groups, it became clear that other streams of meetings could be identified by changing the criteria
used to define a meeting stream. Figure 6.1 provides three such examples that were identifiable in KT-Inc.

A more literal (re)presentation of the dates of individual meetings from different meeting streams, shows how they sequentially occurred relative to each other. Representing the data in this format in Figure 6.2 allowed clustering and seasonal effects to become more visible from the data. Meeting dates indicate the primary temporal relationship between meetings in ‘clock time’, but they exhibit a different type of ‘temporal structuring’ (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002) when considered in more detail in conjunction with ‘experienced time’.
### 6.4.3 A systemic representation of the meetings data

Table 6.1 provided a hierarchic view of the data based on the quantum of hours of recorded material per group. Alternative criteria for determining hierarchy could also be used depending on the purpose of the representation; for example, by number of meetings, by number of attendees, by perceived status of groups, by status of particular meeting participants and so on. This reflects the systems principle that a system is a representation of reality from a stated perspective – if you specify a different perspective (or Weltanschauung), then how the system is represented may change. The range of diagrams in this section reflects different systemic perspectives on KT-Inc’s meetings, which informed how the meetings collectively were reconceptualised in systemic process terms.

Figure 6.3 adopts a systems-oriented view of the meeting frequency data presented in Table 6.1. In this case a sub-group perspective is taken, to consider relational potential between the different organizational sub-groups through their respective meeting dates and/or frequency.
Figure 6.3 – Systemic view of meeting dates

Figure 6.4 takes a fundamentally different view of the data, concentrating on meeting participants as well as the meetings themselves.

Figure 6.4 – Meeting trans-participants
Figure 6.4 views the data from the perspective of participants taking part in the meetings of different sub-groups. It is illustrative rather than comprehensive, showing the principal participants who engaged in meetings of different organizational groups. These individuals will be referred to as trans-participants. The connecting arrows indicate the individual participants who attended the meetings of different groups and highlights at least one of the earliest observed means of connection between the meetings of different groups.

6.4.4 Data (re)presentation as a meeting system map

System boundaries are intellectual constructs superimposed on data to aid interpretation. Meadows (2009, p. 95) characterises them as ‘artificial, mental-model boundaries’ in which the relevant boundaries are determined by the nature of analysis taking place. For illustration purposes, if the focus of analysis was strategizing or organizational change, the systems, elements and associated boundaries could be drawn showing meetings as individual elements in a strategizing system that might also include drafts of strategic plans, strategy workshops, market research and so on. Since meetings collectively are the unit of analysis for this research, the system map as shown in Figure 6.5 is constructed focusing on meetings as the key system elements.
Viewed from a systems perspective, the meetings can be represented as nested layers of related elements. In this view, (sub-)system boundaries are initially placed around the meetings of the different groups in KT-Inc. The sub-systems can then be clustered in different ways to represent combinations of meeting groups such as the primary, secondary and environmental meetings systems, as shown in Figure 6.5. This form of data representation is used to generate theoretical insights rather than to literally represent physical systems in the organization. The aim is to aid visualizing the data as a system of interconnected meetings and to identify the relationships between meetings and how they are connected. Systems-mapping conventionally names each (sub-)system but these names are not used in day to day practice in KT-Inc. The following notes on Figure 6.5 help to illustrate how the system map can provoke alternative ways to view and interrogate the live recorded discourse data from the meetings.

1. Each element in the Primary group meeting system could be represented as a system of meetings in its own right, as previously shown in Figure 6.3. This is not shown here for space reasons.

2. The Primary group meeting system is nested within the Secondary group system to illustrate that it could be viewed as a sub-system of the secondary group.

3. CoOD refers to ‘Cacophony of Organizational Discourse’ – to represent the wide range of discourse throughout the organization that includes meetings and non-meeting discourse and can impinge on all meetings and associated meeting streams.

4. The boundaries of the Primary and Secondary sub-systems are drawn to include what could be considered homogenous meeting entities within each sub-system. Different criteria for defining the homogeneity of meetings could result in different system boundaries, prompting alternative ways of viewing the same meetings data.

5. The ‘Environmental proximity system’ represents the porous and somewhat amorphous boundary between the organization’s general discourse and the ‘outside’ environment.

6. Environmental noise represents external Discourses that could positively or negatively disrupt the organisations discourses.
7. The environment (outside the dotted line boundary) is considered to be those elements over which the organization does not exercise control but may exert influence on the organization (as a system).

It should be emphasised again that the system map is a re-presentation of the data to aid reconceptualising the phenomenon under examination.

6.5 IMMERSION IN A RIVER OF DISCOURSE

At the early stages of data collection, each meeting was necessarily viewed in relative isolation since there were no antecedent meetings with which to compare or from which to have a wider perspective of the other organizational discourse that might inform them. However, as time passed, processual patterns of interactions across meetings became increasingly evident, such as relationships with internal and external context, actions spanning multiple organization levels, temporal influences and ordering, and the relationships between multiple organizational inputs to singular product or customer-focused outputs (Hernes, 2014; Langley et al., 2013, p. 9; Pettigrew, 1997, p. 340; Weick, 1979, p. 138). These patterns were visible within the same groups but also across the meetings of different groups.

As meetings were attended from board level to weekly operations team meetings, the multiple levels at which the company operated became more visible through their meetings. Particular topics were progressed from strategic ideas to embodied conclusions. At the same time, top down strategies encountered the harsh realities of time or resource constraints on the factory floor, causing them to be reconsidered or modified to take account of the diversity of views and inputs from the different individuals and groups that came in contact with them. Meetings were key locations where such bi-directional interactions took place.

It also became more evident how topics, projects, activities or initiatives informed each other and how meeting participants conflated, separated or dropped such topics in their ongoing efforts to make sense of their intermingled activities. The processual emphasis on time became increasingly apparent as meeting participants’ sensemaking was clearly informed and changed over time, as much by the internal context of their changing organization as by the wider and more volatile commercial marketplace in which KT-Inc had to operate. After the initial six months of observation, while each meeting could be viewed as an individual discursive event, viewed collectively, time
could be seen to ‘structure’ the discourse of KT-Inc’s meetings as an integrated process in the same way gravity structures the flow of water.

If “the conversational terrain of an organization is like a great river” (Taylor & Robichaud, 2004a, p. 405), then the organization could be metaphorically viewed as a ‘river of discourse’ of which meetings form an integral part (Duffy & O'Rourke, 2012b, p. 2 & 21). Visualizing the proposition that “the Heraclitian individual cannot step into the same river twice” (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010, p. 3) prompted the first conceptual consideration of meetings as integral but separate parts of the overall discourse in the organization. Rescher’s (1996, p. 52) contention that ‘Heraclitus was only half right’ in that it is the same water rather than the same river that cannot be stepped into twice, prompted refinement of the organizational discourse metaphor into a (re)presentation of the organization as a ‘river of discourse’ as presented in Figure 6.6.

![Figure 6.6 – An organizational river of discourse.](image-url)

Attending individual meetings in KT-Inc was metaphorically akin to being briefly immersed in a small part of the discursive flow of an entire river. Experiencing KT-Inc’s meetings collectively as they constituted the different streams of company departments, working groups, project teams and so on, made it observationally clear that I was in the same KT-Inc river, but also that each meeting and each stream of meetings had their own features and characteristics to contribute to the overall flow of
the whole river. Pettigrew's (1992) related metaphor of a river basin also captures and reflects the diversity of influences from the KT-Inc environment in which meetings collectively as the topic of interest are located, and supports the search for “holistic explanation” of the contribution of meetings collectively, which Pettigrew characterizes as central to processual analysis (p. 9).

The river of discourse metaphor reflects how multiple and intersecting organizational discourses connect meetings to each other, while also accommodating how meetings in turn recursively connect other organizational discourses. The river of discourse is also an apt metaphor to envisage how Schwartzman came to observe that “meetings are the organization or community writ small”, since they are at once discrete discursive events but are also infused with the ongoing discursive flows from the overall organization. Every discourse, whether between individuals or groups in the context of meetings, is unique in time, space and participants and cannot be recreated or revisited. From a sensemaking perspective, such original encounters are accessible after they have taken place only in the form of ‘enacted environments’ (Weick, 2009), representative of the original encounters but only as a recreated sub-set of what originally took place. Process ontology views every individual (person or event) as an evolving product of their experiential encounters, and so immersion in any part of the organization’s river of discourse is an unrepeatable experience. Both the organizational discourse and the individual will have changed as a result of previous immersions. In this context, meetings and their constitutive discourses can be viewed as discursive elements of the organization that intermingle with the main river of organizational discourse, but are simultaneously immersed in and recursively contribute to that river.
This chapter initially described the environmental context in which KT-Inc operated, followed by a more detailed description of the company itself.

Engagement in KT-Inc as a participant observer afforded a significant opportunity for ongoing reflection about the meetings data while they were still being collected. Immersion into the cultural and discursive flows of the company highlighted a range of challenges faced when studying an organization from a holistic perspective. It was instructive to attend meetings of different groups because over time, it made apparent the significant personal, sub-cultural and group differences within the company, while it was also possible to discern a range of common features or characteristics that enabled all of them to be seen collectively as the singular organization that is KT-Inc.

Abductively and metaphorically, meetings collectively are viewed as pools of organizational discourse that form an integral and significant part of the river of discourse that represents the organization in its totality. In conducting the research to understand how meetings collectively contribute to constitute the organizations in which they take place, the metaphorical challenge is to study the makeup of the water in the river (i.e. the discourse in the organization), while considering how that water infuses and informs particular discursive pools (i.e. meetings). The analysis can then focus on how those pools expel water that joins other streams in the ongoing flow of the river (i.e. how meetings conjoin into organizational meetings collectively through varying means of connection).

The river of discourse metaphor as presented in Figure 6.6 is two dimensional, while any natural river exists in three dimensions and unfolds over the fourth dimension of time. The analysis in Chapters 7 and 8 will provide the third dimension of depth and fourth dimension of temporality to the river of discourse and Chapter 9 will bring the findings of the analysis together into the MaSP framework to present a four-dimensional version of the river of discourse.
CHAPTER 7

ORGANIZATIONAL SENSEMAKING THROUGH MEETINGS COLLECTIVELY
7 SENSEMAKING THROUGH MEETINGS

The observer-participant role enabled a holistic perspective on the meetings taking place and prompted the first consideration of meetings collectively from a systemic process perspective. Reflecting on the data as collection was taking place supported abductive development of a conceptualization of meetings collectively as presented in Chapter 6. The ‘river of discourse’ metaphor reflects how meetings are at once discrete discursive units while at the same time form a near seamless part of the entire discourse of the whole organization. However, in order to address the research question:

How do organizational meetings collectively contribute to the organizations in which they take place?

it is necessary to analyse in more detail the discourse taking place while still maintaining a zoomed-out, holistic view of KT-Inc’s meetings.

This chapter draws on the systemic, processual and sensemaking literature reviewed in Chapter 3 to conduct this more detailed examination of the meetings data. In the next three sections of this chapter enactment, selection and retention (ESR) of sensemaking are considered sequentially, but without any suggestion that they occurred so discretely or sequentially in the meetings to which they refer. Section 7.4 then looks at an integrated example of ESR. Section 7.5 draws the analysis together to focus more on the research question and the relationship between meetings collectively and sensemaking. This theorizing from the data is taken further in the penultimate section where the emerging model is illustrated. The chapter then closes with a conclusion section. The analysis illustrates the observed sensemaking taking place across KT-Inc’s meetings collectively as the unit of analysis, rather than providing an in-depth analysis of sensemaking as the topic of interest.

7.1 ENACTMENT

Viewed as the folding together of cognition, action and order (Weick, 2009, p. 189), enactment seeks to (re)present some formerly encountered or perceived (external) reality, while simultaneously creating and contributing to the unfolding reality of the present moment. As the data analysis progressed, it became apparent that meeting attendees in KT-Inc (re)presented previously encountered experiences from three distinct directions, which are used to structure this section.
7.1.1 From outside to inside.

Outside in this context broadly refers to outside the organization, but could also be considered to be ‘outside’ a particular group’s meeting. Patterns of discursive activity, particularly within KT-Inc Board meetings, can be observed in which meeting participants make aspects of the external environment present to enable their inclusion in the further discourse and action taking place within the Board meetings. Every board meeting began with a short review, by the Chairman, of the current economic climate within which the company must operate. Extract 7.1 illustrates how the GM, also serving as Board Chairman at this time, discursively (and literally) brings external commentary into the Board’s discourse, in the form of a specific and highly relevant newspaper article:

Extract 7.1

(0:02:41.8) Ken (GM): I think the biggest problem that we face is Ireland Inc, eh, which is absolutely in crisis and the knock on effect on consumer confidence. Em, interesting I actually read I don’t know if anybody read the Morgan eh Kelly article in Saturdays Irish Times which was the fallout from this has been huge. I brought it in in case anybody eh missed it but the article was tided Now What, which I think is good because it’s really putting the past in the past and where do we go from here

Source: Board meeting, 10th May, 2011

The immediate response from the non-executive director Tim, and incoming board chair, offers a counter point about the article’s author.

Extract 7.2

(0:04:18.4) Tim (ND1): Yea I suppose he suffers from the the doctor doom sort of eh he has never predicted anything positive, in his life ya know, like life has got is got a be there’s ups and downs ya know and like he is, he is and if you wait long enough ya [Sill (FinD): yea] know and you [Sill (FinD): it will rain] if you keep on yea if you keep on predicting rain ya know someday [Sill (FinD): it’ll happen] it will rain.

Source: Board meeting, 10th May, 2011

This exchange is noteworthy for a number of reasons. It illustrates one way in which the external was enacted within board meetings but it also shows how the board members contribute to, interpret and also select from such external information to
contextualize and further enact their own understanding of their economic context. The short exchange with Sill, the Finance Director, reveals a shared skepticism about the article’s author, indirectly casting doubt on the content and effectively reshaping the ‘message’ that was being brought in from the outside. The pattern of introducing briefing material from outside the company at the start of board meetings was not unique to this meeting or to the incumbent chairman. The same pattern was repeated at every board meeting, both pre and post the change of chairman in July 2011.

Another way in which the external was partly enacted through meetings was the use of external guests, either as short-term presenters on specific topics, or as longer-term engaged participants for specific purposes. For example, an external marketing consultant provided a one-hour presentation to the Board meeting of 26th July 2011 (time mark 1:06:07.4) dealing with customers’ disposable household incomes and consumer behavior during a recession. But this external contribution was also not accepted as absolute or as an authoritative reflection of an external reality, as reflected by the GM’s remark some three hours later in the meeting review:

Extract 7.3

(5:39:03.0) Ken (GM): I thought there was one minus eh just ya know if we’re talking about this meeting I thought the (External consultant) presentation was very poor. I thought it didn’t really tell us anything we didn’t know em I was conscious that we had the entire board there for nearly an hour. Not a good use of Board time.

Source: Board meeting, 26th July, 2011

Another example was the engagement of an external marketing/branding consultant who became an integral part of and contributor to the Marketing Forum meetings of 16th June and 22nd September 2011. It is worth noting again that relying on such resources for enactment at meetings was not an unquestioned practice, as evidenced by the discontinuation of the consultant’s services shortly after the September 2011 meeting of the Forum.

The data also show how ‘second-hand’ enactment takes place across meetings. Meeting trans-participants carry information that was first presented at one meeting and then (re)presented and (re)enacted at another meeting, as illustrated in Extract 7.4:
Extract 7.4

(3:46:28.1) Ken (GM): Interestingly from our UK team meeting in February and some of these points lined up, these were notes that I took of the comments we said lookit market intelligence guys tell us what’s happening in your market and (Daniel) and (Cloe) came back with these points

Source: Board meeting (AGM), 22nd February 2012

This form of (re)enactment by transporting external perspectives shared at other meetings, could also be considered a form of selection or retention from the previous meetings, illustrating that enactment-selection-retention are recursively and iteratively intertwined.

7.1.2 From inside to inside.

In many instances meeting attendees for particular groups in KT-Inc seemed relatively static in that they did not change from one group meeting to the next during early data recording. However, a comment by the new company chairman designate at the start of a Marketing Forum meeting, presaged a change in this practice.

Extract 7.5

(0:04:53.4) Tim (ND1): Welcome …We just changed the composition of this group a bit from the last couple of meetings in that we were getting dragged down into a lot of detail so in an effort to try and keep our the discussion at a pretty high and strategic level em we’ve we have made some changes and ee if we do need to bring in people ya know at operational level from time to time we can do that can’t we.

Source: Marketing forum meeting, 16th June 2011

This Extract illustrates how meetings may be informed from beyond their own resources when necessary, an approach that was extended to Board meetings some months later. The noteworthy point is that the resources are internal to KT-Inc. As another example, SBU heads were invited to attend the Board meeting of 15th Nov 2011 to present draft strategic plans for their units. This was intended to become a standing agenda item for future Board meetings. It illustrates a form of coordinated enactment across meetings, given that such draft plans represent enactments, selections and retentions from the SBUs’ own meetings and activities. Their contributions then feed into the selection and retention processes that take place in the current or future
meetings of the Board or the SBUs. The potential benefits of this changed practice were elaborated by the Chairman thus:

Extract 7.6

(3:05:57.1) Tim (BC): I think there will be synergies and there'll be learning and there'll be stimulation of ideas going each way here and eh the idea would be for the four SBUs to present at these meetings no more than half an hour each just hitting the highlights as you have hit and eh that there's cross fertilization of ideas and so on ...

Source: Board meeting, 15th November, 2011

Of course these initiatives at Board meetings also have the consequential impact of SBU heads bringing Board level perspectives to bear in their own SBU meetings, making the Chairman’s “cross fertilization” a two way process supporting further inside-to-inside enactment across meetings.

Another means of inside-to-inside enactment is to observe how ‘corridor talk’ was enacted in Ops team meetings, as a means of informing team managers of what was happening on the ground.

Extract 7.7

(0:07:12.8) Pete (OpsD): Ross has been looking for me for the last two weeks. ...Ross was looking for me yesterday three times.

Source: Ops team meeting, 29th April 2011

These types of short, conversational contributions occurred frequently at meetings. One of their distinguishing features is the level of detail they contain relative to the meeting at which they are given. At Ops Team meetings quite a lot of detail was provided. Individual workers were referred to by name, along with family circumstance and other personal or work related details. This helped the participants to (re)enact and understand the detail of the situation as it occurred outside the meeting, while in the context of (sensemaking) retention, come to some collective agreement on action to be taken at a detailed operations level. The equivalent contributions made at less frequently occurring meetings such as the Managers meeting or Board meetings tended to be more general in nature, with much less detail provided. The associated selection and retention lead to more general and less specific outputs reflecting the level of detail at which the meeting discourse took place.
7.1.3 From inside to outside.

This is the most difficult to observe directly in the meetings data since there is no data from any external meetings to assess how the organizations internal discourse was (re)presented or (re)enacted in outside fora. However, some references within meetings provide an insight into how the impressions of external ‘agents’ who had engaged in KT-Inc’s meetings represented the organization in some way to (re)enact the outside world. This is relevant in considering how the organization then makes sense of its institutional positioning (McPhee & Zaug, 2000) or how it is perceived or characterized to an external audience. Extract 7.8 illustrates this:

Extract 7.8

(0:00:09.0) Tim (BC): Did you see that (Ken), what was that conference that health and education conference where (Academic researcher) [Ken (GM): oh all right] made a a presentation and he singing the praises of (KT-Inc) about cooperation about research and development

Source: Marketing Forum meeting, 16th June 2011

Sensemaking theory proposes that enactment takes place to re-present the original reality experienced, with a view to limiting the volume and content of data to more manageable proportions and to bring it within our more limited cognitive capacity (Porac et al., 1989; Schwenk, 1984). In this context, the data analysis shows that enactment across KT-Inc meetings takes place in different directions with respect to the organization as a whole: from outside in, from inside to inside, and from inside to outside. Enactment across meetings is evidenced through common repeated actions such as opening board meetings with a general economic climate brief, or relaying of contributions by participants in one meeting to participants in another meeting who were not present in the originating meeting. This enables meeting participants to move towards selection as the second phase of sensemaking.

7.2 SELECTION

From Weick’s sensemaking recipe (Weick, 1979, p. 133), selection is achieved through a range of activities that further reduce “equivocal raw data” (Weick, 1979, p. 114) into information. Selection therefore represents a further distillation or refinement of what has already been accomplished through enactment, narrowing the range of inputs to be dealt with more manageably.
Two categories of examples from the data are used to illustrate how selection occurs across meeting streams as much as within individual meetings. In the first instance we look at how selection occurs across meetings to develop shared language and processes in the context of making sense of strategic plans. In the second, we can see how project management is referenced and used across meetings as a whole organization activity that aids collective sensemaking about projects as activities that span most if not all of the company’s functional areas.

7.2.1 The language of strategic planning.

The evolution of KT-Inc’s strategic planning process provides an example of how particular language for strategic planning is progressively selected across a series of meetings involving different cohort groups that directly contributes to shared sensemaking across the whole organization. Aspects of this example from the data could equally be used to reflect the enactment or retention features of sensemaking, further illustrating the intertwined and recursive nature of these three sensemaking components.

When data recording began, KT-Inc used three specific expressions to structure its strategic plan—Governing objectives, Strategic imperatives and Executive initiatives. It is not clear from the data when these expressions were adopted by KT-Inc but it appears it was within the previous two years. We can see a hint of concern with this particular language in Extract 7.9, when in discussing the strategic plan, the future chairman comments:

Extract 7.9

(1:54:01.6) Tim (ND1): sometimes we, when we sit around the table like this we speak language that people down through the organisation don’t understand.

Source: Board meeting, 15th February 2011

This is made more explicit in the subsequent board meeting, when I provided an analysis of the company strategic plan at the request of the general manager:

Extract 7.10

(0:50:38.6) Martin (Res): My question is do the people on the ground have the same understanding of governing objectives, strategic imperatives and executive initiatives, as you have as a board, and if they don’t, then there’s a disconnect. I’m not convinced that they do from what I’ve read in the strategic units strategic plans,
because I'm reading a different way of interpreting those three headings to what I'm reading in the strategic plan itself.

Source: Board meeting, 10th May 2011

Later in this same board meeting, the GM explicitly refers to ‘selecting’ from the feedback on the strategic plan and also how the next board meeting should be partially used to do that:

Extract 7.11

(2:04:15.6) Ken (GM): On I think Martin’s, ya know some of your ideas there would love to figure out how we can implement them into the new plan em, and I think our next board meeting we should probably give ya know an hour or two hours maybe to strategic planning process, and how our next plan might be different.

Source: Board meeting, 10th May 2011

In the subsequent board meeting’s discussion on strategic planning, this developed into a proposal for a further dedicated board planning meeting and an explicit call from the company chairman to revise the terminology being used in the strategic plan.

Extract 7.12

(3:41:06.5) Tim (BC): So (Ken), what are you proposing here, then, that we have a separate meeting of the, of the members of the board really, senior team to [Ken (GM): yea] review the governing objectives here and the strategic imperatives and we'll find new terminology.

Source: Board meeting, 26th July 2011

This discursive thread on strategic plan terminology spanned two board meetings, but then went on to integrate with other board meetings and dedicated planning meetings to revise and update the terminology to one that was shared across the whole company, or at least between the board members in the first instance. While it was interesting to observe that the subsequent board meeting in September 2011 did not change format to accommodate being a dedicated planning meeting, or actually change the company strategic plan terminology, a further series of meetings did just that some six months later.

A special executive management training workshop was scheduled for 24th April 2012, at which the planning process and strategic plan terminology were comprehensively
reviewed and revised. Appendix 5 shows the initial generic planning approach considered by the workshop participants. The appendix then shows the revised terminology that the participants agreed to adopt and that had to be ratified and accepted by the Board. The board meeting of 17th July 2012 was given a detailed feedback brief on the outcome of that planning workshop:

Extract 7.13

(4:07:56.7) Martin (Res): during the workshop eh we split the workshop in half, we did the first half of it was just where I put an idea on the table for how strategic planning processes might work. And the second half of it was where we (KT-Inc'd) it, we adopted the words the language, some of the moves and steps that the group felt, actually this is what we could do within (KT-Inc).

Source: Board meeting, 17th July 2012

An abridged Extract (7.14) of the GM’s contribution to the board on the 17th July 2012 illustrates selection taking place through the adoption of the new planning process and terminology, while he referred to a PowerPoint slide depicting the proposed planning process:

Extract 7.14

(4:28:42.1) Ken (GM): What we didn’t do, we didn’t do this, we never started with a group vision, last year, em and the Board never debated a group vision before we did our strategic planning. In fact we as a Board jumped right in here and eh I know I proposed some goals and we debated them as a board and we changed them.

(4:29:03.9) Ken (GM): We never invited, we didn't have this dotted line, we didn’t really throw those goals, groups goals back to the SBU, back to our senior management team and say what do ya think of these. ....

(4:29:34.5) Ken (GM): Em, but certainly this aspect of it happened, we brought the goals through the SBU management but the board drove this down to objectives as well. But those objectives were very much set with the management teams.

Source: Board meeting, 17th July 2012

The follow-on discussion then established firm planning and meeting dates for the process to be followed, and also clearly indicated the adoption of the revised strategic plan terminology:
### Extract 7.15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4:46:00.1</td>
<td>Tim (BC)</td>
<td>Ok, so em, the vision to be completed sort of mid August, and the review of the strat plan to be completed by the end of October.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:46:10.3</td>
<td>Ken (GM)</td>
<td>Good goal [(Sill): yea].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:46:12.0</td>
<td>Tim (BC)</td>
<td>End of October, yea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:46:27.8</td>
<td>Ken (GM)</td>
<td>I'm just wondering when our next board meeting is Tim?........</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:46:56.5</td>
<td>Tim (BC)</td>
<td>Yea, the 18th of of September........</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:47:14.1</td>
<td>Ken (GM)</td>
<td>That's the first opportunity the board have to kinda debate the vision, it's going to squash the, eh, strategic plan into a six week [process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:47:23.0</td>
<td>Sill (FinD)</td>
<td>Yes It doesn't need to be at a board meeting, does it, to discuss the [vision?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:47:25.7</td>
<td>Tim (BC)</td>
<td>No], but maybe if you circulated the vision as soon as you have it, and sure we'll all input on email [Ken: ok], and if we had a straw man of the business pla, of the strat plan, for for the 18th of September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:47:40.4</td>
<td>Ken (GM)</td>
<td>Ok, we. See the board, ya know is giving major input into the goals, I think our objective by the 18th of September should be to have it down to goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:47:50.1</td>
<td>Tim (BC)</td>
<td>yes, that, that would be great [Ken: yea, yea]. That gives you six weeks then to sort of finalise, yea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:47:57.8</td>
<td>Ken (GM)</td>
<td>Group goals. [Unknown: It's working.] It's working.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Board meeting, 17th July 2012

In preparation for the planning cycle for 2013, a senior managers training workshop in October 2012 promulgated the new planning approach and terminology that had been proposed at the executive workshop in April 2012 and adopted at the board meeting of July 2012.

The short analysis above of Extracts spanning four board meetings over eighteen months illustrates selections made to adopt a new planning process and associated terminology. It is clear that both enactment and retention were also taking place from one meeting to another, but the selections made in each meeting enabled the other two parts of the sensemaking process to take place. No one person, discursive contribution or individual meeting can be identified as 'the source' of the new KT-Inc strategic planning process. It required the combined agency of multiple meetings, spanning a
considerable time period, to bring about the revised strategic planning process and associated terminology.

The gap between the board’s use of strategic planning terminology (in February 2011) and the reported difficulties KT-Inc staff experienced in understanding it, prompted activities across a series of meetings that ultimately enhanced sensemaking throughout the organization by generating a shared process and terminology for strategic planning. The combined stages of the company-level sensemaking process were accomplished across streams of meetings involving board members, executive managers and senior managers. The final outcome, a new planning process and terminology, was accomplished through meetings collectively, since no single meeting could account for the ultimate change that took place.

7.2.2 Projects, Project Management and PAG

Where the original language associated with strategic planning seemed to cause more confusion than clarity and was deliberately changed through iterative selection(s) across a number of meetings, project management was an established approach in KT-Inc that provided a consistent language that enabled and supported clearer communication across meetings of multiple groups within the company. Projects had a particular meaning within KT-Inc and represented one way in which meeting participants could bracket, interpret or label activities. The acronym PAG was used in KT-Inc to refer to its Project Advisory Group that oversaw and ensured consistency of the company’s project management approach. PAG meetings were relatively infrequent and took place on a needs must basis. Only one such meeting was attended in the eighteen month period of data collection, but it served as an intersection point between meetings that supported organization-wide sensemaking in respect of KT-Inc’s projects. The PAG meetings were used by other meeting groups to provide project guidance when required, as illustrated by the PAG chairman’s comment at a Board meeting as shown in Extract 7.16

Extract 7.16

\[(1:10:03.1)\] Tanya (ODir): Yea well what I'm goin to suggest is that maybe the project advisory group could get together and perhaps try to, look at resource costs and prioritise, em, and projects.

Source: Board meeting, 15th February 2011
Notwithstanding such requests, the PAG chairman made clear at the start of the only PAG meeting recorded, what PAG meetings were for and why the PAG was set up:

Extract 7.17

Tanya (ODir): First of all I just wanna (unintelligible) project leaders to be here to reiterate, the lessons learned, from, previous projects. I think we really really have to take this on board cause …. because the project manager process isn’t, isn’t being followed, we’re not learning from previous projects, and remember that was one of the golden rules when we set up.

Source: PAG meeting, 13th June 2011

PAG was used as a location in which to (re)enact aspects of their project experiences, exercise selections from those experiences, and retain the desirable aspects to take away and disseminate throughout the organization, often through other group or project-based meetings. The PAG meeting served as a site for shared sensemaking for company projects, as illustrated by the Finance Director’s request in Extract 7.18 for clarification on the possible amalgamation of two different projects:

Extract 7.18

Sill (FinD): Yea, now, I’d like to actually ask some advice from, from the group here eh, because we’ve kind a, we’ve kind of come to a cross roads em, … and what we’re looking at now is, is relationship development with the stockist, right [Tanya (ODir): um, um]. Now we have (Gavin) and (Tim) and (Jack) who are also looking at the relationships [Tanya (ODir): yea, so there’s, ok] with the stockists, so there doesn’t actually seem a point in, in two groups, [and I]

Ken (GM): And in our] strategic plan, we have the board are to look at the relationship with the stockist, [Sill (FinD): yea], I mean the [Jack (SaM): I know it, ya know , yea

Sill (FinD): But this is the way this has, … this particular project has developed, and I think it needs to be subsumed into the bigger picture and become part of what it is, but having said that, if it’s going to lose its its status as a project and become [a, a

Jack (SaM): It’s a very] important, it’s a very important .....
Sill is trying to make sense of two different projects that seem to be pursuing the same objectives. She seeks the PAG’s advice on how to integrate the output of one project, that is closing with other activities being referred to by Ken and Jack that have not been designated as projects but, are focusing in part on the same issues the project dealt with.

As a meeting forum, the PAG made selections related to projects that were then communicated to the other groups in the company to guide project activities. Extract 7.19 illustrates how shared understanding from the PAG of what constitutes a ‘project’ was disseminated when SBU managers attended a portion of the company AGM, but it also illustrates that the definitions of what constitutes a project are not always clear-cut and need on-going sensemaking as seen from Pete’s interjection at 1:00:21:

Extract 7.19

(0:59:30.7) Ken (GM): It’s a longer term, it’s not a project [it’s a
(0:59:32.0) Tanya (ODir): It’s not] a 2011 thing maybe
(0:59:36.7) Ken (GM): If we go down to the industrial and (Guy) we’re coming into your area where we’ve got a few really big things here, these are a lot, these are additional things to what ya know I think everything you had in your plan was fine but the development of the (product) with (customer) which em I I credit (Pete) with getting us involved in em [Pete (OpsD): - don’t know is it a good thing yet] I think that should become a project actually, I think it’s big enough to where, ..... I think they warrant going to project status.
(1:00:16.6) Guy (IndM): I think they are projects in everything but name anyway I think [Ken (GM): - they are] at this stage now
(1:00:21.3) Pete (OpsD): But then what’s sales? (.) [hm?] Like we’re trying to sell stuff. When does sales become a project?
(1:00:30.8) Ken (GM): Well, it’s more the disciplines of a project (Pete).
(1:00:36.8) Tanya (ODir): Not because you have, you’ll have how has it’s been packaged and all that so you’ll have marketing, [Ken (GM): there will be everything coming into it] you’ll have technical, you’ll have production, you’ll have admin, I can see how it could be

Source: Board meeting, 15th February 2011

Adopting project management terminology enabled the same clusters of activities to be differentiated from other meeting activities, in a consistent way across different meetings. For example, at an all-staff meeting (see Extract 7.20), the general manager
both explained the project management concept and then used it to update all staff on key activity that had been taking place over long periods of time in the company:

Extract 7.20

(0:04:42.9) Ken (GM): We have em, a number of initiatives that we’re working on, eh 24 in total. 11 of these are classified as company projects. By company project we have eh we have defined very specifically what we mean by them and they are multi-disciplinary, they involve multiple parts of our company, whether it’s sales, marketing, operations sometimes customer involvement as well. ..... and we nominate a project leader, a project team, and there’s this what’s called Gantt chart ..... 

(0:05:40.2) Ken (GM): So for our bigger initiatives and those that as I mentioned are a bit more multi-disciplinarian, eh, we have nominated them as projects......

(0:06:07.2) Ken (GM): We’re involved in the (substitution project), isn’t that right [laughter], and that’s been a project that eh started back in January 2010, right and it’s still going on and (Pete) is leading that project. We expect that project to come to a successful conclusion within the next, three months [laughter] ...

Source: All staff briefing, 21st April 2011

In another example at a Stockists team meeting, the general manager, Ken, acting as a trans-participant across meetings, was again able to use the universally known projects terminology and approach to quickly update the stockist sales team on specific topics of particular relevance to them:

Extract 7.21

(0:35:16.4) Ken (GM): Eh, I'm going to shorten the project update, seh, want to go over all the projects that the company, there's six projects at the minute, but I'm just going to mention two of them ....

Source: Stockists team meeting, 24th October 2011

This group of Extracts provide very short examples of how the company’s project conventions and terminology are used to bracket, label or reference specific activity clusters as ‘projects’, thus making them more readily communicable both within and across KT-Inc’s meetings. It becomes clear from the data extracts that it is difficult to delineate between enactment, selection and retention, as they each represent parts of an integrated process of sensemaking. In part we see how the company project approach supports sensegiving by executive managers as they brief managers and staff at
different meetings. However, we also see from Sill's question in extract 7.18 or Pete's in 7.19 that achieving a shared understanding of projects (i.e. making sense of projects) is an ongoing accomplishment that occurs across multiple meetings of different groups, and not just some static wisdom retained and shared by executive managers.

Strategic planning and project management as reviewed in this section represent selections (and retentions) of particular terminology from previous meetings, that enables the bracketing, labeling and referencing in other meetings as part of a wider sensemaking process across the whole company. Selection, as an accomplishment within one meeting, is dependent on selections and retentions made at other meetings, and helps to limit the scope of data or information that participants deal with in making sense of their evolving situation. When viewed across the company's meetings collectively, we can see repeated cycles of selection applied to information that passes from one meeting to another. Selection helps meeting participants to filter and narrow the scope of information they have to process and the options available to them from which they may have to make further selections. Extract 7.21 provided an explicit example of Ken selecting just two projects out of six for briefing the stockists sales team, which necessarily limits what they can feed forward into their own or others future meetings. This section showed that selection takes place across meetings in general but is not a discrete, tightly bounded meeting activity. Selection is embedded in meeting discourse that is almost taken for granted, to be repeated in future iterations of the ESR sensemaking cycle.

7.3 RETENTION

Similar to the other two sensemaking sub-processes, retention cannot operate as a discrete or isolated sub-process of sensemaking but recursively relies on enactment and selection while also contributing to both. From the data, retention as a sub-process of sensemaking can be seen across organizational meetings in a number of ways. Perhaps the most obvious and familiar is the use of meeting minutes as a formalized way to summarize discussions, record decisions and identify action points and responsibilities (Odermatt et al., 2015, p. 56). Minutes are taken (retained) at one meeting but are normally reviewed (re-enacted) and corrected (selected) at a group's subsequent meeting, before their retention is approved as a matter of record. This two-stage textual retention can be seen as the output of the hybridicity of two meetings that neither meeting can accomplish alone.
In the context of the data analysis, the practical retention exhibited by meeting minutes is largely confined to the point at which they are reviewed and ratified in respect of a previous meeting, rather than as a resource that was referenced in meetings to assist recall of what was actually retained. There was only one instance found of minutes of a previous meeting being formally accessed or reviewed to clarify a particular point at a meeting:

Extract 7.22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(0:11:22.3) Tanya (ODir): It was a conscious decision, now I have the minutes, we purposely say [Cathy (HR): we did] it has a lower priority and that was fine.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Source: PAG meeting, 13th June 2011

As a form of textual retention, meeting minutes seemed to play a relatively insignificant role in sensemaking across KT-Inc’s meetings.

KT-Inc’s Meeting Code of Conduct (see Appendix 6) represents a different example of textual ‘retention’. The requirement to “Conduct meeting success reviews” is recorded (retained) textually in the code of conduct, but was not ‘retained’ as a practice in meetings.

At the end of a meeting of KT-Inc’s marketing forum, I was invited by the meeting chair (also the Board chairman designate) to provide some feedback on the meeting:

Extract 7.23

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(3:23:40.8) Tim (ND1): Martin do you want to give us some observations here?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Source: Marketing Forum meeting, 16th June 2011

I suggested an approach for structuring meeting agendas and also a method for conducting meeting reviews, which seemed to be well received. A short briefing document for both was sent to the meeting attendees (see Appendix 6 for the full text of this note, along with Extracts from the marketing forum’s meeting and the managers meeting that briefly explain the method). The company secretary (who attended the marketing forum meeting) responded by personal email and made the following request: “If you are attending the next Monday Managers Meeting would you present this at the meeting as it has good learning in it for all Managers charged with preparing agendas and running meetings” (Daly, 2011). Such a request was consistent with Pacanowsky’s (1988, p. 359) reference to ethnographers receiving requests for
engagement as participant observers and had the effect of retaining a specific item from one meeting for replication across multiple future meetings.

The meeting review method, known as Plus Minus Interesting (PMI) as adapted from de Bono (1982), was first implemented as an agenda item at the end of a board meeting on the 26th July 2011, because it had been included on the agenda by the company secretary:

Extract 7.24

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5:34:32.3</td>
<td>Ken (GM)</td>
<td>Anything else under AOB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:34:33.8</td>
<td>Tim (BC)</td>
<td>Well just a review meeting here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:34:35.5</td>
<td>Jay (SND)</td>
<td>PMI [Ken (GM): PMI].</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Board meeting, 26th July 2011

The PMI method was subsequently briefed as requested to a Managers meeting on the 30th August 2011. PMI, as a particular example of retention, is examined in more detail in the next section to illustrate how it evolved across a stream of meetings as an integrated example of ESR (sensemaking) specific to KT-Inc.

The use of ‘immutable mobiles’, discursive constructs that retain their meaning with minimal change as they move throughout an organization (Cooren et al., 2007), represent a third form of retention occurring across KT-Inc’s meetings. Perhaps the most extensive example is the propagation of the company’s 2012 strategic plan through its meetings, which notably had three (retained) formats as described by the company GM:

Extract 7.25

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:20:30.2</td>
<td>Ken (GM)</td>
<td>To give you briefly an overview I have it in three three ways here. First way is a Presentation format. The second way is an Excel sheets .... The presentation format doesn’t go into so much ch detail .... and the third format is what we asked every SBU to have a full plan …</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Board meeting, 17th January 2012

Meetings were explicitly identified by the marketing director as a means of dissemination when he asked:
Each strategic plan format was a different means of retention that supported future sensemaking in meetings, depending on which group the GM worked with. In Extract 7.26, the GM’s ambition at 1:38:57 for the degree of sensemaking to be achieved through his presentation seemed relatively modest but was achieved through one of the retained versions of the plan. The GM acknowledged the multiple times individuals may have heard his strategic plan presentation at different meetings:

Source: Board meeting, 17th January 2012

In his subsequent report to the company AGM a month later, the GM confirmed both the use of meetings and a particular format of the strategic plan, as part of the wider company sensemaking process associated with disseminating the strategic plan.

The strategic intent of the company Board was ‘retained’ in different formats, with each format being tailored for use in different settings and with different groups. But each
format of the plan was also accompanied by the GM’s ‘voice over’ at each meeting which was also a different textual form of ‘retention’ of the strategic plan. Each form supported a different type of enactment, depending on the group to which it was being presented and in turn, supported different ‘selection’ taking place by different groups, leading to more limited retention of a portion of the original. As this cascade progressed across the meetings of different groups, the strategic plan was becoming more localized and contextualized through repeated cycles of ESR leading to operational implementation which can be seen in the conversation detail of an Ops Team meeting:

Extract 7.29

(0:01:37.8) Pete (OpsD): (Ken) joined us a couple of weeks ago to brief the team on the whole SBU structure, .... he indicated eh what KPIs (*) each of the new departments would be responding to and that. Our three KPIs .... in order of importance is eh total cost per [unit] per manufactured eh [units] ....

(0:02:27.5) Pete (OpsD): The next one then is stock outs and then the last one in order of importance is eh right first time.

* KPI refers to Key Performance Indicator

Source: Ops team meeting, 17th February 2012

This cascade supported the (sensemaking) process required for staff at operation team level to make (local) sense of the strategic plan that was created largely at (global) board level and to then give effect to its strategic intent. The iterative sensemaking cycles that occurred through meetings collectively enabled staff to distill operational practice from strategic intent, ensuring alignment of the whole organization towards shared strategic outcomes.

7.4 AN INTEGRATED EXAMPLE OF ESR

“Meeting success reviews” in KT-Inc were ‘retained’ as a required company practice as stated in the Meeting Code of Conduct. When queried about its meaning at a board meeting, it didn’t seem to ‘make sense’ to directors because it had not been actually practiced. This section provides an example of how organization-level sensemaking of meeting success reviews was actually accomplished through sequential action across a number of meetings of different organizational groups.
The PMI method (see Appendix 7) to review meeting success was introduced at the marketing forum meeting in June 2011. Comparing this with the retained practice at the final board meeting of 17th July 2012 illustrates how ESR sensemaking process operated across meetings and progressed from a retained text without practice, to a retained practice without text. The original retained text progressively changed as it was (re)enacted through different organizational meetings, as illustrated by how Ken proposed it should be used at the Stockists meeting in October 2011:

**Extract 7.30**

(3:01:16.7) Ken (GM): Now, just, final thing, meeting review. This is where we just go round the table and em, everybody give one positive, one negative if you want, and one thing that you found interesting about the meeting, and it might, it could be anything, em, and if you like I'll, I'll start it off

Source: Stockists meeting, 24th October 2011

The original method required all participants to first comment on positive features of their meeting. They should then move on to ‘minus’ features and conclude with interesting ones. But Ken proposed that each individual would deal with each element in a single contribution, which has a significantly different impact on how the method operates and the outcome it produces.

Such different selections were made at different meetings, and ultimately a different version of PMI, now conducted the KT-Inc way, is evidently ‘retained’ in the practice of the board meeting of 17th July 2012. Each participant clearly goes through their own PMI highlights (as shown in Extract 7.31), rather than the group focusing on the P, M and I elements in sequence as originally briefed and intended by de Bono’s (1982) review method.

**Extract 7.31**

(5:11:48.4) Sill (FinD): Eh em, as positive em I think Swords is the great positive .....Eh the negative was I suppose the whole (Guy) leaving and it’s just very disappointing ........Eh and then interesting eh that was interesting to review eh Martins slides on strategic planning....

Source: Board meeting, 17th July 2012

The second significant change was using the PMI to reflect on the meeting content, rather than making the meeting process the subject of the PMI as originally briefed
twelve months previously. In making sense of PMI through successive meetings it was transformed into something that reflected the ESR of the KT-Inc sensemaking process. An intention (to review meetings) was initially retained as a documented policy statement, but with no stated method to do it in practice. A coincidence of circumstances at a particular meeting enabled enactment of a method to accomplish the intended reviews. Meeting reviews moved from a textually retained intention, to an undocumented action retained in practice. Meetings, as both the subject and the means of that practice, enhanced KT-Inc’s organization-level sensemaking through ESR cycles that transformed an intention into an engrained practice. Meetings collectively produced an outcome over time that was more than any one meeting produced alone and was also distinct from the mere summation of individual meeting outputs.

Different degrees of enactment, selection and retention become evident by following the introduction of PMI and tracking its evolution across multiple company meetings. As PMI was implemented at different meetings, the format and content of the PMI practice changed and became more widely acceptable throughout the company. Meeting success reviews were only ‘retained’ in practice following introduction of PMI as a method at one meeting, followed by trialing at a number of subsequent meetings. Practice enabled a different form of retention beyond mere recording of an intention in a company policy statement. In some respects we could say that successive practice iterations through multiple meetings over time rendered an apparently immutable mobile more mutable, yet still mobile, a theme considered in more detail in Chapter 8.

7.5 MEETINGS AND SENSEMAKING

Some six months into data collection, while attending KT-Inc’s November 2011 board meeting, I observed in contemporaneous field notes – “Note the discussion about policies & procedures & communications - is this a pointer to a need for some type of meeting system? (141 mins in AoB)”. This was an identifiable point at which my own focus changed towards adopting meetings collectively as the unit of analysis for the research. In the context of KT-Inc’s river of discourse, it was clear from observation that meetings were significantly informed by the upstream discourse flowing into them, while at the same time generating their own discursive outputs feeding into the river’s flow. It also became clear that outputs from one meeting went on to inform future meetings downstream, sometimes through deliberate intent and sometimes not. To address the research question:
How do organizational meetings collectively contribute to the constitution of the organizations in which they take place?

It was necessary to look at the discursive flows taking place within the meetings I attended, but also to consider what was being done with those flows to connect them with other meetings, both past and future.

Meetings effectively broaden the base of the sensemaking audience and increase the likelihood of shared or 'common' sense being made by organization members. Meetings represent fora at which the bi-lateral interactions of individuals can be witnessed or joined by a wider participant set from the organization. These bi-lateral but particularly multi-lateral personal interactions enable people to enact, select and retain their experiences into further interactions that (re)constitute their organization on an ongoing basis. It was clear observing KT-Inc’s meetings that they provided spaces in which people could share those experiences and also create new experiences for future sharing.

Interpretation as an integral part of sensemaking operates from top down as well as bottom up. Meetings provide essential channels through which both sets of interpretation flow. A common feature of the examples of retention provided in this chapter is their dependence on repetitive cycles of ESR over long time periods, emphasizing the recursive, iterative and temporal contribution of meetings to sensemaking. Viewed at an organizational level, meetings are discursive selections in their own right drawn from and contributing to the organization’s river of discourse; they create theaters for shared (re)enactments of both external and internal events, making such events more accessible to more organization members; and they support co-creation by organizational sub-groups of shared outputs (retention) that can be transported across time and space for inclusion in further cycles of sensemaking.

Viewed in isolation of other meetings, ESR is identifiable within individual meetings, enabling the attending group to make shared sense of their meeting’s inputs. However, by refocusing the analytical lens to a zoomed-out perspective, I looked across multiple meetings spanning longer time frames, to see how streams of meetings collectively also accomplished the ESR cycle of sensemaking. The examples of an implemented strategy or the retained practice of meeting reviews could not have been produced by any single meeting. They could also not be said to be the simple sum of the outputs of different meetings, since the discrete outputs of individual meetings are not summative.
In a simple mathematical sense. Yet meetings collectively over time significantly contributed to the final outcome in each case.

In Boden’s (1994) analysis of organizational discourse she identifies talk as the primary medium through which humans make sense of their world (p. 3) and that “all the while they are producing that reasonable and reasoned account of action that makes sense now and links past actions to only partially grasped futures” (p. 153) (emphasis in the original). Viewed in this context, KT-Inc’s meetings could be considered temporary semi-bounded pools of discourse, accommodating some of the past interactional flow that is ever-present in the organization’s river of discourse, while feeding into the future discursive flow yet to come. Schwartzman (1989, p. 9) suggested that “the meeting assumes great importance as a sense-making form for individuals and organization”.

As such, meetings represent a place where the organization makes itself known to its members, while also serving as places for individuals to make sense of what they say and do and how they relate to that organization (p. 39). If we accept Boden’s and Schwartzman’s assertion that sensemaking is an integral part of all organizational meetings, it is inevitable that sensemaking of some sort will take place in all future meetings, which prompted consideration of how future meetings might play some role in sensemaking taking place in current meetings.

7.5.1 Meetings Prehension

In this thesis, meetings prehension is defined as a deliberate process of communicating into future meetings essential aspects of ‘sense made’ in current meetings (prehension was reviewed in Chapter 3). Prehension shows mindful anticipation of future meetings as a precursor to inevitable sensemaking taking place within them. It involves taking steps in the present to deliberately inform (but importantly not direct) sensemaking processes in future meetings.

In the context of a systemic view of meetings, prehension could be seen as one of the ways in which meetings are connected to each other. Meeting participants may feed forward into their own groups’ future meetings, but may also connect their meetings with the meetings of many other groups, which we saw occurring in KT-Inc. Prehension reflects a broader disposition towards meetings as it supports making deliberate connections to multiple future organizational meetings. Meetings collectively are then viewed as elements of an overall organizational sensemaking process. Prehension would inform thinking and discourse in meetings to ensure
‘transportation’ (Cooren et al., 2007) of appropriate ideas or information into future meetings, to support future sensemaking processes. Extending the ‘river of discourse’ metaphor, prehension might be considered equivalent to putting a message in a bottle and inserting it into the river to be opened at a specific future meeting.

It is important to emphasize that meetings prehension is not the same as sensegiving and differs from it in a number of key ways. Meetings prehension is a systemic aid to sensemaking processes rather than an attempt to persuade individuals or influence their acceptance of change (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442; Weick et al., 2005). Prehension does not create meaning for others directly (Maitlis, 2005) but is intended to ‘package’ current thinking in one meeting for ‘transportation’ (Cooren et al., 2007) to future meetings to support and inform future sensemaking processes. Meetings prehension does not have the reciprocity of sensegiving, where the recipients of sensegiving may respond directly to the ‘sensegiver’, leading to feedback into the sensemaking taking place (Weick et al., 2005: 416). Unlike sensegiving, which may alter based on the reaction of the receiver, the output of prehension as envisaged here cannot be itself reciprocal because it cannot be altered once received in a future meeting.

Meetings prehension has similarities with sensegiving in so far as it is intended to assist people to make sensible interpretations within a sensemaking process (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991: 443); it is sequential in that it would feed forward into a linear progression of meetings; it may be self-referential in so far as the creators of prehension may be the future recipients of their own prehension; it may also have reciprocal effect in that the act of being prehensive in the present may cause individuals or groups to make different sense of the topic on which they show prehension, thus affecting both their current sensemaking process and the content of any prehensive message they may wish to transport; it could also be used with expanding audiences (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991: 446) in so far as it can be targeted at multiple meetings across different organizational groups.

7.5.2 Sensemaking through meetings collectively

The aim of prehension in the context of meetings collectively is to inform a future sensemaking process, not to dictate an outcome. Unlike sensegiving, prehension does not seek to ‘tell’ actors what sense to make, but rather to inform a sensemaking process they are anticipated to follow. By definition, meetings prehension seeks to inform
anticipated needs in an unpredictable future, rather than prescribe what that future should become. Where sensegiving is a purveyor of sense made, prehension is a conscious precursor of future sensemaking.

In contrast to the broader concept of sensemaking previously reported in the literature, the sensemaking process arising from a systemic orientation towards meetings collectively reflects the combined concepts of retrospective sensemaking and future oriented prehension, as summarized in Figure 7.1.

![Conceptual framework for Sensemaking through meetings collectively](image)

**Figure 7.1 – Sensemaking through meetings collectively**

Giddens’ (1984, p. 27) observation that ‘the moment of the production of action is also one of reproduction in the contexts of the day-to-day enactment of social life’ suggests that actors and the environments in which they operate, recursively construct each other. Bourdieu’s sporting metaphor (1990, p. 82) cited in section 3.6.4 suggests that sense can only be made of practice in the present, if attention is paid to how it contributes to future practice. Where Rouleau and Balogun (2011, p. 1955) argue that ‘Intertwined and mutually reinforcing multiple acts of individual sensemaking shape the processes and outcomes of organizational sensemaking’, I propose systematised meetings collectively as a form of situated contexts (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010, p. 9) in which such individual or collective sensemaking acts take place. Organisational structure(s) can transcend physicality and may reside in the structuring properties of social practices which span time and space and thus provide an organization with systemic form (Giddens, 1984, p. 17). I therefore further propose that meetings
collectively, reflected in the disposition people have towards them and the mechanisms which connect them to each other, can be adopted into an organization-wide, systemic process through which whole organization sensemaking takes place.

7.6 **MODEL BUILDING FROM DATA ANALYSIS**

Systems and processual thinking rely on diagrams and pictures to capture and reflect the connections that render a collection of elements systemic or processual in nature. All parts of a picture can be seen at once, reflecting how a system should be viewed as well as how it operates (Meadows, 2009, p. 5). ‘Visual mapping strategy’ is one of seven approaches proposed for developing theory from process data (Langley, 1999, p. 700). It has the benefit of enabling different dimensions of the data context to be represented simultaneously and the effects of time, sequence and parallel processes to be relationally represented. This section diagrams a Systemic Meetings Model (SMM) as an abstract representation derived from the analysis in this chapter.

7.6.1 **Model building in stages**

The Extracts in this chapter represent limited examples of ESR from a much wider sample of data from KT-Inc’s meetings. Accounting for only the words spoken by the meeting participants, they represent one level of abstraction, since in their written form the Extracts do not include tone, inflection or emphasis, while in their recorded form they do not capture gestures, facial expression or body language.

I developed a systemic meetings model (SMM) (Duffy & O’Rourke, 2013b) as a further level of abstraction to reflect the broad pattern of sensemaking taking place across meetings. The model construction begins by reflecting meetings of different groups taking place ‘in the present’, with some perhaps taking place contemporaneously, as shown in Figure 7.2.
Figure 7.2 – Current meetings

Figure 7.3 then illustrates how meetings taking place in the present (e.g. group B) may reference past meetings of their own or other groups, for the purpose of making sense of something under discussion in its present meeting. The connections to these meetings are characterized as "direct retrospective" when they involve referencing meetings of the same group, and "indirect retrospective" when one group accesses the meetings of another group.

Figure 7.3 – Retrospective sensemaking
The data sample in Extract 7.32 provides an example of direct retrospection in action.

**Extract 7.32**

(1:27:55.2) Cian (LA): What [KT-Inc] did two years ago at this board meeting was it decided that it needed to diversify internationally and start a few other things. It also decided that it needed to bring in non-execs onto the board which has been a hugely positive development for the company because ...

Source: Board meeting, 15th February 2011

In Extract 7.32, the participants did not have any tangible material to refer to or to help them recall any details of what the organization did two years earlier, but relied solely on the recollections of the legal advisor. The board used this specific historical reference to make better sense of the company’s current plight in significantly different economic circumstances from those in which the reported conversation took place. When these types of retrospective connections were made within meetings there was nothing in the data to indicate any structured method for making them other than simple personal recall.

Figure 7.3 also shows how meetings of other groups may be referenced by indirect means, such as through relaying an anecdote from previous meetings or passing on specific messages from them. As an example, in Extract 7.33 Sill tries to make sense of something that occurred in another group’s meeting by means of indirect retrospection:

**Extract 7.33.**

(0:16:59.6) Sill (FinD): But it also] it only mentions the bar coding aspect of the anti-substitution, whereas I thought at the sales [meeting

(0:17:08.6) Gavin (MarD): It was a bigger thing than that.]

(0:17:09.6) Sill (FinD): that it was a much bigger thing and I actually came away from the sales meeting sort of saying to myself that if the only thing we did in 2011 was bring down the level of substitution substantially, it would achieve a huge amount in terms of increasing your sales volumes. But it seems to be getting a relatively low profile on this list.

Source: Board meeting, 15th February 2011

These connections are referred to as “indirect retrospective.” The direct and indirect connections from Extracts 7.32 and 7.33 respectively make no reference to the
modalities of transportation or connection between meetings (Cooren et al., 2007) which will be examined more closely in Chapter 8.

Figure 7.4 illustrates how meeting prehension is integrated in the evolving SMM.

Figure 7.4 – Direct and indirect meeting prehension

Although sensemaking in meetings is based on retrospection, analysis of the meetings’ discourse also indicates that sensemaking discussions feed forward into meetings that have not yet taken place, reflecting the concept of prehension as previously discussed. It is worth noting in Figure 7.4 that connections to future meetings can bypass meetings taking place in the present, emphasising that the relationships between past, present and future meetings are not preordained or necessarily linear. Prehension as reflected in the SMM may also operate at a general level rather than identifying specific meetings, as reflected in the Chairman’s announcement to the board meeting in Extract 7.34:

Extract 7.34.

(0:11:21.4) Tim (BC): One of the things that I've talked to [Ken] and [Tanya] about was is bringing eh the heads of the SBUs along to the board meeting and having them sort of account for their stewardship eh give them a half an hour or a forum eh to just provide an overview of where they are eh highlight the achievements em and identify the challenges and the actions that are being taken.

Source: Board meeting, 15th November 2011

The chairman referred to explicit arrangements he put in place to foster direct cross-coupling between other groups and the board’s future meetings. This illustrates how connections between meeting streams can be established prehensively, carried out repetitively and done premeditatedly for specific purposes. As with retrospective
sensemaking, prehension can also be both direct and indirect as shown in Figure 7.4. Extract 7.35 shows an example of both direct and indirect prehension between board meetings.

Extract 7.35

(3:41:06.5) Tim (BC): So what are you proposing here, then, that we have a separate meeting of the members of the board really senior team to [yea] review the governing objectives here and the strategic imperatives and we'll find new terminology.

(3:41:22.0) Ken (GM): And I don’t think we if we want to have it and at the second stage of that is we'll have team meetings with the sales teams em on team initiatives, what we called executive initiatives last year. And we want all that and we want the thing completed by the first of Nov. We’re going to have to have a separate board meeting for that thing.

Source: Board meeting, 26th July 2011

Tim shows direct prehension of board meetings at 3:41:06, while the GM shows indirect prehension in proposing to continue the process of strategic plan development through himself or fellow board members engaging in the future meetings of strategic business units. There are many other examples from the data indicating the intention of participants to inform future meetings in some way from the proceedings of the meeting in which they are currently engaged. In Weick and Robert’s (1993) language of collective mind, this could be said to indicate some degree of heedfulness towards their meetings. However, although these participants show awareness of feeding forward into future meetings, there is little or no detail in the discourse indicating the exact message(s) to be conveyed, who will carry them, and how they should be delivered. In the same language of collective mind, this seems to show little mindfulness of the implications or requirements for connecting meetings across time and space. The implications of this for meeting practice will be considered in Chapter 10.

7.6.2 Systemic Meetings Model (SMM)

The SMM reflects an abstracted representation of the connections between meetings as identified during the zoomed-out data analysis and helps to visualize the complexity of those connections as they are built up over time. The model reflects time, space,
entities, and relationships. Figure 7.5 provides a simplified version of the overall SMM.

![Systemic Meetings Model (SMM)](image)

The SMM thus provides an overview of how meetings can be connected through four types of connections: two referencing past meetings termed direct and indirect retrospection, and two projecting interactions with future meetings, termed direct and indirect prehension. The data analysis shows how connections between meetings occur heedfully to support sensemaking taking place, but there is no indication from the data of mindful use of meetings collectively or in a systemic way.

### 7.6.3 Modes of connections between meetings

At the level of analysis carried out in Chapter 6 and here in Chapter 7, we can see that retrospective and prehensive connections between meetings are accomplished through two principal means—actors and actants (Taylor & Cooren, 1997). Actors refers to people, while actants refers to non-human objects that enable connectivity to take place. Both actors and actants as meeting connectors are briefly introduced and described below but will be considered in more detail in the finer-grained data analysis in Chapter 8 and will be comprehensively described in the findings in Chapter 9.

**Actors.** Two types of connections by people are distinguishable from the data - trans-participants and ghost-participants. Trans-participants take part in the meetings of different groups and link meeting streams to each other through their involvement in
individual meetings. Ghost-participants manifest themselves in two distinct ways, which I refer to as absent participation and controllers-by-proxy. Absent participations are discursive constructs by meeting participants who invoke or refer to people or things (actors or actants) who are not physically present at a meeting. Controllers-by-proxy are also not physically present at meetings but exercise some form of control through actors or actants who are present. The latter two modes of connection are accomplished through acts of ventriloquism as reviewed in Section 4.4.6 and will be analysed more closely in the meetings data in Chapter 8.

**Actants.** Three categories of actants are also distinguishable from the data analysis so far – clustered artefacts, immutable mobiles (Cooren et al., 2007), and temporal markers. ‘Clustered artefacts’ refers to standing policies or procedures that are used or invoked to inform and guide the activities within meetings. ‘Immutable mobiles’ refers to textual or discursive constructions that are carried from one meeting to another, bearing some form of communication. ‘Temporal markers’ refers to external or internal factors that temporally drive when meetings are required or determine the pace at which meetings-related activities should take place.

### 7.7 CONCLUSION

Sensemaking was used in this chapter as a broad theoretic lens through which to analyse the data and consider how meetings may systemically contribute to organization-level sensemaking. Insights from this (zoomed-out) analysis supported the creation of an abstract Systemic Meetings Model to represent patterns of meeting connectivity observed in the data.

Sensemaking is not a uni-directional flow of distilled wisdom up or down the organization, but rather a systemic process through which all levels of the organization can ‘make sense’ of their shared environment, experiences and actions. The analysis shows that, when subsumed as a part of sensemaking (Gioia, 2006), interpretation can equally apply from the bottom up in the organization as much as from the top down. The organization’s internal activity is also ‘interpreted’ by staff and transposed into a communicable format to inform senior company managers’ broader sensemaking processes.

While personal sense made may be accomplished in the minds of individuals, it is dependent on interaction with and communication between those individuals. Organizational sensemaking can then be viewed as the processes that enable sufficient
commonality across individuals’ sensemaking such as to render it identifiable as a shared or common accomplishment of the whole organization. The data analysis illustrates the centrality of meetings in the accomplishment of such organizational sensemaking, both in terms of process and outcome, and also identifies the modes of meeting connectivity that support such sensemaking.

Selection in sensemaking is achieved through various practices such as bracketing, interpreting, noticing or embellishing, followed by labelling to enable referencing and connection to generate shared cognitive maps (Daft & Weick, 1984; Eden, 1992; Henneberg et al., 2010). Such mental models may ultimately become retained outputs from the overall sensemaking process but also may have “a short half-life” (Weick, 1979, p. 26) as they encounter further and repeated cycles of sensemaking.

We saw in Section 7.6 how the analysis through a sensemaking lens informed the development of the SMM as a next level of refinement of the ‘river of discourse’ conceptualization of organizational meetings collectively. Specific modes of connection between meetings were identifiable, and could be sub-divided into two main categories – Actors and Actants.

The SMM identified basic temporal relationships between meetings, along with abstract types of relationships as key components of meetings exhibiting systemic and processual qualities, as they aid sensemaking across the entire organization. Through more detailed analysis of the connections between meetings in Chapter 8 we will see how those connections operate in practice, creating a more refined picture of different degrees of temporality associated with organizational meetings. We will also see the specific modalities of how meetings connect with each other to create the Meetings as Systemic Process framework.
CHAPTER 8

MODALITIES OF MEETING CONNECTIONS
8 MEETING CONNECTIONS IN FOUR COMMUNICATION FLOWS

Table 8.1 summarises the modes of connection identified so far, which are analysed in more detail in this Chapter.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modes of meeting connections</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Actors</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Trans-participants</td>
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<td>Ghost-participants</td>
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Table 8.1 – Modes of meeting connections

In the context of this research, trans-participants were the most prolific and conspicuous means of connection that were evident in the data. They served as the primary means through which the agency of the other actors or actants became visible. Without human actors, it is difficult to see how the agency of the other meeting connections would have been accomplished. Trans-participants, as a sub-set of meeting actors, played a specific role in connecting meetings which contributed significantly to the agency exhibited by meetings collectively.

Clustered artefacts were the next most prevalent form of connection but were relatively static in that their location and content tended to be unchanging over time, and they were used by trans-participants to align the discourse in one meeting with that taking place in other meetings. Temporal markers were the least referenced directly and their influence was more visible in their temporal impact on scheduling meetings, rather than in their material or discursive influences during meetings.

Meeting connections indicate that meetings can be viewed holistically as an integrated organizational phenomenon. However, a more fine-grained analysis of the data was required to understand their operation in more detail and to identify how they contribute to the agency of meetings collectively in the constitution of organizations. This chapter considers the data from a zoomed-in perspective, as a complementary view to the broader analysis already undertaken. In the context of the micro-macro debate reviewed in Chapter 5, McPhee and Zaug’s (2009, pp. 29-30) four 4-Flows framework.
represents a meso level perspective, positioned between the macro Social Systems Theory of Luhmann and the micro analytical level espoused by the Montreal School. Adopting Nicolini's (2009) bifocal approach enables the 4-Flows framework to be used as the primary lens through which the zoomed-in analysis is carried out, while also using other concepts from CCO to explore the agency of meetings collectively at a greater level of detail.

Structuration theory's ‘duality of structure’ asserts that macro and micro aspects of communication should not be viewed in isolation since they recursively inform each other (McPhee, 1988, p. 485). For this reason, discourse analysis of interactions and exchanges within, but more particularly across meetings, is used to examine how meetings collectively contribute to the four communicative flows. While the 4-Flows do not provide or prescribe any specific analytical methods, McPhee has indicated that he prefers discourse-focused and critical methods over standard quantitative methods to demonstrate structurational processes in empirical data (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 302). We will also see from the analysis in this chapter that the 4-Flows recursively manifest themselves in and contribute to meetings as they are taking place.

As the meetings’ discourse is considered in more detail, we will also see patterns illustrative of concepts drawn from the other two CCO schools - specifically ventriloquism and immutable mobiles from the Montreal school and autopoiesis and decision paradox from the Luhmannian School. As referenced in Chapter 4, CCO scholars such as McPhee and Iverson (2013), Cooren and Fairhurst (2009) and Taylor (2009) have previously combined concepts and approaches from the three CCO schools to develop aspects of CCO theory.

Following this introduction, the chapter is structured into six sections. The first four directly reflect each of McPhee and Zaug’s (2009) four communicational flows, and represent refinement of a meso-level perspective from the broader view of meetings collectively already adopted in Chapter 7. The 4-Flows are used as “a template by which to detect, diagnose, and assess novel organizational phenomena” (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 32), the novelty in this case being the agency of meetings collectively.

In Section 8.5, I review how the 4-Flows framework acts as “a stimulus to unpack different approaches to CCO” (Putnam et al., 2009, p. 13) in the context of the meetings data analysed. The implications of the zoomed-in analysis under each flow heading are considered together, to provide an integrated perspective on how meetings collectively exhibit agency. The chapter then closes with a conclusion section.
8.1 "NEGOTIATING MEMBERSHIP" - THROUGH AND ACROSS MEETINGS

In broadest terms, the membership negotiation flow is concerned with how individuals come to be associated with and integrated within the organization (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 34). In the first instance we will look at the role meetings play in the transformation of the board chairman role. This is followed by an examination of the way different meetings highlight different roles of the GM. McPhee and Zaug (2009) emphasised that membership negotiation can be as much about members leaving an organization as integrating into it. The subsequent two sections deal with members leaving and joining the organization respectively.

8.1.1 Transforming the chairman role

Meetings in KT-Inc played a central role in installing a new board chairman. Prior to formally assuming the chairmanship of the company and board in July 2011, Tim was already chairing company meetings such as the Marketing Forum (Marketing Forum meeting, 16th June, 2011). Ken, the owner and GM of KT-Inc had been company chairman and the formal handover took place at the Board meeting of 26th July 2011:

**Extract 8.1**

(0:12:13.8) Tim (BC): Anyway we kick off. And first of all, welcome to our quarterly board meeting. Em, Ken kindly invited me to become chairman of (KT-Inc) and I'm very honoured to do that, and delighted to do it, and eh, I hope that eh, I can make a contribution, eh, as, as we move forward.

Source: Board meeting, 26th July 2011

Ken used the July board meeting to explicitly acknowledge Tim’s new role as chairman, subordinating himself to “working on the board under your chairmanship”, making the transition formal, public and complete:

**Extract 8.2**

(0:23:32.9) Ken (GM): Eh, well, from my point of view, thank you very much for, for eh, agreeing to take it on. I'm really looking forward to, eh, working on the board under your chairmanship. .....  

Source: Board meeting, 26th July 2011

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Prior to the July 2011 board meeting, the company officers meeting on the 22nd June 2011 discussed the change of chairman and it is clear from the recorded meetings data that it was also discussed at one or more meetings between Ken (the company owner/board chair) and Tim (the new chairman) which were not recorded.

Meetings were used by the new chairman to define, scope and assert how Tim would engage his new role more broadly across the organization. His role is consolidated across multiple meetings and meeting streams as we will now see. Immediately on assuming the chairmanship role in July 2011, Tim speaks for an uninterrupted ten minutes, setting out his philosophy for how the organization should operate. While establishing his intended modus operandi for KT-Inc in the future, two short Extracts illustrate how he intends, in part, to bring this about:

**Extract 8.4**

(0:14:37.4) Tim (BC): So em what I've done is just as a sort of by way of introducing where I come from in terms of the team and ya know I just put together a little, a little sort of schedule here that I've, I even got it laminated yesterday because I didn't want people eh scribbling on it, ya know [light laughter].

Source: Board meeting, 26th July 2011

This establishes what Cooren et al. (2007, p. 159) describe as an ‘immutable mobile’, that will aid transportability of the new chairman’s philosophy across meetings to come. Appendix 8 contains a copy of his one page document titled “Great people in teams deliver great Business results”. Its physical immutability is all the more assured through being laminated, although as we saw in the analysis of meetings in Chapter 7, physical retention in textual format is no guarantee of retention in operational practice. Towards the end of his monologue, Tim says:

**Extract 8.5**

(0:21:26.4) Tim (BC): ....wouldn't it be wonderful to sort of say in a years time or two years time, that we send this out to eh, blank to, the team, to whatever it is, fifteen or twenty people, and asking them to tick the boxes here to see where they stand on each one of those areas so, just a little food for thought for everybody and feel free to cascade it down the organization if, if you think its appropriate.

Source: Board Meeting, 26th July 2011

This provides the first hint of how the board might at a future date ‘test’ if the underlying philosophy had the forming influence that Tim intended. One of those
intentions was to move from a high dependency culture to a high performance culture as reflected in the last line of Tim’s philosophy in Appendix 8. Tim’s vision for becoming a high performance culture was recounted across many meetings and manifested itself in many ways, as we will particularly see under ‘member disidentification’ (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 294) later in this section. Towards the end of the same board meeting, Tanya introduces a more intuitively understandable language to convey the same idea:

Extract 8.6

Tanya indicates Tim had “already discussed this”, making the provenance of the expression “upping our game” a little less clear but suggesting that Tim may well have been its originator in a previous meeting with Tanya. The phrase ‘upping our game’ gained considerable currency across meetings from this point onwards. It represents an example of another immutable mobile that more closely aligns with Cooren et al.’s (2007) use of that expression as a conversational construct.

Having established an important pretext on which Tim would go on to attend the meetings of numerous groups over the subsequent six month period, the sales team meeting on October 2011 provides an explicit example of how meetings collectively were used to embed the new chairman’s preferred management philosophy and high performance culture. At 0:40:28 in Extract 8.7 Tim refers to his laminated sheet:

Extract 8.7
(0:40:39.3) Ken (GM): Well we said we'd bring it to all the teams, so this is our chance to bring it here.

(0:40:43.2) Tim (BC): Yea, well now that's fine, that's fine. No, I suppose this is a bit of a compilation for me, eh of em, ....... Eh, and no matter what culture you were in, what countries you were in, or what business you were in, the principles are all the same.

(0:41:29.4) Tim (BC): So I suppose, what I've done here eh, and shared it with some people, different groups here, was to talk about the sort of, team commitments and team behaviors that I felt are really really important. Em, and I just run them very briefly and I sort of titled this, 'great people working in teams deliver great business results', and I fundamentally believe that.

Source: Sales team meeting - 24th October 2011

This short Extract highlights a number of key points, emphasising the physical copies (at 0:40:37) and the immutable mobile status of Tim’s underlying philosophy. More particularly, the discussion shows how his laminated sheet is specifically transported across multiple meetings and meeting streams as indicated by Gavin’s reference to the ‘Monday managers’ meeting (at 0:40:35), Ken’s reference to ‘all teams’ (at 0:40:39) and Tim’s reinforcement of sharing with ‘some people, different groups’ (at 0:41:29). The philosophy could not be implemented by its mere announcement at one meeting (Extract 8.4) - it required multiple meetings, involving multiple groups to be socialised and adopted within the organization.

The data contains evidence for how the old and new chairmen influenced meetings from a distance as ghost-participants, which I refer to as controllers-by-proxy and absent participations as introduced in Chapter 7. ‘Controller-by-proxy’ describes individuals who exercise some form of control at or through meetings when they are not physically present, through influencing someone or something physically present at the meeting. ‘Absent participations’ on the other hand, are discursively invoked by meeting participants who are present, probably without the absent parties knowledge, but typically with a view to enhancing the speaker rather than communicating on behalf of the absentee.

Tim’s textualised philosophy on the laminated sheet represents one way in which he could be a controller-by-proxy without being physically present at meetings. But as we see in Extract 8.8, control can also be ventriloquized (Cooren, 2012) by meeting participants, who may discursively invoke the views of someone who is not present:
Extract 8.8

(0:02:08.4) Tim (BC): But (Ken) seems to have a view that, that the relationship can't be improved more than it is.

(0:04:41.1) Tim (BC): And the other point that (Ken)..... like (Ken's) view there that potentially we could spend a lot of money on rejuvenating the stockists, ya know, facilities, with very little long term growth potential or results but ....

(0:05:28.5) Gavin (MarD): For the five to ten years ..... I had a very open conversation with (Ken) ..... (Ken) is not convinced that there's a whole lot more for us in the stockists network.....

(0:06:42.4) Gavin (MarD): ......and he's open about it, he's not convinced that there's a big reward for us, I think ..... 

Source: Rejuvenation team meeting - 16th June 2011

In this case, Tim had not yet taken on the role of Chairman and both he and Gavin invoke Ken’s views on a number of occasions in a short six minute meeting segment. It is not clear that Ken sought to have his views ventriloquized in his absence and it can therefore be inferred that both Tim and Gavin are invoking an absent participation to enhance their contribution, rather than Ken in any way trying to be a controller-by-proxy. This is one example of how absent participations were manifested across KT-Inc meetings.

Ventriloquism does not always require the ventriloquized voice to be physically absent as we can see in Extract 8.9:

Extract 8.9

(0:38:54.5) Ken (GM): Em, and it's all working towards a leadership em, eh code, which (Tim) has, eh, has, has been professing, and em, (Tim) has come up with some ideas as to how important our teams are, and the style of communication within teams. So (Tim) at this point we'd like to kinda run [through

(0:39:18.4) Tim (BC): I don't know] if, if eh, yea, in em, the I would just endorse what em, (Ken) is saying there in relationship to leadership development and .....roles, responsibilities, levels of authority

Source: Stockists team meeting - 24th October 2011

While neither Cooren (2008, 2012) nor Cooren and Sandler (2014) specifically reference instances of both parties engaging in ventriloquist acts being simultaneously present, in this instance Ken is acting as Tim’s ventriloquist while Tim is present, and
then Tim goes on to speak for himself in subsequent turns. This pattern was often observed in KT-Inc's meetings, particularly involving Tim and Ken as co-participants, inviting the question - what purpose is served by Ken's act of ventriloquism on behalf of Tim? Is it to bolster Ken's standing by invoking Tim; to bolster Tim by endorsing his ideas; or to mutually reinforce the message with both parties present? Whatever their motivations, ventriloquism in this instance has the effect of enhancing the degree of control exercised by both parties at the meetings they jointly attend.

In the data, meetings combined with actors and mobiles to provide vehicles through which the new chairman's philosophies could be disseminated, and perhaps more significantly, endorsed by an ever widening constituency in KT-Inc. The terms of the role exchange between the GM and new board chairman were bilaterally agreed, but it is noteworthy that there was no reference to the change in chairman at the preceding two board meetings. Tim's indication in Extract 8.2 that he was 'invited' to become chairman can reasonably be assumed to have involved significantly more than a one sentence exchange at a single board meeting! Different meetings played different roles in the process that enabled the chairmanship change-over to take place. As we will see, the changeover was not a mere title exchange between two individuals, but came to represent a significant culture shift for the whole organization. Meetings collectively played a central role in accomplishing that culture change.

8.1.2 Degrees of membership

We have seen Ken's transition from Board Chairman to a subordinate board member from the data in the previous section. Having divested himself of the chairmanship role, Ken also conveys different roles through his engagement in and contributions to individual meetings within different meeting streams. Where the triple role of owner/GM/Chairman previously identified him symbolically as 'being the organization', transfer of the symbolic leadership role of board chairman had the effect of diluting this particular membership status and transferring it to another board member.

Notwithstanding the formal membership role transition in July 2011, Ken also portrayed himself in different ways at other meetings, both before and after his role change. For example, in a briefing with all staff in April 2011, he quite firmly portrays himself as being a simple member of KT-Inc:
His pointed reference to "your company", combined with the shared "anxiety for us all" due to the challenging economic environment, clearly positions him as a regular member of the organization. However, later in the same meeting, he displays his leadership role as the company MD, positioning himself as a first among equals in that leadership position, while making a short motivational contribution addressing concerns about staff morale:

Extract 8.11

(0:26:06.0) Ken (GM): Now let's be real about morale. Morale is very important, but it's, it's very difficult when nationally morale is extremely low. But morale in any company and in (KT-Inc) is very important and again I don't create the morale, you do. Maybe we're responsible for creating the conditions but the people create the morale. And I urge you, and I know it's difficult in this economic time, but it's probably more important than ever before, to support and encourage one another, let's reinforce our positive culture that we have in the company. Let's look at all the good things that we have and build on them. Let's look at the glass is half full not half empty. Let's find solutions to things not problems. And let's go the extra yard to help one another.

Source: All staff meeting, 21st April 2011

In a third meeting-setting with the sales team, Ken portrays his role as representative of, or speaking for the organization. His contribution refers to membership of a particular industry trade body:

Extract 8.12

(0:02:27.6) Ken (GM): I attended two congresses since our last meeting, or two big meetings, one was the (Trade group 1) congress, which was the European (trade) industry. Met in Dublin, and the eh, other was (Trade group 2), met in Chicago. Both were three, three day affairs. And one of the issues that ch,
continues to dominate the landscape for the industry, and is a huge concern for (KT-Inc) is raw materials.

Source: Sales team meeting, 24th October 2011

In this case, Ken is letting the sales team know that he was effectively spokesman for KT-Inc on the national and international stage. His representation of KT-Inc and the associated implications for KT-Inc, were made more explicit as he briefed an earlier board meeting (Extract 8.13) on how he became chairman of one of these trade groups:

Extract 8.13

(2:55:09.7) Ken (GM): .... and they're lookin around and they all ask me if I would take it on, and I'm looking around and I'm thinking well, it'd be great if somebody else would but there isn't anybody else. And I've, it kind of struck me that at the top of the other organisations they're not actually very strong. Where as when (PJ Glenn) was around the table and (Frank O'Byrne), I mean, and (Conor Daly) was there, I felt in fourth place. ... and I realised, there's a huge opportunity for a company in Ireland to slot into the number two position. The number one guys are weak, at the top, ..... They all seem to be in defensive mode and thinking how to stop the slide.

(2:56:26.7) Ken (GM): ... there's a huge opportunity for (KT-Inc) to slot in to the number two position in Ireland by bringing a small percentage of the market along a premium path with us. The other path is that we get into making cheap (product) and I think then we enter the (competitor company) land and we lose. I think we can't do that. I think we have to do the other.

Source: Board meeting, 20th September 2011

Ken’s recounting of his ranking around the table of peer GMs of competitor companies shows the historical position of KT-Inc as being ‘in fourth place’ (at 2:55:09), but given the weaknesses of new incumbents, KT-Inc now has the possibility to ‘slot into the number two position’ (at 2:55:26). In this short Extract, Ken effectively moves himself from being an individual requested to assume chairmanship of a trade group, to being KT-Inc, holding the number 2 position within this particular trade group in Ireland.

Viewed across a number of meetings, Ken's contributions illustrate how his membership of KT-Inc can be viewed symbolically in three ways: as being a member of the organization, as representing and speaking for the organization, or as embodying or being the organization. Individual meeting-contexts determine Ken's portrayed
role. His interactions across multiple meetings collectively provide the range of settings necessary for his kaleidoscope of roles to become fully visible, which would not be possible if Ken’s interactions were only considered in the isolated context of any single meeting.

8.1.3 Member disidentification

Note: In this section, additional KT-Inc staff members are referred to in the Extracts. For ease of reference they are: Jack (SaM) – Sales Manager; Leo (HSM) – Head of Sales and Marketing; Keith (RSM) - the Retail Sales Manager; Dan (UKSRl) - UK Sales rep 1.

McPhee used the expression ‘disidentification’ (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 294) to refer to individuals who leave organizations, which he indicated was equally relevant to membership negotiation. The logical flow of join-stay-leave for a single organization member, contrasts with how membership negotiation was actually observed in the day-to-day meetings of KT-Inc - the observed pattern involved vacating a position, and then filling it with a new hire. In the context of structural changes in the internal departments, the sales function and marketing function were amalgamated to form a new department of sales and marketing. The post of sales manager (also referred to as business development manager, depending on context) was made redundant in this new structure, leading to Jack’s departure from KT-Inc. Leo then joined KT-Inc as a new Head of Sales and Marketing (HSM). The role of meetings collectively in the departure of the sales manager will first be reviewed, before considering how meetings collectively also played an important role in both socialising and inducting the new HSM into the organization. Meetings collectively, occurring in different meeting streams, play a role in how these contrasting outcomes are accomplished and perhaps more significantly, also in the timing of their accomplishment.

The decision to make the sales manager’s position redundant was taken in the July 2011 board meeting, but the seeds of that decision were evident in a number of preceding meetings. Senior managers, including Jack (the sales manager), attended the second half of the company AGM in February 2011, to discuss their respective business areas. The quality of company displays in stockists’ outlets and also the varying quality of those stockists as company clients was a main focus of that discussion. Sometime after Jack and the other senior managers left the meeting, the following exchange took place:
Extract 8.14

(1:24:51.4) Sill (FinD): I don't think it's the, I think it's the management of the teams, I don't think it's the team. I think it's the managers responsibility to bring out the best in that team and if that team is not performing then it goes, it goes up the line, so I'm talking about the team as distinct from the management of the team.

(1:25:09.9) Tim (BC): But I, ..., I don't think that we have, eh, given proportionate amount of effort behind the stockists, eh, organisation to really turn that business around ya know. We've sort of almost left the guys to their own devices to turn it around and I don't think they're capable of doing that quite frankly, and so, I was really pleased this morning that, ya know, the penny has dropped as far as I can see, with, that team needs real, really serious help to, eh, help them, eh, try get that business turned around because, I keep on coming back to it, that's the core business, and the organisation will see the business survive or otherwise based on that business. We can do great things in the UK, we can do great things in the, eh, (product) business, but the sart, the, the heart and soul of the business still is that stockists end of the business.

(1:26:40.0) Jay (ND2): Which is sixty five percent of the business.

(1:26:42.9) Tanya (ODir): Which is funny that was my third project and I decided not to say it, was a focus on sales team, ya know, stockists sales [team

(1:26:49.7) Tim (BC): So] eh, ya know I think that like people who see that that's not maybe being given the focus that it's, that it's being, not being given, they have a sort of a, a view that that's an area where real improvement is needed and it's not getting that focus and that can have a debilitating effect on the organisation.

(1:27:08.9) Jay (ND2): And where do you think that focus should come from eh, Tim?

(1:27:12.4) Tim (BC): Well I think that they are the management of the, as (Sill) says, the management of that area has to be looked at seriously, I mean [the senior], the senior management [the senior management], ya know, and is it help that's required or do you have to change the guard.

Source: Board meeting (AGM), 15th Feb 2011

This is the first record in the data of direct criticism of the performance of the sales manager seen at 1:24:51 and a direct reference to the possible need to “change the guard” (at 1:27:12). The focus directed at the sales team, but more specifically the
sales manager following this discussion, increased across subsequent meetings, and was also specifically directed towards his handling of his team meetings. At a meeting of the four ‘officers’ in KT-Inc - the GM, Finance, Marketing and Operations Directors - an initial discussion about meetings in general turned to focus on how the sales manager (mis)handled his meetings in particular:

Extract 8.15

(0:59:08.0) Gavin (MarD): ...(Jack) needs help in his agendas and structuring and running his meetings, absolutely. [Sill (FinD): I was] Because you have the UK team, you, you've the UK team comin over sayin, ya know, what this will be, a big long agenda [Sill (FinD): tick, tick, tick] tick tick tick tick tick, and don't], ya know, decide things and go home.

Source: Officers meeting, 22nd June 2011

Lack of meeting structure and absence of decision making are the first criticisms. These in turn led to a shift in focus onto the performance of UK sales in particular:

Extract 8.16

(1:04:34.6) Gavin (MarD): Em, based on the management of the UK, I've made my suggestions to, to (Ken) and (Cathy) in relation management of the UK, I feel that management there is weak, I think (Keith) is really struggling with (UK Shop), ........ and I've recommended that (Dan) be interviewed, appointed or whatever, eh, to take it by the scruff of the neck, because what (Dan), (Dan) is what ya see is what ya get, em, I think ..... (discussion about appointing someone to manage the UK).

Source: Officers meeting, 22nd June 2011

Jack’s apparent poor handling of his team’s meetings quickly led to discussion about under-performance in UK sales, which in turn quickly led to a discussion about Jack’s performance as sales manager, prompting a call from Pete in Extract 8.17, to have a special meeting to focus on this more serious problem:

Extract 8.17

(1:08:58.6) Pete (OpsD): ..., (Sill) is right, this needs to be a separate debate. What I'm trying to bring in this is to a higher level, in the sense that, I'm worried about the UK. Have a separate meeting to find out what we want to do to fix it. I'm just worried about that [business opportunity
In Pete’s view (at 1:08:58), another meeting is the most appropriate way to ‘find out what we want to do to fix it’. The conversation then quickly escalates to proposing that a full board meeting deal with this issue due to its seriousness, also indicating the role some meetings play in creating the agenda for meetings in other meeting streams:

Extract 8.18

(1:11:30.9) Pete (OpsD): Yea, well hang on for a second, the entire board should be there, this is a serious decision, what, what, we're identifying here is, I'm not talking about the individual, and I don't want to be scaremongering cause you get given out to, but I do think that the UK is in a bit of difficulty here, [uh, hum] and, we need to have a plan of action......

(1:12:11.7) Ken (GM): Ok. Can I make a proposal here then, that we would, we would eh, make it part of our Board meeting, which is, I'm I'm going to ask, it's on my to do here, to move it back to the second of August. Anybody have trouble with the second of August? .....Well I'll make that an agenda item, [Gavin (MarD): great] a review of the UK,

Source: Officers meeting, 22nd June 2011

The board meeting as discussed by the officers, took place on the 26th July 2011. The new chairman’s views in Extract 8.19 on the need to change people in order to change the organization culture, presages a significant level of change in the people in the company, representing the foundations of membership (re)negotiation over successive meetings of different groups, over the following twelve months.

Extract 8.19

(0:20:03.2) Tim (BC): Culture gobbles up strategy. The only way you can change a culture is to change the people.

Source: Board meeting, 26th July 2011

The first change of people in this context was his own assumption of the Chairman role from the company owner/ GM which was reviewed previously. The first target outside the Board for such change was the sales manager (Jack), who later in the board meeting was deemed to be under-performing:
Extract 8.20

(2:07:00.8) Ken (GM): The messages coming back from the (sales) team were not clear. They were asked for the game changing event and they came back with joint venture partnerships to cover geographical gaps. There has been a tolerance for broken displays.

(2:07:42.8) Tim (BC): I remember out in the West Coast hotel last November, and the team were asked at the workshop event, we had with the stockists routine, they were asked for those game changing plans and, the whilst eh, the standard of displays was sort of mentioned in a sort of passing sort of way, there was nobody s, standing up there and hitting, banging the table saying, we gotta reinvent ourselves, we gotta, we're being, ya know, we're being out manoeuvred by the competition, eh was nobody beating the table saying we gotta do something about this.

(2:08:20.3) Tim (BC): ..... I have to say, when I went to, eh, with Jack down and did a trip around six stockists, the key one from my perspective was (Stockist), .... and (KT-Inc) has fantastic lo, eh, allocation of space. But the display was very poor, ya know, it was dated, it looked, and even to this day, eh, ya know, that I don't know what the follow up has been, ....

(2:09:15.3) Tim (BC): Whereas, if I were the, the sales manager there, I'd be sitting with (our customer) and getting something sorted, like last February.

Source: Board meeting, 26th July 2011

Tim’s displeasure in Jack’s performance as sales manager is rooted in experience from a previous sales team meeting (workshop) (at 2:07:42) and meetings with individual stockists, which he specifically makes agential in putting his case for Jack’s ultimate departure. The board meeting of 26th July 2011 identified ‘change the people’ as a very broad means of culture change. Meetings with the sales team and stockists that occurred some eight months previously are cited sources of justifying grounds for the disidentification of Jack from the organization. We will now see how discussions much later in the July 2011 board meeting culminate in a formal decision to make Jack’s position redundant. Where Tim had earlier raised his doubts about Jack’s ability, both Tim and Ken (the GM) later reinforce those doubts by referencing other meetings as far back as four months previously (at 4:09:40) and as recently as two weeks (at 4:10:10) and (at 4:13:53) in Extract 8.21:
(4:09:40.3) Tim (BC): Ken, I think exactly the same thing would happen in (The Quarry) in Limerick. It's, it's [Ken (GM): it would yeal] that's the thing that I, I'm worried about and, ... more or less the same thing was said to (Jack) that day in February when I was down there .....  

(4:10:10.4) Ken (GM): And, and then again, ya know, we went down to (Pat McDermott) last week and we also went to meet the (Albatros) group, and em, .... I brought (Jack) in and I came up with a package where we would look at tripling our (product) sales to them. And, I had to do the spread sheets. I had to even phone (Stan) to get the castings a, and also (Shane)  

(4:10:42.3) Ken (GM): And it was only on the way down there I was thinking, ya know, I've, I've put hours an hours and hours and hours into this, but why was it me doing it? It, our business development manager should have been coming to me with that, rather than me having to go to him with that.  

(4:10:58.5) Ken (GM): So it's been a, ya know, I, I, think we need to debate (Jack's), eh, (Jack's) position if the collective Board wills that we need to keep going with (Jack), ..... and I'm ready if the Board is willing, I'm ready to propose that we try and move on, move (Jack) on in some form shape or fashion. Hard decisions, but, we've had a very very hard decline and I'm not convinced he's the man to turn it around.  

(4:13:53.7) Tim (BC): .... At one of the marketing forum meetings (Adie) said she was ashamed of the (Quarry) displays - (Jack) was there not saying a word. Stockists team workshop two weeks ago - an outsider would have said (Glen) and (Stan) were the team leaders and (Jack) and (Shane) were followers.  

Source: Board meeting, 26th July 2011  

But it is a discussion not without doubts and equivocation on the part of a number of board members:  

Extract 8.22  

(4:15:19.7) Sill (FinD): He takes a back seat. He doesn't appear to take responsibility, em, for his area. Nowhere, I mean in the title business development manager, I don't think he has developed the business. Em, to the, well he hasn't done what we want him to do. My issue would be, is that, have we told him, in no uncertain terms, what we want him to do. Because, have there ever been any consequences for him not doing what we think he should be doing? Has there
ever been anything like that? Because I feel it's unfair to take a guy out and shoot him over something that you've failed to, to, to do yourself. .... but I think he's been lulled into a false sense of security that is, oh dear, that's the way the market is and I'll make my excuses, and I'll trundle on and nothing ever happens.

(4:16:33.2) Tanya (ODir): That's why I was asking, (Ken), (unintelligible) put into place these regular reviews and I just wondering [Sill (FinD): yea what was]
(4:16:42.2) Ken (GM): I get the feeling I'm being told what he thinks I want to hear. I'm not getting ideas. That's my big issue with him. Sales going down is everyone else's fault.

(4:17:09.7) Tanya (ODir): But is, to me, has, has he been called on that? has he, ya know, has he [Sill (FinD): has he been told]
(4:17:20.4) Ken (GM): Yea, I'm having fairly, I'm having straight meetings with him but it's not changing.

Source: Board meeting, 26th July 2011

A key point to note from this exchange is the invocation of meetings (with Jack) that Sill (at 4:15:19) suggests did not appear to happen, but that could have mitigated if not changed the ultimate sanction that seems to be coming Jack’s way. At the same time, Ken reinforces or justifies at 4:17:20 his view based on the ‘straight meetings’ he has already had with Jack. Meetings with Jack are placed central to both opposing arguments - the meetings are invoked as doing the talking, as opposed to the meeting participants.

The final decision on Jack’s fate comes slowly and again with some equivocation. Extract 8.23, spanning a ten minute passage of discourse, shows how each time a definitive decision was ‘called for’, (by Gavin at 4:30:56, Ken at 4:32:41 and Gavin at 4:35:40), further equivocations or reinforcements of the (apparent) decision were introduced.

Extract 8.23

(4:30:56.2) Gavin (MarD): Is the decision that you meet Jack and offer him a package?
(4:31:00.3) Ken (GM): Well, I think, yea, I think that's
(4:31:03.3) Jay (SND): Well equally ask everyone around the table, anyway, is there, is the writing on the wall? I think, ya know,
(4:31:08.4) Gavin (MarD): That's a different, that's a different thing to [unintelligible] .....
(4:31:12.2) Ken (GM): Yea, well it's, it's eh, yea it could be a redundancy.

(4:31:16.8) Gavin (MarD): It can, well it depends on what you want to do plan B, [multiple voices speaking]

(4:31:22.4) Ken (GM): If our, if we were going to replace (Jack) with somebody at director level with a sales director. I mean I don't think (Jack) is suitable for a sales director, certainly not.

(4:31:53.5) Pete (OpsD): This resolves into two separate issues - (Jack's) performance and getting a suitable person who can perform at a far higher level and who doesn't need baby sitting and hand holding. First issue is to come to a unified agreement

(4:32:41.9) Ken (GM): Are we in agreement on that point? Yes. You never come out of these things clean. Lots of ways of doing it. We could go the redundancy route if not replacing the position, if we're hiring a different. Or else offer him a package to move on. I suggest that we put a sub-committee of board together to figure out the best way to do it.

(4:34:30.9) Tanya (ODir): (Summarises the position).

(4:35:15.3) Ken (GM): It's because I don't think he's up for it that I would suggest this. The past is the past and I probably got a lot of the blame for the past.

(4:35:40.4) Gavin (MarD): So the decision then is, eh, (Tim), (Ken), eh, (Tanya), (Cathy) sub-committee to organise an exit strategy.

(4:35:57.4) Ken (GM): Yea, yea, I don't know if you need to put it in [Tanya: no no] in the minutes, eh, because depending on what happens eh, I mean, eh (Sill) are you comfortable with that?

(4:35:59.1) Sill (FinD): I'm not comfortable with the, .....His performance to date is not good enough ... but not comfortable with him getting away with that through us accepting that and terminating a contract when you've tolerated what they've done is not acceptable. ..... (Gavin) - we will have to move on from this. (Pete) - He had a number of opportunities but he didn't rise to the occasion. Hard decisions have to be made. (Tim) - We have a responsibility to make the right decisions for the overall business, need to balance the lesser of two evils. ..... (4:41:32.6) Tim (BC): Sill asks what we will do with the stockists initiative. Carry on , make the plan by end of August, implement in the new company year. Target top 40 stockists, tele sell to the rest. SLA's, relationship managers. Need to recruit
a new manager. New Job description needed. Big challenge for us. There should be one sales and marketing director to head up that. Sales & marketing are two sides of one coin in this context. Retail and stockists need to report in to the same individual.

Source: Board meeting, 26th July 2011

The board adopts the same approach at 4:35:40 as the officers did at their meeting in June: to ‘figure out’ the best way to do it - a sub-committee was established that would go on to hold further meetings to put flesh on the bones of the decision. This tendency for meetings to beget further meetings will be examined more closely in the reflexive self-structuring communication flow. The chairman then closes the discussion some six minutes later by indicating at 4:41:32 how things will ‘carry on’ with activities that Jack had been centrally involved in.

The board sub-committee that was formed to plan and implement Jack’s exit, reported on its achievements at the subsequent board meeting in September 2011. The subgroup’s meeting represented a punctuation in the normal temporal flow of regular board meetings:

Extract 8.24

(1:02:27.0) Tim (BC): Em, Ken on em, next item is em, [Ken (GM): update], an update on the announcement and maybe we try to capture the sort of implications of things that need to follow up [Ken (GM): it, yea, ok] ....

(1:02:44.7) Ken (GM): I suppose it, it is eight, eight weeks ago to the day since the, we made the board decision, and, I think in fairness it's been a tough eight weeks. .... We've had five weeks where we could do very little other than plan, eh, but the decisions that were made were kept confidential, they didn't leak, anywhere, em, and... So five weeks after it on September the 06th, eh, which is only three weeks ago, we had the longest day.

(1:03:22.7) Ken (GM): Em , we did inform the company of the announcement, we had a plan, it was a,b,c, d, we effected the plan to the minute, we had to phone people, eh , and we stuck to the announcement, eh ..... we, I think we really tidied up the announcement and we made it very very very sharp. Em, we notified (Jack) of his redundancy, em, and eh, I'll go into that again in a minute, em, and we notified the (Bearings) team of the decision to exit (Bearings), and we put the team on notice of redundancy.
Within the three minutes covered by Extract 8.24, it is clear the 'exit strategy' for Jack necessitated further meetings of the sub-group (at 1:02:44), multiple meetings with Jack (at 1:04:04), and also the use of meetings with various staff groups (at 1:03:22) to coordinate Jack’s exit and to minimise any collateral damage across the company. We can also see at 1:03:22 that the meeting with the (Bearings) team to announce Jack’s departure was also used to advise them of their own imminent departure! Bearings was a particular product line that was discontinued and is another example of ‘disidentification’ in which a team and their associated product are to be made redundant. The role of meetings in disidentification of the Bearings team will be reviewed in more detail in activity coordination in Section 8.4, which also illustrates how the same meetings can play significant roles across multiple communication flows.

The disidentification of Jack was accomplished through actions and interactions within and between the meetings of the Board, a sub-committee of the board, the sales team and personal meetings with Jack. Special meetings were also convened to progress this process to a final conclusion, within a desired time-scale and it is clear from the data that meetings and meeting streams were central to the whole process.

**Departure of a director.**

While the departure of the sales manager seems to have occurred over a relatively short two-month period, the same cannot be said for the departure of the Marketing Director. A more subtle process spanned a significantly longer period of eighteen months, but can also be tracked through a range of Board meetings. The agency of meetings collectively in the process becomes increasingly apparent when considered in conjunction with the actions of individuals at meetings, the use of particular meetings
to decide on organization restructuring, and the use of certain meetings to accomplish this restructuring within particular time frames.

On Jack's departure, amalgamating the sales and marketing functions in September 2011 impacted on the marketing director's role. Gavin was the incumbent marketing director and his marketing responsibilities were removed and new responsibilities ('special projects' and 'the UK') were assigned to him in late 2011. A comment made by Gavin (Extract 8.25) at the February 2011 board meeting, in apparent jest but also arguably indiscrete if not undiplomatic, may not have served his longer term interests very well but may have represented the start of the end of his tenure in KT-Inc:

Extract 8.25

(1:35:16.1) Gavin (MarD): I think everything was fine until (Tim) arrived here but he, that's only a by the way [light laughter]. I'll never forget his first comment, eh, the beatings will continue until morale improves, [general laughter] that was eh, that one has registered. Em seriously, eh, I think the eh, I think the talk and gossip culture is a big thing.

Source: Board meeting, 15th February 2011

Gavin acknowledged at the same meeting that he had already 'got his butt kicked' (Extract 8.26) and while he was 'kind of eh invigorated by this process', he may also have unknowingly started his exit from the company, traceable across a number of meetings over the succeeding eighteen months:

Extract 8.26

(1:38:03.8) Gavin (MarD): ..... we're a bit behind the scene and I feel what (Tim) and, and (Jay) have done, is they've identified the pressure points within the company, put their fingers on it, and they're keeping them there, until something is done about it. And, that's why I'm, even though I've got my butt kicked in the last while, that's why I'm kind of eh invigorated by this process, because this is the stuff that's going to make the difference between living and dying, eh, and the company succeeding or not.

Source: Board meeting, 15th February 2011.

At the Officers meeting in June 2011, Gavin refers to some of these individual meetings that took place with Tim, apparently on a fairly routine basis as we can infer from Extract 8.27:
Extract 8.27

(1:51:54.8) Gavin (MarD): Yea, he was eh, the other day he was supposed to meet me, and he, your meeting ran late so he couldn't, and I said he rang me and that's fine. Yesterday we were to meet for lunch in (Friel's) and he just let the morning (unintelligible), and he was late ..... ok, I won't tell (Ken) at your review....

Source: Officers meeting, 22nd June 2011

Gavin again appears to use his meeting with Tim for some gentle personal jesting, but one has to feel that Tim may not have always shared Gavin’s sense of humour. Gavin’s jocular prank on Ken (the GM) at the start of the July 2011 board meeting (Extract 8.28), clearly did not meet with Tim’s approval, who was now the new company chairman:

Extract 8.28

(0:10:52.0) Gavin (MarD): There's one other item here, just eh,
(0:11:00.6) Ken (GM): Ah jaysus christ,
(0:11:03.7) Gavin (MarD): (laughing) I have to show this
(0:11:06.2) Ken (GM): This was the transition in the triathlon to my nephew the runner, [ah
(0:11:10.7) Gavin (MarD): You can't trust], you can't trust those nephews ......it just goes to show the man is human after all [laughter].....
(0:11:35.6) Tim (BC): You've just taken 15 mins off our time.....
(0:11:41.6) Gavin (MarD): Sorry Mr Chairman
(0:11:44.7) Ken (GM): You gave him permission, Mr Chairman [laughter]
(0:11:46.7) Tim (BC): No I didn't. Em, eh (Ken), is it ok to kick off?
(0:11:51.3) Ken (GM): Yea, absolutely, I've extra agendas here [yea yea]
(0:11:54.2) Tim (BC): Has everybody, [with the right people here] everybody got an agenda here. ...

Source: Board meeting, 26th July 2011

Later in the same board meeting, the implications of reorganizing the sales and marketing functions became apparent for Gavin’s position, when discussing the need for a new head of sales and marketing position:
Extract 8.29

(4:46:34.3) Ken (GM): We're accepting that we need to hire and someone at a higher level. It needs to be at board level, a director designate,

(4:46:52.4) Gavin (MarD): I have a personal interest in this - what am I voting for here?

(4:47:12.4) Tim (BC): I'm coming at it from the point of view if you have a clean sheet of paper, what is the ideal structure. This business is what you're doing with the brand on an all Ireland basis and ....

(4:48:41.9) Tim (BC): I mean, Gavin, I know I understand that there are, there could be implications, ya know, for you and so on, but I mean, I think that is something we should discuss and look at, eh, and recognise, ya know, what you are doing and so on. But, I mean, it's not they're not mutually exclusive.

(4:49:02.8) Gavin (MarD): [unintelligible] my thought was that, ya know, because taking on retail sales, taking on stockists sales is a big chunk on its own.....

(4:49:32.4) Ken (GM): I think that same committee could take on [that task.

(4:49:34.2) Tim (BC): One], one step at a time, I mean, I think, and obviously clearly where, where there are sensitivities here everybody has to recognise that and, ya know, we, we should be, take that on board [Ken (GM): yea, yea].

Source: Board meeting, 26th July 2011

The decision to create a new director designate position for the amalgamated sales and marketing functions ultimately resulted in Gavin’s board director position being made redundant. Interpreting Tim’s ‘one step at a time’ comment at 4:49:34 with the benefit of analytical hindsight suggests he may well have already premeditated such an outcome. Premeditated or not, Gavin’s exit from the company was progressively accomplished through a detailed and complex series of interactions spanning many meetings from different meeting streams (the board, the UK sales team, the marketing forum, the Irish sales team). The accumulation of apparently minor and also significant business events across a number of meetings, seem to have all contributed to the ultimate disidentification of Gavin from the company. Understanding the dynamics of how and why his position became redundant requires an archaeological dig of the organizations meetings along with many other data sources, but meetings were clearly central to his ultimate departure.

The two examples of disidentification referred to in this section also reflect aspects of both reflexive self-structuring and activity coordination, confirming a key proposition
by McPhee and Zaug (2009, p. 21) that “complex organizations exist only in the relatedness of these four types of flow”, which we will return to at the end of this chapter.

8.1.4 **Induction of a new organization member**

The opening created by the exit of the sales manager and the redefinition of the marketing director's role, was filled through appointment of a new Head of Sales and Marketing (HSM). The selection and appointment to the new position of HSM necessarily involved a number of different meetings, starting with the board meeting at which the position was approved. By signing off on the establishment of the new HSM post, the board was required to reorganize positions around the board table, which was made more explicit by Tim’s comment at 4:43:11 in Extract 8.30, and was reinforced by the owner (Ken) as he refers to a ‘director designate’ at 4:46:34:

Extract 8.30

| 4:42:47.7 | Sill (FinD): So are we saying we don't need a manager [Tim (BC): sorry?] Are we saying we [don't need a manager |
| 4:42:51.3 | Ken (GM): No no no I think we are, .... we have to hire [Jay (SND): we have to recruit] we have to recruit, |
| 4:43:01.3 | Gavin (MarD): Eh, is there a time frame on this (Ken), there needs to be does there not? ..... |
| 4:43:04.6 | Tanya (ODir): Well I think we'll have to talk to (Cathy) |
| 4:43:07.0 | Ken (GM): I think we have to just, |
| 4:43:09.1 | Jay (SND): And what job description or title then? |
| 4:43:11.2 | Tim (BC): Oh yea, ya see I think that's a big, that's a big challenge for us, ya know. I've been saying for a long time, and Gavin knows this, if we, there should be one person, a sales and marketing director, that heads up that. Sales and marketing in this context are, are two eh, two sides of one coin, and we need to be looking at that, ..... |
| 4:46:34.3 | Ken (GM): We're accepting that we need to hire and someone at a higher level. It needs to be at board level, a director designate, |

Source: Board meeting, 26th July 2011

Ken’s reference to the HSM position as a ‘director designate’ could, in hind sight, be the earliest allusion to the threat to Gavin’s position as marketing director that we saw in the previous section.
Prior to the new HSM’s arrival, contributions to the board meeting in September 2011 pre-empted the HSM designate’s role and board members’ expectations of how he would fulfil that role. Both had the effect of creating distinct immutable mobiles (Cooren et al., 2007) - one associated with the post itself, and one with how the incumbent might fulfil the role. We will see these being ‘carried’ by the Ops Director (Pete) into later meetings of the operations team. The significance of this will become apparent when we later examine how such immutable mobiles are used at other meetings to announce the new company arrival. Ken announced Leo’s appointment to the board in Extract 8.31:

Extract 8.31

(1:06:08.1) Ken (GM): Em, I know we're being taped but it's under, under wraps, eh, (Leo) has come on board, we've agreed a package with (Leo), and his start date is the, eh, middle of October. .... and (Leo) is going to I think fill in very quickly cause he's quite familiar with [the company from

(1:06:54.3) Tim (BC): Yea] no I can, I think he can hit the ground running [Jay (SND): he can hit the ground running yea] yea, yea

Source: Board meeting, 20th September 2011

It is worth noting that where Ken’s explanation of why Leo might be familiar with KT-Inc was truncated by Tim’s interjection at 1:06:54, it was actually completed by Pete at his weekly operations team meeting on the 30th September, as we will see later in Extracts 8.34 and 8.35. Further on in the September board meeting, the board’s expectations of Leo were set out by different directors:

Extract 8.32

(2:39:52.6) Tim (BC): but those were, those are eh, I think, that's why it's so important I think, that the stockists eh, are imbued with those sorts of messages and they buy into them.

(2:40:04.5) Ken (GM): Well that's what I hope (Leo) will bring [Jay (SND): but you have to] that is what I hope (Leo) and it's going to involve eh, ya know, eh, a, a quantum shift in our sales team's thinking [Tim (BC): mindset, yea, yea], which I think is going to be very hard.

(2:40:18.1) Ken (GM): Ya mean, your talking about almost rebooting (Glen), rebooting (Stan), rebooting (Shane), to a whole new way of presenting things, em,
and I think it's a big challenge, but I think that's, if we're going to deliver that [but what] and it's not just going to be ink on paper I think that's what we have to do. 

......

(2:43:41.8) Gavin (MarD): Is it, is it an achievable goal? I mean .... if we could pull more of the market into the premium sector, happy days ...

(2:44:39.4) Ken (GM): I absolutely believe it's doable. I passionately believe it's doable. I don't, I thin, I don't think we're good enough, at the moment, to do it [Gavin (MarD): right, right]. I think it's only a matter of how good we are, but I think it's doable, but we'd have to be really good, and I think (Leo),

(2:44:53.0) Gavin (MarD): [will bring that to us]

(2:44:54.4) Ken (GM): Well, I think, in terms of setting, (Leo) wants to know, ya know, where, where, what am I to do here. We've, we've gotta create this picture of what we want him to ch, to achieve.

Source: Board meeting, 20th September 2011

Note on meeting participants – (Glen), (Shane) and (Stan) referred to in Extract 8.32 are the three regional sales reps in KT-Inc, forming the main body of the sales team.

The board meetings were instrumental in setting out what was expected of Leo, and Ken also had no doubts about the positive attributes that Leo would bring to his new KT-Inc role. Ken's positive message about Leo as a new entrant to the company is also reinforced by Jay, one of the non-executive directors, as shown in Extract 8.33:

Extract 8.33

(3:00:45.7) Ken (GM): Now I'm absolutely sure that, in terms of the team, that, if we're, if we're to rech, recharge this thinking, that (Leo) will be there. (Leo) is starting there, he wanted to know that the ambition was big enough. I mean, that was, I, I was really impressed with that, eh, but I'm not sure if we can get (Glen), (Shane) and (Stan) there. I'm not sure if we're going to have to, ya know, and the most important thing is the plan and everyone believing in it. I'm just not sure if they can reboot [Tanya (ODir): up their game] to that extent and up their game.

(3:01:26.3) Pete (OpsD): But then there's more hard decisions. If you're not good enough for the squad [yea, yea]

(3:01:29.8) Tim (BC): Ya see] That's important, I think ke, (Ken) you, you that's absolutely part of it,......

(3:07:04.6) Jay (SND): I think it's going back to Ken, can do [uh hum]
Ken (GM): Can do. Is feidir linn. And that attitude has to, ya know, and (Leo) is a real, positive guy. He's going to bring that in there

Jay (SND): Oh big time.

Tanya (ODir): And I think this is where the leadership development stuff is going to feed into all of this

Tim (BC): It is going to feed into it (Tanya), because I actually think, eh and I said this to (Ken) when we talked about (Leo), his, his appointment, is, he is going to ruffle a lot of feathers [Jay (SND); yea], in this organisation. Now, I think that's brilliant, but the organisation has to be big enough, eh, and I mean, the le, the managers and leadership within the organization have to be big enough to be able to live with that and work with that and support that. But, it, he, he is going to, he's going to knock over a lot of the old traditional sacred cows and stuff like that and ......

Source: Board meeting, 20th September 2011

Note: At 3:07:07, ‘Is feidir linn’ is an Irish language expression that translates ‘Yes we can’.

The expectations being set for Leo, and Ken’s ventriloquizing of Leo’s disposition towards his new role, create expectations that serve as an immutable mobile defining how Leo will perform. Such expectation was ‘transported’ by Pete, the Ops director, at his Ops team meeting a week later, as shown in Extract 8.34. The exchange takes place on Leo’s first day in the company and Pete used the meeting to ‘introduce’ Leo to his ops managers, making Leo a ghost-participant at the meeting through ‘absent participation’ as he wasn’t physically present. Initially Pete names the new entrant and, significantly, references a past occasion on which the ops team previously interacted with Leo:

Extract 8.34

Jaspor (DM): Anybody hired?

Pete (OpsD): He just came in this morning.....his name is (Leo), he just came in this morning...

Millie (LabM): And where's he from?

Pete (OpsD): You remember the MSc group, [yea], years ago, [yea], the (Newspaper) guy, that's the guy who's got that job.

......

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(0:48:43.6) Pete (OpsD): No, but he's, sales marketing. He's a serious marketing
guy
(0:48:51.9) Jaspor (DM): Is he good at sales?
(0:48:53.0) Pete (OpsD): Yea. And by all accounts, well, from what I've seen of
him, cm, and the way he was doing his MSc, this guy is a sharp guy. He, he, he
will not cm, eh, tolerate eh, cm, second class work.

Source: Ops Team meeting, 30th September 2011

Pete then speaks of Leo’s credentials for the job (at 0:48:43) in terms (at 0:48:53)
closely reflecting the immutable mobile created by both Ken and Jay’s views in Extract
8.33 above from the Board meeting ten days previously.

Pete then establishes ‘a marker’ for how he expects his own team to conduct future
interactions with Leo, suggesting a degree of ‘upping our game’ to be achieved by his
team:

Extract 8.35

(0:52:27.7) Jaspor (DM): (Pete), you said he was a serious marketing guy .....  
(0:52:47.6) Pete (OpsD): I'm putting a marker on the table, how we interface with
him has to be very very professional.

Source: Ops Team meeting, 30th September 2011

Finally, as the operations team identify, in Extract 8.36, the pressure they expect Leo
to be under, Pete uses ‘direct retrospective connection’ (see Figure 7.5) to remind his
team of a previous meeting at which they interacted with Leo, allbeit “five or six years
ago” (at 0:58:11):

Extract 8.36

(0:55:53.5) Millie (LabM): He's going to be under a lot of pressure though, isn't he?
(0:55:55.4) Pete (OpsD): He's going to be under a lot of pressure ..... From what I
know of him and the way he presented at the, MSc, he identified, from that group,
I don't thin, that you were, were ever aware that, ye should all remember this,
because we were the only department that
(0:56:33.9) Jason (PrM): Yea, but we're honest, [yea], and we got fuckin slated for
it [yea, like we] we were actually telling the truth about how things [
(0:56:43.0) Pete (OpsD): were], and we got fuckin taken to the cleaners, yea. Do
ya remember that? [yea] because like, ye sat in meetings without me, with those

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people, and then to discover we were the only department that the heads of the
department actually stepped out and let the people speak their mind. .....  
(0:58:11.2) Pete (OpsD): He said that, how many years ago was this, was it five or
six years ago?

Source: Ops team meeting, 30th September 2011

Sometime previous to this research, a team of students on an MSc programme had
conducted research in KT-Inc, and Leo was a member of that research team. The Ops
Director Pete, refers the participants in this current meeting back to an almost forgotten
memory of interactions with that research group, using a long-distant meeting in
combination with the current meeting to (re)acquaint the ops team with the new HSM
just starting. In Chapter 7 we saw how such references to past (or future) meetings are
more broadly used to support sensemaking within the organization and Extract 8.36
provides an example of its detailed enactment.

Having talked up the expectations at meetings prior to his arrival, particularly focusing
on how the new HSM might perform, examining his first sales team meeting reveals
how meetings are attributed specific agency in inducting him into KT-Inc. It begins
with Ken in Extract 8.37, ascribing 'the main purpose' of the meeting as that of
welcoming Leo:

Extract 8.37

(0:01:13.4) Ken (GM): And obviously the main purpose of today's meeting, one of
the key purposes is to welcome (Leo). I think everybody has met (Leo) by now,
em, (Stan) included, right (Leo)  
Source: Sales team meeting, 24th October 2011

As if on cue, the reputation previously built up at the last board meeting is invoked
straight away by Ken, and Leo seems to respond accordingly:

Extract 8.38

(0:01:23.3) Leo (HSM): Yes, absolutely  
(0:01:25.1) Ken (GM): Em, and you see now that (Leo) doesn't bite, em
(0:01:30.0) Leo (HSM): hum, not yet [giggles]  
(0:01:30.4) Ken (GM): But I think,
(0:01:32.7) Shane (RSR2): He's got a good set of teeth though [laughter]

Source: Sales team meeting, 24th October 2011

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While not literally suggesting that Leo bites, Shane’s joking response is also laden with innuendo of the reputation that precedes Leo. Later in the same meeting, Gavin, the incumbent marketing director, invites the sales team and Leo in Extract 8.39 to use these sales team meetings in a particular way:

Extract 8.39

(0:54:09.4) Gavin (MarD): Em, there’s been lots of times, and I’ve been part of it, we have a meeting in here, we go out for a cup of coffee, and then the discussion is what we really think. And that just has to be taken out of the equation and I know at the last meeting, (Shane), we did it and in fairness you came back and you said a few things, that were probably hard for (Ken) to hear and, and ya know, i, it’s not that ya know, you’re people can’t be afraid of upsetting (Ken) or telling me ya know, that display is useless or whatever. This ......

(0:54:49.1) Gavin (MarD): And it does mean at these meetings ya know, maybe having a more head to head conversation with (Ken), or me or (Pete) or whoever it is, but that we do it right because I’ve no doubt ......

(0:55:19.1) Leo (HSM): Ok.

(0:55:22.0) Ken (GM): .... ch, we’re getting really into the meat of the meeting no, not that ........

(0:59:55.1) Ken (GM): So far so good. [Leo (HSM): yes] Now, when you’re in the chair now at the next meeting you can be in the hot seat, [laughter], you can enjoy the free ride today.

Source: Sales team meeting, 24th October 2011

Ken’s acknowledgement at 0:55:22 of ‘getting really into the meat of the meeting’ suggests an expectation previously set for how Leo might engage, that can be accomplished, at least in part, through the interactions at these sales team meetings. Ken makes it clear, but light-heartedly at 0:59:55, that it will be Leo’s turn to ‘take the hot seat’ at the next meeting of the group. True to his reputation, Leo doesn’t waste too much time setting out his own initial expectations at 1:06:54 in Extract 8.40, of “a sales report every week” from his sales team:

Extract 8.40

(1:06:54.9) Leo (HSM): one of the key things is, is the (unintelligible) point of sale, because when you put those in, you’re actually getting an uplift in stores and I’ve looked fairly briefly at some of the reports that you guys sent in, you send send in,
and I need those guys, particularly now, from everybody, a sales report every week, because I have no idea of who's who, what you're going to mention names of companies and stuff like that and I'm thinking who are they, where are they from, what do they do. I need to build up a profile and a history and stuff, so they're very important to me right now. 

(1:07:16.6) Leo (HSM): Em, and if we need to change them as we go, I said this probably individually before, I'm just saying it for the meeting, we'll change them

Source: Sales team meeting, 24th October 2011

He reinforces his expectation by 'just saying it for the meeting'. Leo's acknowledgement that saying something 'for the meeting' is distinct from having said the same thing to people individually. He effectively ascribes a distinct identity and agency to the meeting that is separate from any individual participants in the meeting.

At the end of Leo's first sales team meeting, Shane, one of the sales reps, uses his 'positive' comment in the meeting PMI (review), to welcome Leo to 'the sales meetings' as opposed to just the sales team:

Extract 8.41

(3:14:36.1) Shane (RSR2): ...... having (Tim) here at the sales meeting and (Leo) ya know, as the manager, I think they have a lot to bring to the table. So I'd just like to welcome them officially, I suppose, to the sales meetings.

Source: Sales team meeting, 24th October 2011

Again, the meetings are ascribed a distinct identity within the group's discourse. While Leo also contributed his positive comments about the current meeting under the meeting review PMI, he used the M or 'Minus' part of his review contribution to challenge the information sharing that actually comes from the team's meetings more generally. In Extract 8.42, he has a clear view on how meetings should be used as communicative fora for sharing information within the team, pointing to the meetings as much as the participants as agents in sharing the information:

Extract 8.42

(3:16:26.0) Leo (HSM): The negative would have been em, the lack of info sharing that went on from previous meetings or that there was no follow through on in relation to, well you didn't have the SLA, .... things like that, they're important things that you should know about, and eh, be up to speed on. So, not, not a big
issue but that just it's communication, so communication needs to be a bit sharper, that way we all know what's going on all the time.

Source: Sales team meeting, 24th October 2011

While sales team meetings were used to both welcome Leo to the company and enabled him to set out his own expectations for how he would act as an organization member, Pete uses the PMI in a later board meeting to praise Leo’s approach, contributing further to Leo’s induction in KT-Inc:

Extract 8.43

(2:13:43.8) Pete (OpsD): The positive, as I say, (Leo) is somebody who, eh, talks my type of language and em, ya know, it's one thing about getting two hundred or three hundred pallets of (product), but even his focus on, he's actually putting that to one side. It's the sell through, because it all means nothing, it's just a flash in the pan if you just don't have that focus on the sell through, and then in 2013 em, there's nothing on the floor and that really excites me. I never actually worked with, in (KT-Inc), with somebody who's so focused on, that's done, let's move on and, and eh, that would really excite me.

Source: Board meeting, 17th January 2012

The analysis shows that the induction of Leo as a new organization member is not a singular event. It is accomplished over an extended period of time, commencing before his physical arrival and extending beyond his first day at work. Meetings provide one of the vehicles through which discursive descriptions of expectations of Leo’s role and his performance of that role are created as immutable mobiles, which then carry across different meetings and are used to convey expectations to wider groups within KT-Inc. We also see how meetings themselves are ascribed specific identity and agency in the context of welcoming Leo to his new role, and also in the articulation of his own expectations for interactions with the sales team in the future.

In this section on membership negotiation, the meetings data from KT-Inc spoke to three broad themes - how new members were assimilated into the organization, how existing members became more integrated or changed their roles within the organization, or how members left the organization in either positive or negative circumstances. The data reflected the role of meetings collectively in accomplishing these different aspects of membership negotiation. While each of the examples and Extracts are isolated for analytical purposes, they derive from a complex and
completely integrated set of discourses that took place at individual meetings and also spanned multiple meetings of different groups, over the full eighteen months of data collection. These specific examples also played parts, to varying degrees, in restructuring the organization, coordinating multiple organizational activities, and affected KT-Inc’s institutional positioning with respect to clients, media or suppliers outside the company. Accordingly, individual flows cannot constitute organization on their own (McPhee & Zaug, 2009) but are implicated in a “complex relationship” (p. 42) with each other which is directly reflected in the complex relationship between the organization’s meetings and will be taken up further in Section 8.5.

8.2 “REFLEXIVE SELF-STRUCTURING” - REGENERATION FROM MEETING TO MEETING.

Reflexive self-structuring as a communication flow centres around communication that references, builds and establishes the mechanisms for acquiring or deploying organizational resources, exercising control within the organization, making decisions about the organization, and “is essential to the explanation of the power of formal organizations” (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 35). Some of these traits were already visible in the Extracts used in the previous section on negotiating membership. McPhee and Zaug (2009) see reflexive self-structuring as firmly grounded in role-holders and groups within the organization. Reflexive self-structuring is therefore not directly about the work outputs of an organization, but rather about the “internal relations, norms, and social entities that are the skeleton for connection, flexing, and shaping of work processes” (p. 36). It is significantly rooted in the systemic and processual characteristics of organizations and reflected in the socioeconomic traditions and political processes that often define the bureaucratic nature of the organization (p. 38). By creating such a skeleton around which work processes are built, “the organization as a system takes control of and influences itself” (p. 37).

This section looks at the contribution of meetings to organization self-structuring in terms of defining structures and establishing processes in KT-Inc. It begins with Section 8.2.1 which considers how meetings help to define organizational processes, while 8.2.2 focuses on the way meetings define structures, both of which contribute to the overall self-structuring of the organization. In Section 8.2.3, the analysis examines how meetings show autopoietic tendencies to generate further meetings. The analysis will show the repeated and marked tendency for meetings of all types to generate
follow-on meetings, creating a ‘skeleton’ similar to the one envisaged above by McPhee and Zaug. Meetings collectively are considered to form and sustain a skeletal communication framework through and around which the organization is continually (re)constituted.

8.2.1 Establishing processes through meetings.

The GM made a comprehensive opening statement at the first recorded board meeting that reflects important details about how meetings are used for multiple strategic and operational purposes within KT-Inc:

Extract 8.44

(0:00:39.8) Ken (GM): Em, and the ideal process that we're trying to achieve, is that the company sets, the company strategic plan, at board level, then we engage i, with team meetings, to try and get ideas from the ground, solicitation meetings, we attend sales team meetings, there's, there's new business opportunities discussed at all of the sales team meetings, be it stockist sales team, industrial sales team or the retail.
And then we have an annual sales team meeting where again we throw it out and we get lots of ideas, and all of those should give us a strategic business unit plan for each of our three units, stockists, retail, industrial. And all of those SBU plans should be aligned with the company strategic plan. Now that's the ideal world.
Em and out of the SBU plan we get projects and initiatives. Ya know, that's the abcd of how this thing is supposed to work. It gets a little bit jumbled up along the way and what's happened this year is we've got a lot of initiatives poppin up at all the different levels and I just want to show you list of you're all very familiar with them, of the initiatives that we have on the table at the minute....

Source: Board meeting, 15 Feb 2011

Clearly Ken considers the meetings of the various groups to which he refers as one of the primary interaction points that enables the board to formulate a broad strategic plan, comprising inputs from each SBU. Through a cascade of interactions at meetings, the company strategic plan both informs and helps the development of SBU-level strategic plans. Significantly, Ken also refers to how the board gets “lots of ideas”, suggesting that a recursive interplay is taking place between meetings, rather than a uni-directional flow of strategic wisdom from top to bottom. In this Extract, Ken also emphasises how
projects and initiatives are integral to the strategic plan, but also how this is referred to as “the ideal world” and “how this thing is supposed to work”.

Ken’s reference to meetings (plural) in Extract 8.44 suggests that no single meeting could accomplish all that he envisages. Initially we must infer that his intention is accomplished through the agency of meetings collectively, but there is no explicit reference to meetings collectively being viewed or used in such a collective way. However, we will see how individual meetings or meeting streams are routinely invoked by meeting participants to accomplish different organizational objective(s). As an example, an almost throw away comment by the production manager, Jason, during a weekly operations team meeting, illustrates how he used the ‘Monday Managers meetings’ to provide feedback to the GM on production scheduling:

Extract 8.45

(0:44:55.9) Jason (PrM) - As I said to (Ken), I said in the management meeting, as you remember years ago, we had a Winter schedule and we did manufacture a lot of (product) and we had sixty or seventy pallets down in the em, down where you are on the rackin, and he said yea yea easy but he said why don't we do that again...

Source: Ops team meeting, 29th Apr 2011

This managers meeting provided an opportunity for junior managers to directly inform and influence the thinking of the most senior manager about core company (production) processes, in the exact way that Ken had referenced in the February board meeting (Extract 8.44).

Later in the February 2011 board meeting, Ken proposed a significant change to the periodicity of a particular meeting stream in KT-Inc that provided all staff with updates on the general company situation:

Extract 8.46

(1:39:55.5) Ken (GM): OK. ... What I took, what I've taken out of all that ch, discourse, ... I know (Guy) mentioned maybe a regular update to the staff, maybe at this time given the stress that is around, that maybe we should have a quarterly, I know we've had an annual staff update ..... but maybe we need to bring that to quarterly given ch, and in that way we can make actually a positive contribution to the em, eh, morale in the company. At least people if they're informed probably,
probably the only thing worse than being informed that the situation isn't great is
not being informed at all ya know, and so I will I will take that on if everybody's
agreed we'll we'll do a quarterly.

Source: Board meeting, 15th February 2011

Ken expects that increasing the frequency of meetings to brief all staff will make a
positive contribution to morale in the company. The rescheduling of just this meeting
stream could be dismissed as a once-off change of little significance, but it becomes a
broader pattern when observed taking place in the board’s and other groups’ meetings
as well:

Extract 8.47

(5:31:08.3) Tim (BC): There was a suggestion (Ken) that this meeting that we
would have this meeting eh every two months rather than three months
(5:31:18.2) Ken (GM): I think given the [Tim (BC): given that the amou] I think
it was a suggestion (Jay) made that given, well given the seriousness of the situation
he, the economic climate etcetera [yea], that we bring it back to every two months.
(5:31:36.5) Tim (BC): I think it’s a good suggestion. Ya know, maybe we take, do
it per year because one of the things I found today now is that we’re dealing with
a lot of management operational he, issues as well as dealing with the more
strategic, and like sometimes it’s difficult enough to do both.
But if we were having six meetings a year rather than four meetings a year, ya
know, maybe they could morph into more management type meetings eh, ya
know, you’re still satisfying the board requirements but ya know everybody on the
team, ya know, is a board director but also a manager ...

Source: Board meeting, 26th July 2011

The shift in the organization to a ‘high performance culture’, as proposed by Tim while
chairing his first board meeting and reported in section 8.1.1, appears to have been
supported by the increased frequency of meetings within different meeting streams.
Higher tempo meetings seemed to align with and support accomplishment of the high
performance culture that was aspired to. However, the shift to more frequent meetings
highlights ‘a meeting paradox’ when viewed in the context of the comments of the GM
at an ‘officers meeting’ shortly before the board’s move to bi-monthly meetings. In
Extract 8.48, Ken is unequivocal about too many meetings taking place:
Extract 8.48

(0:58:33.6) (Ken): Well lookit, an, an I think there's two issues with meetings in general. I think as a company we've far too many of them. And a lot of the same issues are coming up in different meetings, and there's different outcomes, and that's how we get malalignment, [in general ..... we might have] to have fewer of them.

Source: Officers meeting, 22nd June 2011

On the one hand, meetings are frequently the source of proposals to hold more meetings, while at the same time, they are used to bemoan the excessive number of meetings being held in KT-Inc. The paradox is partially resolved through rationalisation of the need for more meetings and ascribing specific purposes to them, reflective of Andersen’s (2003) factual deparadoxification. It is also resolved through the discontinuation of different meeting streams, for different reasons. The ‘marketing forum’ meeting stream, as referred to in Section 8.1, is one such example, while the ‘officers meeting’ stream is another, both of which were discontinued within six months of data recording commencing.

Processes associated with meetings themselves are also shaped and informed by mobile technology, live streaming of data into meetings, remote joining of participants from other locations (Cichomska et al., 2015) or live streaming of data out of meetings to inform other (external) activities. Extract 8.49 illustrates a board member being ‘skyped in’ to one of their meetings:

Extract 8.49

(0:00:37.3) Pete (OpsD): Can you hear me?
(0:00:38.6) Tanya (ODir): Not really
(0:00:39.7) Ken (GM): You’re very faint. You’re like you’re at the bottom of a barrel.....because they would need, you would need a speaker for that.

Source: Board meeting, 26th July 2011

The use of skype in this instance illustrated how the boundaries of time and space are increasingly malleable in the discursive construction of meetings collectively which was explored further as the research progressed.
8.2.2 Defining structures through meetings.

The ‘Officers meetings’ in KT-Inc were noteworthy for a number of reasons - they were convened ‘as required’ rather than being periodically scheduled; they had no agenda; they kept no minutes; participation was limited to the GM and the directors for marketing, finance and operations (i.e. the four company officers). While just two officers’ meetings took place over the course of the data collection, they provided valuable insights into how meetings were perceived by at least the executive managers in the company. They were also illustrative of how a range of meetings were used as communication hubs through which ideas and proposals about organization structures were made:

Extract 8.50

(0:01:24.4) Ken (GM): I'd had a meeting, as you know, with (Tim) about, eh, the structure of the industrial. I drafted up this chart. I went over this chart with eh, (Sill) and (Pete), (Gavin) you haven't seen this, but just as an intro to what I'm going to eh, introduce in a minute, I think this is probably a, a good start. So I'm just going to pop this up there.

Source: Officers meeting, 22nd June 2011

This short Extract references a number of meetings through which the proposed structure for the industrial SBU was already discussed, one involving the soon-to-be new chairman and one involving Sill the finance director along with Pete the operations director. The officers’ meeting is then used as another meeting stream through which the ideas are further disseminated and socialised with Gavin, the marketing director. The ideas for the industrial SBU were just part of the wider development of SBUs in KT-Inc, as they came to form an important structural part of the company. A similar pattern of dissemination and socialisation of the SBU idea can be seen when Tim addressed the May 2011 Board meeting on the topic, preceding his accession to the Chairman role:

Extract 8.51

(0:54:17.6) Tim (BC): I think the whole SBU concept, I mean up to a year and a half ago it was (KT-Inc) and it had a number of different departments if you like [Martin (Res): ah, ok]. The whole idea of the S, strategic business unit concept, ..... wasn't actually implemented. Like in most, in businesses that go that route, I
mean, they formalise it and put a head of an SBU so, somebody is responsible and accountable for the performance of that strategic business unit.

Source: Board meeting, 10th May 2011

It is clear from Tim’s comments that the initial SBU initiative “wasn’t actually implemented” as originally proposed or planned. However, under Tim’s new chairmanship, restructuring into SBUs can be seen to progress apace through later board meetings, as in Extract 8.52:

Extract 8.52

(1:54:50.3) Tim (BC): Em, this is just, as I mentioned earlier on a sort of a chart, if you like, to depict what the SBU structure sort of might look like, eh, I, cause I am a great believer in having a simple tool eh, of something, a picture to be able to give to people and show them exactly, where it, and I think it will fit also with the role profiles and people looking at their responsibilities and accountabilities and so on. In the, in the prev, in the sort of (KT-Inc) group, if you like, there the different elements of it and all this is doing is looking at them in a different way, and where the different activities are, so I’ve labelled......

Source: Board meeting, 20th September 2011

Extract 8.50 indicated that Ken and Tim created a new organization chart depicting SBUs (an immutable mobile). Extracts 8.51 and 8.52 then illustrate how such mobiles are ‘carried’ across meetings by trans-participants as the means of transportation, with the effect of making the mobiles increasingly immutable and ultimately ensuring that the intended company structural outcome is achieved. This sequence of activity illustrates a process of imbrication (Taylor, 2000) as described in Section 4.4.3. Tim and Ken form a dyadic pair, co-orienting to an SBU organizational structure chart, forming a triadic communicative unit. This triad then engages with successive meetings over time to promulgate and engender buy-in to their re-conceptualization of how the company should be structured. Under the imbrication model, Ken, Tim and the SBU Org chart could also be considered part of a new dyadic unit, the second part of which is each individual meeting. This (new) dyadic pair [Tim/Ken/Org chart + Meeting] now co-orient to produce a refined SBU chart for each company SBU, illustrating a recurring process of imbrication that ultimately links interpersonal discourse, through meetings, into the emergent structures that define the organization.

Slightly later in the 20th September board meeting, Ken makes the following comment:
Extract 8.53

(2:15:27.0) Ken (GM): I think this actually probably reflects pretty much the way we've migrated to working [Tim (BC): yea yea yea] ya know, so in that sense I really like it and I think a lot of the practices in the company have actually migrated to this type of a system and SBU focus. Eh, I think we should finish it down below, I think ya know, people probably need to see where they are [Tim (BC): absolutely, absolutely, I agree] as, as well, ya know, and show that (KT-Inc) is really stockist and retail and that retail is four retails and bla bla bla, ya know...

Source: Board meeting, 20th September 2011

This statement from Ken clearly reflects the incremental change that has taken place but also illustrates the type of sensemaking that is also taking place through meetings, as discussed in detail in Chapter 7. His (re)enactment in the meeting of “the way we’ve migrated to working” is being retrospectively categorised as following an SBU approach. His final comment suggests that further selection and retention is now required to “finish it down below”, by which he means it needs to reflect how all personnel within the company fit into the new SBU structural arrangements.

We can see the outcome of SBU restructuring by looking at Extract 8.54 from the last Board meeting recorded for this research in July 2012:

Extract 8.54

(1:02:38.5) Sill (FinD): Ok, so first thing I was going to go through a review of the sales for eh, the first eight months to the thirtieth of June. ... Em, (Ken) went through a few of these slides at the SBU meeting last week, so em, if, if you're bored you can blame me, em, or (Ke,) whichever........

(1:18:08.7) Ken (GM): I just presented that at the SBU heads meeting cause I thought it was very very interesting. It's the most interesting thing that's happened to the market figures in six years we've been looking at them.

Source: Board meeting, 17 July 2012

The first point of note is the finance director and GM refer separately to the “SBU heads meeting” (at 1:18:08), suggesting that a new meeting stream involving SBU heads has formed. The SBU structure that had initially failed (see Extract 8.51), was re-introduced and reinforced by Tim at his second meeting as board chairman (see Extract 8.52 at 1:54:50.3). The SBU structure is further consolidated through meetings of the SBU heads, representing another evolution in the constitution of the organization.
As a second point of note, SBU heads were now attendees at board meetings, indicating that Tim’s proposal in November 2011 that SBU heads should attend board meetings (see Extract 8.56) has come to full fruition some six months later. This could be viewed as an enhancement of the board’s requisite variety, thus improving its sensemaking ability (Weick, 1979, p. 188) as reviewed in Section 3.5. The combination of immutable mobile (SBU organization structure) and meeting trans-participants (Tim and Ken) consolidated the intended structures and information exchange processes that were being envisioned, proposed and adopted throughout multiple meeting streams over the preceding eighteen months.

Where the new SBU structures may be considered functional changes, legal restructuring was also accomplished through meetings. In Extract 8.55 we see Tanya reference previous meetings at which discussions took place with the company legal advisor to establish the optimum legal structure that should be adopted for KT-Inc. Ken identifies at least one of the basic rationales for establishing new legal company entities within the KT-Inc group:

Extract 8.55

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(0:53:38.6)</td>
<td>Tanya (ODir): I jus, in terms of the whole restructuring, do you remember (Cian) and, way back when, talked about restructuring kinda overall, has that progressing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0:53:47.8)</td>
<td>Ken (GM): ya, it has done [Sil: yea] it's, it's actually done. [Tanya (ODir): ok] um, you signed loads of stuff [laughter]....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0:55:13.0)</td>
<td>Ken (GM): I think the, the, eh, the fundamental issue is that it's not good to have cash reserves in a trading company, because all of the liabilities are in the trading company, ya know the truck has an accident today and.....</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Board meeting, 20th September 2011

Where the preceding analysis shows how meetings within particular meeting streams were central actants in the accomplishment of a new organizational structure for KT-Inc, Extract 8.56 shows how meetings were agential in communication processes across these structures, specifically involving the heads of the new SBUs as meeting trans-participants:

Extract 8.56

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(0:10:51.7)</td>
<td>Tim (BC): I think in (KT-Inc) and from the discussions I've been having with various people over the last couple of months and I met with (Ken)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
last week, I think the SBU structure is taking shape. It's great to hear people talking about their SBUs and sort of, focusing on their challenges and I've participated in the development of some of the strat plans for the SBUs and I think most of them are coming on very well.

(0:11:21.4) Tim (BC): Em, one of the things that I've talked to (Ken) and (Tanya) about wa, is bringing, eh, the heads of the SBUs along to the board meeting and having them sort of account for their stewardship. Eh, give them a half an hour or a forum, eh, to just provide an overview of where they are eh, highlight the achievements em, and identify the challenges and the, the actions that are being taken. It's not a big long whinge list or wish list that we're looking for, it's something that's going to be succinct and, eh, and just gets to the point. But I think (Ken) just mentioned to me beforehand, and I think maybe we should allocate a two hour slot fo, at the board meeting where all four SBUs would come and each present for half an hour and that all of the heads of the SBUs would be in attendance, because I think there are going to be synergies across the different businesses, I think there's going to be ideas coming through which can be transferred across to the other SBUs so maybe that's something we can, we can sort of formalise and ya know, I'd like people's views on that, yea. Em,

(0:12:32.2) Gavin (MarD): Are we agreed on that? Wa, was that a decision to put into the

(0:12:35.4) Tim (BC): So if we were to allow two, gave a two hour slot, four half hour slots,

(0:12:40.8) Tanya (ODir): At every board meeting?

(0:12:41.9) Tim (BC): At every board meeting, eh, cause I mean, the way I look at it is that the four SBUs will be the heart of the business. I mean, essentially everything else that happens is going to be a support to that, to those four business units. And, like, fo the board needs to be really, understand [uh um] what is happening in each of those business units and hopefully it'll be sort of, ya know, taking pass for most of it but like, I think we will have a role in helping the heads of the SBUs unlock some of the blockages they have or maybe eh, like, for the most part, I mean, all we can try and do is help people to achieve their goals, ya know, and support them and so on, and eh, I don't know what anybody else thinks.

(0:13:28.7) Ken (GM): I think that's a decision. [First decision
Apart from confirming the continued embedding of SBU structures (at 0:10:51), this extract illustrates how restructuring board meetings positions them to play a more central role as integrating communication hubs. It is clearly intended that senior executives attending board meetings, enabled them to account for the stewardship of their SBUs but also to share ideas and experiences with each other. We see how the topic was set up during previous meetings between the Chairman and company owners (Ken and Tanya at 0:11:21) and also that an immediate decision was taken on it when it was raised, in spite of an apparent residual reluctance expressed by Tanya at 0:12:40. The Extract also shows how board meetings will contribute to membership negotiation of the senior managers and their integration as a more cohesive, whole-organization team, providing another example of how meetings collectively contribute to more than one of the four communication flows.

### 8.2.3 Generating meetings from meetings

As the constitutive role of meetings emerges through the analysis, it is worth reflecting on where meetings originate and how they come into existence in the first instance. It was rare in the data to hear participants explicitly discuss their dispositions towards their organizational meetings. It is not clear why this was the case given the prevalence and significance of the role that meetings played in KT-Inc. However, a rare exception occurred at the officers meeting in June 2011 as reflected in Extract 8.57:

**Extract 8.57**

(0:58:33.6) Ken (GM): Well lookit, an, an I think] there's two issues with meetings in general. I think as a company we've far too many of them. And a lot of the same issues are coming up in different meetings, and there's different outcomes, and that's how we get malignment, [in general

(0:58:49.9) Gavin (MarD): I think, if there's] better meetings, well, well, there's an example, we talked about putting a, a, window sticker in (Customer)
(unintelligible) and we forgot about, and because the meeting ran on so long, so, so now we have to have another (product) meeting, so if the meetings are better, eh, eh and [focused]

(0:59:06.9) Ken (GM): We might have to have fewer of them

(0:59:08.0) Gavin (MarD): Have a fewer [Ken (GM): absolutely], because we had the, when we had the PAG meeting that was energetic and we came out of it kinda buzzin, yea, that was good, there was eh, the, the marketing forum meeting, that was good, but Martin if you could take one thing out of this, (Jack) needs help in his agendas and structuring and running his meetings, absolutely. [Sil: I was] Because you have the UK team, you, you've the UK team comin over sayin, ya know what this will be, a big long agenda [Sil: tick, tick, tick] tick tick tick tick tick, and don't ya know decide things and go home.

(0:59:33.7) Ken (GM): And, and, from, the thing that bothers me about that meeting last week was, I'm looking at the cost of that meeting [Sill: yea .. Gavin (MarD): jaysus]. The cost of taking people off the road, the cost of bringing the UK people over, the cost of that meeting runs into the thousands, I'm sure it's probably about ten grand when ya take everybody's salary and, and their lost time, the opportunity cost, they're not out in the market selling while they're here, and you have to ask, somebody has to ask the question, are we getting value for spending that amount of money at a meeting. And that really puts pressure on the agenda, because I think the answer to that would be no [Sill: no, u hum.], and therefore, what do we need to do to get value and cm. I don't know, I mean I'm struggling

(1:00:16.6) Martin (Res): One], one thing that didn't come up in the conversation, maybe it's worth just throwing it on the table, the head of function, whatever the function is, whether it's the board, whether it's, it's ya know, the most basic meeting, maybe the head of function isn't necessarily the best person skilled at chairing the meeting [uh hum, yea] so, so maybe the chair can be picked, not for their expertise in the content of the meeting but for their expertise and ability in managing the meeting. And]

(1:00:45.1) Gavin (MarD): And, and that's why we brought (Cathy) into the [two (unintelligible)

(1:00:47.7) Ken (GM): Yea, but I mean], ya know, Tim made this point with me as well, ya see, a very good observation that, that ya know, in (Cathy), he thinks we got the best manager in the place in (Cathy), that you have somebody who's a really

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solid thinker, and that we need to utilise her more on the things that matter. Now maybe, maybe (Cathy) should be, I'm just throwing this out, I mean we do need to think a bit, laterally, whether (Jack) can change, and do the meetings better, can we give (Jack) the feedback as to how to make the meetings more productive [Gavin (MarD): we've done it before] we can tell him everything we don't like about it, but that's maybe not being

(1:01:25.2) Gavin (MarD): I mean, (Sil) made the point to me after the meeting, a lot of what was going, ya know with (Celine), with (Dan), with (Sandra), could have been done on a one to one before that meeting, ya know, minor stuff, get it out of the way, so that, you, so that three of the reps in the company are not twiddling their thumbs plus six other people

(1:01:39.4) Ken (GM): And there was a lack of clarity as to what were decisions and what were discussions without a decision. [I think that

(1:01:45.1) Gavin (MarD): Ya know, and, and] there's a case in point, better meetings will mean less meetings, an, and you're right, and I think Martin will observe as well, we've an awful lot so, ya know, but Martin's going to give a little presentation on agendas on meetings at the next Monday Managers meeting, which I think will be useful......

(1:02:33.0) Ken (GM): It's just it feels like (Gavin) we've got an awful lot of meetings where an awful lot of the same stuff is covered, and you're right, if we can make our meetings more productive we should be able to have less of them, and there's a cost to them.

(1:02:43.3) Gavin (MarD): There was a (an industrial) meeting and at the end of it there was ok, we move on and .......... I know (Tanya) wouldn't let us away with, if she was there, ya know, what's the bloody outcome of this so,

(1:02:55.3) Martin (Res): There, there is, there's maybe a bit of a pattern that the person who's functionally most involved with the content of the meeting may be too close to the content to be the effective, who can just actively listen, who are now feeling they have to engage in the content, [yea], so then they're able to step back and say [Sil: objectively and say what is the ] yea, after ten minutes they're saying, where are you at guys, and it's not where are we at, it's where [yea, you] you guys at, and, and that could mean that ya know, you chair somebody else's functional group, and you chair somebody else's, and in that way maybe there's an opportunity [um, um] to, to make more people aware of other stuff that's going on, but equally to free up the likes of (Jack), to actually engage [Gavin (MarD):
This extended Extract provides a valuable insight into a number of aspects of meetings in KT-Inc, not least of which is the palpable concerns about the sheer number taking place (at 0:58:33). The effectiveness of chairing meetings is called into question (at 0:59:08), the absence of clear decision-making (at 1:01:39), repetitive content across meetings (at 1:02:33); all contributing to a general dissatisfaction with meetings which incur considerable cost to the company (at 0:59:33). Ken, supported by Gavin, concludes (at the start of the discussion!) at 0:58:49 that if meetings could be improved, the number of meetings could be reduced.

Notwithstanding the apparent rationality and logic of the group’s discussion, there was little evidence that the number of meetings in KT-Inc decreased, nor that sustained efforts were made to improve the quality of the meetings - the exceptions being the request for Martin to provide some broad guidance to managers on handling meetings at the Monday managers meeting (at 1:01:45). Individual groups, such as the Board and the operations team, also asked for feedback at the end of some of their meetings, focused on how they handled their meetings, but there was no company-wide initiative to ‘up our game’ in respect of meetings as had happened with the broader drive to establish a high performance culture.

In the face of such explicit concern from the officers about the high number of meetings, where do so many meetings come from? In many cases, they come from other meetings, suggesting an autopoietic tendency of meetings to self-replicate, although not in a literal sense. The operations team provides one example of such autopoiesis, but also demonstrates other meeting features that are noteworthy as communicative building blocks of the organization:
Extract 8.58

(0:32:27.4) Pete (OpsD): Yea but we're meeting on Tuesday [Millie - but we need to ]
(0:32:28.0) Jason (PrM): But we have to have a discussion
(0:32:29.6) Pete (OpsD): Well we had a very good meeting with
(0:32:31.1) Millie (LabM): We did but (Brian) changed his mind completely [Pete - fucking knew he would do that], well (Gary) came to me yesterday morning to say that (Brian) said that it couldn't be done, but it was a completely different meeting that me and you were sat down with, so we need to have (Brian), (Gasa) and (Scan), everyone in the same room [so
(0:32:45.3) Jason (PrM): yea] it was like what we did with the, the neutral me, I know you weren't there but (Gasa) was there, myself, Pat, (Brigid), (Anthony), and it's sorted now, it's made so, maybe next week [then
(0:32:58.7) Pete (OpsD): for] for us to deal with the stock out issue we need to be targeting the, the larger (unintelligible) [Jason - we need to be making], and we're utilising the [plant

Source: Ops team meeting, 29th Apr 2011

This very short 20 second exchange has three interesting features, symptomatic of a similar pattern that can be observed in a large number of other meetings, across different meeting streams. In spite of individuals referring to a number of meetings that others in the group did not attend, the group’s exchange is a good example of Cooren’s (2004a) view of collective minding, in that three individuals complete each other’s sentences during the discussion.

Secondly, Millie’s instinct at 0:32:31 is to suggest a further meeting to clarify something from a previous encounter with Pete and Brian that had clearly become contentious. Jason closes the discussion down at 0:32:45 by declaring “it's sorted now” following yet another meeting, and effectively defers the issue to next week’s Ops Team meeting, obviating the need for the additional meeting proposed by Millie.

The third point of note is how routine non-meeting talk involving Gary and Millie at 0:32:31, is brought into a current meeting, and then highlights how two quite different understandings of the outcome of the previous meeting were understood by different participants, prompting Millie’s proposal to hold another meeting, which she sees as the way to clarify things by having “everyone in the same room”. The clip illustrates that meetings also provide junction points with the organizations day to day routine
discourse that enable members to share information and experiences and to come to a shared or common understanding of that experience.

The board provides an example of how meetings are used to alter the timing for preparing the company strategic plan, given that the preceding year’s plan was announced three months into the year.

Extract 8.59

(3:36:42.0) Ken (GM): My goal would be that we would have the strategic plan for the next financial year ready for the 01st November - which is the first day of the new year, and it's a bit late getting into it three four and five months[ into it.
(3:36:55.0) Tanya (ODir): yea, I agree], I [agree
(3:36:55.7) Tim (BC): yea, yea, yea] And have that discipline around it, and it runs in line with the financial year.
(3:37:02.8) Ken (GM): And then if each of the teams want a, ya know, which I think I really encourage, have an engagement into the executive initiatives section.
(3:37:11.3) Tanya (ODir): I don't think it's a matter of want, I think we [Ken (GM): have to] have to, yea
(3:37:16.0) Ken (GM): Well then they nearly have to have a separate meeting for that, in the, rather than tagging it on as an item, [a general item.
(3:37:21.8) Tim (BC): I would], I would say it's worth, and it's important enough to do that as well, just delegate a meeting to doing that. .....
(3:41:22.0) Ken (GM): And I don't think, we, if we want to have it and at the second stage of that is we'll have team meetings with the sales teams em on team initiatives, what we called executive initiatives last year. And we want all that and we want the thing completed by the 01st Nov. We're going to have to have a separate board meeting for that thing [Tim (BC): yea, yea] or a board get together......
(3:42:04.1) Tim (BC): I'm going to request, strategic planning meeting, yea, eh kind, ya know attended by members of the board [yea, yea], and if you want to bring in a few [yea, yea] additional people then by all means, but I'm away from the 29th of August to the 15th of September

Source: Board meeting, 26th July 2011
We can see clearly from this exchange at least one of the criteria for justifying holding additional meetings - the perceived importance of the topic to be discussed, in this case developing the strategic plan. The mutually-reinforced view in the group prompts a near cascade of mandatory new meetings for individual groups at 3:37:11, possible meetings between the board members and individual groups about ‘executive initiatives’ (at 3:41:22), and an additional board meeting dedicated to strategic planning (at 3:42:04). This exchange illustrates how a relatively short passage of discourse in one meeting can ‘birth’ a range of meetings in other groups, around a topic of perceived importance or common interest.

In other instances we can also see examples of how items of particular importance prompt the creation of dedicated meetings to progress them. The sales team had used a series of meetings to develop service level agreements for engaging with ‘stockists’ who carried KT-Inc’s products. To put flesh on the bones of their ideas, it was considered necessary to ‘put a team together’ (Extract 8.60) to engage a wider group of people in their formative activity.

**Extract 8.60**

\[
\begin{align*}
(2:32:02.6) & \text{Ken (GM): Ok. I think on it, eh, we should probably put a team together to start really cementing down on this. No I know (Gavin) and you (Tim) have done a lot of work eh, on it, but I think we need to engage (Leo) and myself [a bit more as well.} \\
(2:32:17.1) & \text{Tim (BC): Yea, no, absolutely, yea, yea. ...} \\
(2:33:25.9) & \text{Ken (GM): So, the action I'm going to take out of that is that (Gavin) and (Tim) em, will sit with myself and (Leo) and we'll start, we'll scope the service level agreements based on what we discussed [today.} \\
(2:33:38.3) & \text{Tim (BC): Yea, yea yea} \\
(2:33:39.3) & \text{Ken (GM): Is there anything big we're missing?} \\
(2:33:41.8) & \text{Glen (RSR1): I think em, the one thing I would suggest, ay do need to have a confidential discussion with one or two stockists just to make sure that you're [} \\
(2:33:48.9) & \text{Ken (GM): Oh, yea, that process [Glen (RSR1): Yea, yea yea ...], test case, absolutely, absolutely, and then we'll have to come back} \\
(2:33:54.4) & \text{Glen (RSR1): and to be honest, I'd like to be part, whoever whoever's in the local area [Ken (GM): ah yea, absolutely]} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Source: Sales team meeting, 24th October 2011

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As the idea of a new group is discussed, the reach of the group progressively increases from Gavin and Tim’s initial work, to include Leo and Ken (at 2:32:02), but then extends to Glen wanting input if his sales area is involved (at 2:33:54), and also inclusion of some client stockists to get their perspectives (at 2:33:41).

The apparent ease with which new meetings or meeting groups can be formed without any discussion about the potential costs of doing so stands in stark contrast to the strong opinions of the officer group on having too many meetings and their potentially excessive cost, as previously seen in Extract 8.57. The meetings act as agents in their own right in creating new meetings, independently of the participants and their previously expressed views of having too many meetings or meetings being too costly.

The scheduling or periodicity of meetings provides another factor for consideration when new meetings are being proposed:

**Extract 8.61**

| (2:54:50.3) Ken (GM): | Ok. And I, I think you should put in maybe, the first three of the year eh, to get them into your diary. |
| (2:54:57.0) Leo (HSM): | Yea. So how often did you traditionally do them, were they every month? |
| (2:55:01.1) Ken (GM): | I think at, that time of year maybe every month is, [ |
| (2:55:03.5) Leo (HSM): | Well I think now because you’re looking into giving the whole [Ger: yea, yea] bunch of new stuff so they’d have to be a little bit regular, so if em, |
| (2:55:08.0) Ken (GM): | The sixth of February? |
| (2:55:09.7) Leo (HSM): | So then you’re looking at, yea, |
| (2:55:15.0) Ken (GM): | Continuing that theme you could go fifth of March |

Source: Sales team meeting, 24th October 2011

Leo, as the newly appointed HSM, seeks to establish meeting dates for his team at Ken’s suggestion at 2:54:50. He considers their historical meeting schedule at 2:54:57 but plums for more regular meetings due to the ‘bunch of new stuff’ that his team is being asked to deal with. We have already seen this pattern of increasing the number of board meetings and the number of staff briefing meetings in the previous section, to accommodate increased work output. The sales team provides further evidence of how
the tempo of meetings can be used to accommodate and accomplish increased demands from the various teams.

Meetings collectively can be seen as discrete tools at the disposal of the company to accomplish the high performance culture aspired to by Tim when he chaired his first board meeting (Extract 8.4) but there was no evidence in the data that they were explicitly deployed with that intention. Simply having more meetings seems to be a taken-for-granted response to increasing work demands. This represents a different form of temporality associated with meetings distinct from the simple past or future reflected in the systemic meetings model in Chapter 7 and will be elaborated at the end of this chapter and discussed more fully in Chapter 9.

As the frequency of meetings increases, changes in the focus of the meetings becomes apparent:

**Extract 8.62**

(2:06:28.7) Ken (GM): I think we have two reasons for a board meeting, we need a board meeting before February to get the SBU, to report the SBU activity etcetera etcetera, and we need a board meeting which is our AGM for the finances where we bring in eh (Accountant and co), like

(2:06:47.2) Gavin (MarD): That could be a separate meeting

(2:06:48.7) Ken (GM): That could be a separate meeting I think where we just have a natural

(2:06:53.5) Tim (BC): Like these meetings, bi-monthly board meetings are will become as much sort a senior management meetings as well as board meetings [yea, yea, yea] rather than just

Source: Board meeting, 15th November 2011

This Extract shows how Tim considers that the move towards bi-monthly meetings will cause the board to focus more on management issues, a point he had previously made in the July Board meeting (Extract 8.47). The change in the temporal pacing of the board meetings, introduced three months previously, now appears to be a driver for change in the board’s focus, from strategic perspectives to more operational perspectives. This temporal consideration is not the only driver for board meetings becoming more operationally focused as Tim’s proposal to integrate SBU heads into board meetings had similar effect.
Tim’s trans-participation as company chairman across multiple meetings and meeting streams reflects his desire to exert more operational influence in KT-Inc and may well be another factor driving the focus of board meetings. While the available data does not speak directly to Tim’s conscious intentions, there is evidence of how his attendance at meetings reflects such intentionality. His status as a trans-participant across a high number of meetings illustrates the hybridicity (Cooren, 2004b, p. 377) of Tim and the meetings he attends, creating distinct dyadic pairs that collectively can be seen as actants exhibiting agency over both time and space within KT-Inc. These represent just one example of how meetings acquire agency and contribute to imbrication (Taylor & Van Every, 2011, pp. 29-30) that contributes to the constitution of the organization.

There is no suggestion that meetings are the only means by which reflexive self-structuring is accomplished in organizations, but they serve as a consistent location in which the structures, processes and roles within the organization are proposed, negotiated, adopted, and re-generated over time, perpetuating and developing the self-structuring features of the organization through the agency of meetings.

Luhmann’s definition of communication (Luhmann, 1992) and his conceptualization of autopoiesis (Luhmann, 2006a) provide complementary theoretical perspectives from the Luhmannian CCO school through which McPhee and Zaug’s reflexive self-structuring flow can be considered. Summarising Luhmann’s perspective, Schoeneborn (2011b, p. 674) suggests that “organizations consist of an interrelated, self-referential, and autopoietic network of communicative events, which are fundamentally grounded in paradox ….” The analysis in this section shows how meetings can be viewed as one such “network of communicative events” that are self-regenerating and reflect Luhmann’s (1986, 2006b) autopoiesis within social systems. The analysis also shows meetings as central to reflexive self-structuring through actors in dyadic pairs combining with meetings as actants, to play a central role in the proposal, development and evolution of structures and processes within KT-Inc.

Extending McPhee and Zaug’s (2009, p. 36) view of “internal relations, norms, and social entities that are the skeleton for connection, flexing, and shaping of work processes”, meetings collectively can be viewed as ‘a transient skeleton’ in that they last for relatively short durations, but the imprint of past meetings or the anticipation of future meetings are repeatedly referenced and invoked during meetings taking place in the moment. Meetings collectively are skeletal in so far as they provide a framework,
around which organization is constituted and re-constituted as an ongoing, sustainable entity. Meetings collectively are considered transient in so far as they occur in the moment and only an impression or imprint of their occurrence remains after they have taken place. Unlike material objects such as machinery or buildings, meetings are once-off occurrences that can never be repeated, but still live on through indexical referencing that occurs at future interactions.

8.3 “ACTIVITY COORDINATION” - MEETINGS AS DECISION MEDIATORS

Activity coordination focuses on the interaction of processes and people as key features of the organization, which contrasts but complements the focus on structures and processes as seen under reflexive self-structuring. In Chapter 4 we saw CCO scholars, particularly those from the Montreal School, have increasingly adopted aspects of Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) to develop CCO theory (Taylor, 2013, p. 208). Latour (2005), in his elaboration of (ANT), drew a distinction between intermediaries and mediators in the context of ‘producing the social’ (p. 38). He defines intermediaries as “transport[ers] of meaning or force without transformation”, while mediators “transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry”. In this section, we see how meetings act as both social and communicative mediators, transforming participants’ textual and discursive inputs, into outputs that carry forward to subsequent meetings as initiatives, projects or task lists.

Activity coordination, viewed positively, ensures alignment of organizational activities to achieve common goals or to strengthen existing achievements by focusing on the people involved or the processes through which people interact. Individuals’ contributions become aligned through communication and shared processes supporting on-the-spot problem solving (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 39). In a more negative sense, activity coordination may also result in disorganization, misalignment or ultimate disintegration of an organization. Personal power plays, personality clashes, lack of resources or product failure in the market can all contribute to a lack of coordination. These features would still be analysed under the activity coordination flow, in spite of ultimately leading to the possible destruction or de-constitution of the organization (Putnam et al., 2009, p. 11).

The board of a company is generally expected to drive and coordinate the company’s strategic direction. This section initially focuses on board meetings to consider how
specific initiatives are proposed, adopted and then driven or dropped as coordinated activity across the company. At the first board meeting recorded for the research, the expression ‘game changers’ was used to describe special initiatives and projects in KT-Inc. At the subsequent May 2011 board meeting, the GM enumerated these game changers, one of which was the ‘economic profit initiative’:

Extract 8.63

Source: Board meeting, 10th May 2011

The role meetings played in the unfolding and coordination of these different game changer initiatives can be considered from two principle perspectives - driving them towards successfully fulfilling their game-changing potential or dropping them upon realisation that they had become unviable. The economic profit initiative (at 0:17:53) was driven to a successful conclusion but also transformed and extended into other related initiatives involving the whole stockists’ base in KT-Inc, and will be reviewed in more detail in Section 8.3.1. Section 8.3.2 will focus on the role meetings play in both creating and resolving paradoxes in the context of activity coordination.

8.3.1 The economic profit initiative- the role of board meetings

The economic profit initiative was considered a game changer for KT-Inc, but like so many other activities, required a number of meetings to eventually clarify its exact scope and to breathe full life into it. In Extract 8.64, Ken refers to “the annual stockists’ sales meeting”, which occurred six months previously, as the origin of the economic profit initiative:

Extract 8.64

Source: Board meeting, 10th May 2011
like us to kinda formally hopefully at the end of this session agree on what we are, and, and hopefully a few things we aren't going to do.

Source: Board meeting (AGM), 15th February 2011

While the initiative was proposed at the annual sales team conference in November 2010, it was “ kinda left hanging”, as Ken puts it, and he still seemed to equivocate a little later about its full significance, as we can see from Extract 8.65 at 0:09:38, while asking should it be given project status:

Extract 8.65

(0:09:38.7) Ken (GM): Do you think though (Jack), some of those, warrant the status of becoming projects if we’re to take them on? [Jack (SaM): em] I mean, for, for, for example eh, like the measuring and the culling of negative economic profit accounts, the ...........

(0:24:51.8) Jack (SaM): And I absolutely accept that the economic profitability on the smaller accounts, we have to do that, and see whether they’re adding up, and I’ve no doubt there’ll be some cull on that. But, there are accounts we’re not in that we need [to

Source: Board meeting (AGM), 15th February 2011

Following a lengthy discussion, the sales manager accepted the need for the proposed initiative (at 0:24:51). Tim, who was a non-executive director at this time, identifies the significance of the proposed initiative and elaborates the rationale for pursuing it:

Extract 8.66

(0:26:23.9) Tim (BC): Yea. And I think what we it might be worth looking at, what is the ideal profile of a (KT-Inc) stockist? I mean what would it look like? What would the ideal profile be, because I contend, that you’d be better off with forty really top class stockists [yey, yea], eh, who, who are working in partnership with you to build the brand and you are working in partnership with them to build their business. Then you will, out of the, hundred and ten that you have, which has this big long tail, because what you’re doing is, you’re diluting your resources across a hundred and ten customers, and you’re providing them with (specialist) machines and (product) cards, the cost of keeping them that show on the road, is, is phenomenal. Whereas if you were to put those resources into the top forty or
fifty, maybe it’s, I don’t know you’d have to go through them and draw up what is
the profile you want to achieve, but I think you could spend an awful lot more
money and get an awful lot greater results if you focused your resources

(0:27:28.1) Ken (GM): Can I just suggest here as I realise time is marching on he,
that maybe the outcome here will, will leave the new accounts there but maybe
(Tim), yourself myself and (Jack) would get together and look for (Jack), give (Jack)
some direction on setting up criteria for new accounts. Maybe, maybe we’ll do it
with your sales team [yea] when you have your next sales team meeting.

(0:27:52.5) Gavin (MarD): I think, I think we have that exercise is partially done.
We did a profile [yea] [we did] [we did, yea] just like that a couple of years ago,

(0:27:57.2) Ken (GM): But the problem is we didn’t stick to it. [yea] .....

(0:28:00.5) Ken (GM): Ok. We will meet with eh, are you ok with that (Jack) [Jack
(SaM): yea absolutely yea] ok. Is everybody happy that we’ll drop the bespoke
displays and the [well] yea?

Source: Board meeting (AGM), 15th February 2011

Ken’s immediate response to Tim’s suggestion is to establish a new sub-group and a
meeting, and also to involve the subsequent meetings of the sales team (at 0:27:28),
although Gavin suggests something similar had already been tried before (at 0:27:52).
The initiative is eventually given ‘project status’ at Ken’s suggestion:

Extract 8.67

(0:39:45.5) Ken (GM): With respect to the culling of the negative accounts and
economic pro, pro, ch the economic profit accounts, and the next one, ....., I think
we should make both of those projects. I think they should become new projects
for the company.

Source: Board meeting (AGM), 15th February 2011

With project status, the initiative is enjoined to the PAG’s meeting stream and also
establishes an identity that ensures a more focused attention at any meetings where it
will be discussed. Project status also formalises the roles that organization members
play in the activity and pre-ordains some processes to be applied as the project is
discussed at different meetings. These diverse activities are coordinated through
meetings. However, we can also see that it takes more than just project status to
coordinate and progress initiatives to focused action.

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The economic profit initiative was quite simple at its core. The performance of approximately 120 stockists was analysed in detail. The ‘tail’ of the list was identified as those stockists who generated less profit than the cost of servicing them as clients. Once identified, the tail was ‘culled’, as Sill explained at the May 2011 board meeting:

Extract 8.68

(2:28:11.8) Sill (FinD): So, the actually, the upshot of that is that cm, myself and (Ken) sat down eh, with (Jack), we went through it and we made recommendations, for eh, I think to close twelve accounts and to put six accounts on six month watch, eh, list, to see, eh, give them a chance to improve and if they didn’t they’d be going as well. So, eh, following from that there was a stockists sales meeting eh, which I attended and, eh, eleven of the twelve accounts are going to be closed, and the, the, em, the six, the six accounts are on the watch list. So I just have to, get in touch with (Jack) and see, he’d to, he’d to do a communication plan, bring up a letter, he was going to go with the CRMs to explain the situation, em, so, that’s kind of, that.

Source: Board meeting, 10th May 2011

Sill, Ken and Jack “sat down” at their own meeting to originate the list of clients to be culled. The cull was intended to free up time and resources to ‘invest’ in the highest performing stockists and also to bring mid-performing stockists up to a higher performance standard. Much later in the board meeting, Sill provided a broader picture of the whole stockists’ list:

Extract 8.69

(2:41:52.0) Sill (FinD): Yea, you see there, the top 14 accounts contribute, eh, 50% of contribution [and .
(2:41:59.1) Tim (BC): 38] account [for 80% of total contribution.
(2:42:00.4) Sill (FinD): those are part] of the top 38, they, they account for 80% of the total contribution, and go as far as 50, our top 53 accounts, 90%, so the bottom 45 accounts, account for 10% of contributions.....
(2:42:20.7) Tim (BC): So, so why are we spending all this resource on the, the other, the fif, ya know, anything beyond 45?

Source: Board meeting, 10th May 2011

Tim’s question at 2:42:20 prompted the next evolution of this project, that transformed it from ‘the economic initiative’ into the ‘stockists initiative’. The stockists initiative
focused on developing a new type of relationship with stockists in general and the top fifty stockists in particular. It was based on a partnering approach to foster mutual commercial development, rather than a pure transactional based supplier-client relationship.

Towards the end of the May 2011 board meeting, Tim was unequivocal about the need for this evolving stockists initiative:

**Extract 8.70**

(3:47:23.1) Tim (BC): But (Ken), I, first of all I, I think, the, the, I wouldn’t agree that we’re getting the best effort, get best return from the stockists that we could. I think there are too many, there are too many of them that are not really appropriate for you, for to be selling (KT-Inc) brand, and I, I wouldn’t, I would say if you’re going to carry, if you’re going to continue the way you are and more of the same, well then I’d say probably, the (Sheds) route is the right route. They are, it is going to wither and die, ya know, that channel, unless there’s a radical work done to really look at how you work with those people, and that, like if you had forty (No 1 Client), ya know, he’s doing what, 200,000 a year, how much is he doing?

Source: Board meeting, 10th May 2011

When questioned on the stockists initiative in more detail, Tim elaborated:

**Extract 8.71**

(4:05:07.0) Tim (BC): Well I mean] it’s, it’s not rocket science this at all. It’s just, that rather than looking at your stockists as the customer, and just dealing with them as an arms length customer and providing them with displays and, and ya know, negotiating prices with them, and then when you sold into him forgetting about him selling out to the consumer, it is looking at, first of all, identifying what are the top 50 of these that you want to work with, and drawing up a plan with each one of those as to what way you want KT-Inc to look in that store, how it should be merchandised .... and you draw up a contract with each of those distributors ..... and that you both work together, with each of those distributors to sell to consumer and to grow the busine, the brand that way......

(4:07:46.6) Ken (GM): I’d love to feel there’s a way, we can win more the hearts and minds of the stockists.

Source: Board meeting, 10th May 2011
Further discussion leads Ken to make another proposal as in Extract 8.72:

**Extract 8.72**

(4:21:17.4) Ken (GM): I'd love to, I'd love to take that on as an action, that we would look at this partnership approach with the stockists channel. And I mean, I suppose, the immediate question is, what is a partnership approach and how is that different from the current stockist approach. But I think we should have a separate, issue on that.

(4:21:34.5) Gavin (MarD): But, can I work with (Tim) and (Jack) on that, and you work on the (joint ventures), [Ken (GM): em], because otherwise you're going to divide (Ken) into so many bits and pieces ....

(4:21:47.6) Ken (GM): Well I think we should be, we should be trying to prepare something to come up with a panel, a stockists panel (Tim (BC): yea, yea, yea, yea)..

Source: Board meeting, 10th May 2011

Ken’s proposal at 4:21:47 to establish and meet with another group is refined forty-five minutes later, confirming establishment of a stockists’ forum, which will involve new meeting streams and new groups, in yet new rolling patterns of meetings collectively:

**Extract 8.73**

(5:00:09.8) Ken (GM): So how will we go about this visionary though, eh like, do we need to put a think thank together, do we, or,

(5:00:16.8) Pete (OpsD): Well you mentioned about your forum with the stockists that, [that needs to be incorporated]

(5:00:20.1) Tim (BC): Well I think], that needs to feed into it, and I think that's a brilliant idea, that forum could inform you on so many, eh different areas, but I think the outputs from that forum needs to feed in to this....

(5:00:39.2) Gavin (MarD): Is that, is that a bunch of people coming together?

(5:00:42.5) Tim (BC): It's a bunch of key stockists, yea ..... 

Source: Board meeting, 10th May 2011

In addition to prompting the establishment of a stockists’ forum, the May board discussion also resulted in the establishment of a small sub-group comprising just three people - Tim, Gavin and Jack. They held just one meeting under the title ‘stockists rejuvenation initiative’, with the purpose of scoping out the parameters for the initiative to be designated as a project. The degree to which they succeeded is questionable as can be seen from their meeting output after approximately two hours discussion. Even
their summary of their output ran to ten minutes which is heavily curtailed in Extract 8.74 to show their main conclusions:

Extract 8.74

(1:42:21.0) Tim (BC): Now and I just put in a, a few next steps there which was, eh, sign off on this initiative from, it's probably the PAG isn't it,

(1:42:30.5) Gavin (MarD): Yca, tis actually. Yca, (Tim's) just added on a few notes to the, you can help him with that, eh Martin.

(1:42:40.5) Tim (BC): Achieve commitment from the sales team, and like we've talked about that, and that's so important. I think the commitment of this, commitment to this by two parties, one is [stockists], by three parties, eh, well we have to win the support by the, the, of the stockists, because ..... we're working on the assumption that there'll be a very positive response to this.... Getting, the sales, the sales people's buy in to it ya know, and that they really become passionate about this, and to get the senior management in, in (KT-Inc) to be really passionate about it as well ..... 

(1:43:58.1) Gavin (MarD): Urn, um, ] I think that's critical because there's been an awful lot of false dawns in relation to the, the sales team, and I think we need to make a bit of a fuss about them and bring them up here when this is advanced [Jack (SaM): Um] and, ya know, invest a bit of time maybe two days or something in, in, getting this, ..... that there's resources [being put in behind it

(1:44:21.2) Tim (BC): (Jack), ya know what might] be worth having here is to just put a bit of em, eh, eh skeleton, what we used to call a straw man together [Jack (SaM): yea], and get, have a workshop session [Jack (SaM): yea], with maybe, with the lads, yourself, maybe (Gavin) and I, Martin if he feels like it, or even getting somebody like Martin to facilitate it .... let's have real challenge debate and discussion and, and end up at the end of the day with a piece of paper that we all put our names to and sort a say, yea

(1:45:08.4) Jack (SaM): This is the way to do it, yea ....

(1:47:11.2) Jack (SaM): So maybe our, maybe our next meeting then should involve, really needs to involve, we've got two meetings here, needs to involve our own guys here, .... because we can, there is a board meeting on in the first week in August, ..... 

(1:48:27.5) Martin (Res): So what would you be looking to get at the end of that sort of a, half a day or a day, [a, a comprehensive
(1:48:32.6) Tim (BC): We have a straw man] coming from here, we have, we have
[Jack (SaM): we've the bones, we've the bones of the] and that we would review
that with, with the guys, that we would add, ya know, we would add s, and that we
end up with something that we can add to, to get the before and after sort of look
from (Andy) and something that (Jack) and (Andy) could take to the board meeting
on the second of eh, on the second of August, so say this this
(1:49:05.5) Martin (Res): It, it would be a working game plan and possibly a draft
one of the SLA [Jack (SaM): exactly], as two specific outputs you probably look to
.....
(1:49:26.4) Martin (Res): A working draft of, the, the overall plan, the game plan,
and [Jack (SaM): and SLA] a working draft of an, of an SLA.
(1:49:35.1) Jack (SaM): And a possibly a questionnaire for the cm, for our own ch,
key focus stockists, we're going to do five guys that we might talk to.....
(1:49:49.9) Tim (BC): But I think that the dozen questions or so that would be
addressed in that conversation, we should have those
(1:49:56.4) Martin (Res): And they would probably form part of the draft SLA,
they'd be embedded in that, and you'd structure the whole package so that you'd
have, here's the agenda for when I walk out to [these
(1:50:06.8) Tim (BC): Guys I tell ya], I, I think this will really make a difference
here, ya know, if we get this, eh, if we get this right, it it will make a difference, I'm
certain it will make a difference.

Source: Stockists rejuvenation initiative, 16th June 2011

It is particularly worth noting the degree to which this small group shows the
autopoietic tendency for meetings to generate yet more meetings at 1:44:21 and at
1:47:11, as seen under reflexive self-structuring in Section 8.2. Of equal significance
is the explicit efforts they took to synchronise, sequence and integrate these proposed
new meetings into the existing meeting streams of the board, the sales team and some
special activity by their graphic designer Andy at 1:48:32. This was not something that
they were schooled to do - this happened spontaneously, as an intuitive and inherent
part of their use of meetings as instruments of their own policy, or to fill gaps in their
existing policy.

Abstracting from the details of this conversation in a very small group focusing on a
single aspect of organizational strategy, shows the relevance of adopting a holistic view
of meetings. Meetings collectively are central to progressing the ideas expressed in the
group's discourse and are the focal point for coordination with other activities taking place in the organization.

Reflecting on the discursive threads from just two board meetings on this single topic (February and May 2011), it is conspicuous that the economic profit thread is laced throughout the whole meeting rather than handled as a single agenda item to be opened and closed in a time-bound discussion. This was a notable feature of many of the individual meeting discourses in KT-Inc, as we will see again in the Extracts below from the July and September board meetings. The tendency for topics to be threaded through multiple discussions within meetings is also apparent as topics are threaded across meetings before being progressed, even where the topics in question are considered to be high priority game-changers. The tendency to discuss topics across multiple meetings was verbalised explicitly at the July board meeting. A discussion about the poor quality of the company's in-store displays led to the following exchange (Extract 8.75) between Pete and Tanya: (Note: Pete took part in the meeting via Skype)

Extract 8.75

(2:23:25.8) Pete (OpsD): Eh, (Tim), (Tim) [Tim (BC): sorry (Pete)], just listening to the comments there, eh, and I go back to something that (Tanya) said. Eh, Tanya highlighted that this conversation has taken place over several meetings, and, I think it was identified eh, going back a while, that there was an issue here developing about our in-store presence. Now I suppose, what I would say is that, for whatever reason, em, we missed it, and that's why there's a gap now, there's a lag time ...... for whatever reason. We've all been at several meetings where the whole in-store presence was debated, debated, debated, and nothing really happened. Em, we need to look at, at em, why or, or we need to be more reactive or identify what's important and what's not important.

(2:25:04.4) Ken (GM): For, for me (Pete), the answer to that is noise. Like every time in-store presence was debated, it was debated in the context of multi issues, there, it was never highlighted as a single issue. The issue that was highlighted as a single issue was the, the need for geographical coverage in the Dublin area, which I think actually our figures are supporting, even still today. Em, that was the one game changing event that the team identified......

(2:25:49.6) Tim (BC): Lookit, hopefully we can learn from what has happened here and sort of eh, ya know, move this thing on at pace now and eh, and do what's
needed to be done in rejuvenating all these displays eh, in at least the top, ya know, 30 or 40 ch, stockists here. Ok.

(2:26:10.0) Pete (OpsD): .... I would be hugely supportive of that.....It goes back to the whole idea of this project and a time line, ya know. This is urgent and it needs to happen so that our sales drop is addressed.....

(2:27:07.5) Tim (BC): Yea, well what we're proposing with the stockists rejuvenation programme is, is to come up with a plan by, sort of , within, by the end of August or so, on, on that identify where are the critical ones that need to be attended to first, and look at a plan, an implementation plan and a cost of implementing it. And so hopefully by the end of August we'll have that plan put together.

Source: Board meeting, 26th July 2011

We see initially at 2:23:25 that this discussion “has taken place over several meetings” but that the board “missed it”. While the GM offers an explanation at 2:25:04, the new chairman, Tim, is clear that they now need to “move this thing on at pace” (at 2:25:49). Significantly, that pace is achieved through scheduling further meetings associated with the now hybrid economic profit initiative/stockists initiative, involving board members, finance team members, the sales team, the stockists and the marketing team. Meetings of different meeting streams become both the drivers and coordinators of activity, as well as becoming the pace makers for such activity.

In the next Extract (8.76) we see what started as the economic profit initiative was now transforming into a stockists rejuvenation initiative (at 3:02:47):

Extract 8.76

(3:02:47.7) Gavin (MarD): Chairman, I think the stockists rejuvenation project which, ya know, ok, it could be late but I mean we're, we're up and running at the, at the earlier stages, well sorry, it's an initiative at this stage, he, but it's one of my suggestions was that it would, it would become a project. Em, I think if anything is significantly going to make a difference there, I don't know how other people felt but I felt the two meetings during the week with (large stockist 1) team, and the (large stockist 2) team and (Ken's) other meeting with (large stockist 3), eh, went very well. I think the, the mood is, is right. ........

(3:46:55.3) Ken (GM): (Tim's) suggestion that we ask for the three biggest issues, now, I thought we might like to go around to em, each individual, I took the liberty
of summarising them around eh, six poi, six themes that came through, like, arresting the stockists decline or rejuvenate stockists sales. Eh, six of us came up with that as a, a key issue........

(3:59:33.0) Tim (BC): Yea, well I, it was just a conversation with (Ken), and suggested that we, ya know, poll the board to just to, and I...... it's interesting, it's interesting that, ya know, we came up, seven people come up with six priorities, ya know when we were looking for three. .... but the ones that I, I focused on again, without doubt the stockists, the stockists area........ Ya know, and it's brilliant to see that, ya know, 6 out of 7 people sort of see that as a prior, as a sort of number one priority.....

(5:24:35.7) Tanya (ODir): For consideration was em, stockists rejuvenation, was an initiative, there was a group put together and em, it was strongly felt by particularly (Gavin) and others that it really should be a copy project, that it would benefit from that and they were asked, (Jack), I have it here, (Jack) to scope and present em, the results from it, in terms of continuing to be an executive initiative and a key strategic objective for the stockists unit. So now I know that subsequently the team has met and I think the proposal is that em, it be a company project.

Source: Board meeting, 26th July 2011

During a near two hour discussion on this issue (which is significantly abridged in the Extract), Gavin recounts the importance of recent meetings with key stockists, then Ken at 3:46:55 and Tim at 3:59:33 confirm the unanimous board view on the importance of the stockists initiative. Tanya, as the chairman of the PAG, proposes at 5:24:35 that it be formally designated as a company project, reflecting its high priority status for the Board members when their views were considered collectively.

The transformation from economic profit initiative to stockists’ rejuvenation initiative seems complete, and a new cycle of project based activity, involving a new project team, further meetings and renewed focus is now set in train. But significantly, Jack was removed as the sales manager from the company, as we saw in Section 8.1.3 and the project had to be handed over to Leo as the new head of sales and marketing. Notwithstanding the highest priority given to this new project, it still seems to be slow out of the blocks when it is discussed at the next board meeting two months later in September 2011:
Extract 8.77

(0:37:19.7) Gavin (MarD): It brings the stockists rejuvenation project in, into focus, the urgency of it.
(0:37:23.7) Tim (BC): It does, it does, yea.
(0:37:25.7) Tanya (ODir): I'm a bit concerned it's gone bigger than this.
(0:37:28.1) Tim (BC): Well I think, well I mean, when we get on to the next item on the agenda I think we, we just need to consider, ya know, the new people coming in and how long it's going to take, and do we have time to wait for them to come in, or, do we need to be working on this now.

Source: Board meeting, 20th September 2011

By the end of this September board meeting, there is still some equivocation about how, or more particularly when, to push ahead with the project, in light of the Leo’s imminent start, as expressed in Extract 8.78:

Extract 8.78

(4:12:47.0) Ken (GM): What I was thinking here, ya know, (Leo) starting off, it’s probably a bit unfair to expect him in one or two months to be able to put this together and have it bang on, and certainly with the new guy coming in, in industrial, it’s, we haven’t even started the process of hiring him so we’re months away from having that, so, em, in the interim, I think we need to, we really need to work on something. We have, we have a sales meeting in November with the, eh (sales) team, I think we need to, I think we need to come up with something, I think if we don’t [Pete (OpsD): um], we’re in [danger of

(4:13:28.1) Pete (OpsD): Is, ] Isn’t rejuvenation top of the

(4:13:29.5) Ken (GM): Yea, I mean

(4:13:30.8) Pete (OpsD): But like that's not the, that's something [that

(4:13:32.4) Ken (GM): It's probably] not even up for discussion that we're going to cancel the rejuvenation project for it's, that's ya know, [a core element

(4:13:37.1) Pete (OpsD): So, so like], isn't that a given that (Leo) is going to be [presented with that
Viewing the discourse associated with the (initial) economic profit initiative across multiple board meetings, we start to see how topics are generated, emerge, develop, amend, are prioritised and progress through the interactions at numerous meetings, of different groups, across considerable time periods. No single meeting can be said to be the originator or owner of any particular initiative. Meetings are rather seen to be coordination points for wide ranges of activity, spanning different groups within KT- Inc, operating over extended time periods. The temporal implications of this in respect of MaSP will be considered more fully in Chapters 9 and 10.

Moving to the anniversary AGM in February 2012, we can see in Extract 8.79 how the focus of conversation continues to pick up on key vestiges of the stockists’ initiative (the top fifty stockists) and how planned initiatives for the coming year will work to the mutual benefit of both the stockists and KT-Inc:

Extract 8.79

(1:54:53.7) Tim (BC): But the plan for the coming year is to up, up this eh, big time with and the plan for this year is, that with the top fifty stockists that there will be a programme of a local radio, local em, that the first thing a consumer thinks about when they go to buy (product) is where am I going to buy it. The second thing they think about is when I go there, what am I going to buy. So to answer those two questions if you like, eh, what (Leo) now is planning is to, with the top fifty stockists is to develop a local promotional programme for the brand around those stockists, in the local community. And I think that that is well worth eh, [trying, and ]

(1:55:35.3) Ken (GM): I think that’s something we're well sorted on, and I think it'll be far more effective than our [(magazine) campaign, if ya know what I mean (1:55:41.2) Tim (BC): and, well, well, we,] I think it'll be really interesting to see ya know, this time next year, when we measure our awareness, how big an impact that will make, because I believe myself that it will make a big impact and it could be a relatively, if you like, low cost way of increasing your brand awareness, ....
As we look further into 2012 in Extract 8.80, we see the stockists’ initiative is still actively discussed at the board table, now through the participation of SBU heads at board meetings, where Leo is asked to bring the new Head of Industrial Sales, Dinny, up to date on the initiative:

Extract 8.80

(1:12:14.4) Tanya (ODir): Maybe just for (Dinny’s) sake, if you want to explain what, what you mean by that

(1:12:19.6) Leo (HSM): With the stockists rejuvenation? So what we did was, we, we took em, the top stockists or took the top potential stockists and eh, their presence in their stores, their point of sale displays, em, we, we created a new point of sale unit which is an interior display, and we set up a plan and we had a list of people that we wanted to take these new stands in, and .... Em, initially we looked at fifty, fifty was too big an ask, it was also too expensive, so we've split it into two, so we'll do, we had twenty five for this year, em, it'll work out at twenty one, em, .... with new installs there'll be a financial contribution.

(1:13:06.5) Dinny (HIS): And (Leo), we, we pay for this?

(1:13:07.7) Leo (HSM): We pay for this yea, but we, we're looking for something back, so obviously we want more, we wan, we're looking for, ya know, we're looking for things, we really want them to sign an SLA to say this is what it is, but em, eh, we're getting it difficult to get them to do that because they've already been a stockist. Em, so it's , it's not and it's not something that happens in the industry here but we're going to have to work at it over a period of time, and we'll get it done, but it is .......... 

Source: Board meeting, 29th March 2012

What started as a proposed idea from a sales team meeting in November 2010, developed into the economic profit initiative in 2011, morphed into the stockists’ rejuvenation initiative in late 2011 and was effectively completed as a discrete project by March 2012. However, all of these changes and shifts of focus are accomplished through the interactions both in and more particularly across meetings collectively and their associated meeting streams.

8.3.2 Meeting paradox in meetings

There are numerous examples throughout the KT-Inc data of decisions being simply deferred from one meeting to another, illustrating how meetings play a role in temporal
deparadoxification (Andersen, 2003) to resolve decision paradoxes. It also provides empirical examples of meetings showing prehension towards future meetings (as discussed in Section 7.5.1). Two such examples can be seen at the end of the September 2011 board meeting. The first relates to implementing ISO quality standards:

Extract 8.81

| 5:17:51.3 | Gavin (MarD): Will we put down for the agenda of a PAG meeting, project advisory .... |
| 5:18:08.4 | Gavin (MarD): What do we do? |
| 5:18:10.3 | Tanya (ODir): Well we have a meeting in November, maybe we revisit the [presentation] |
| 5:18:15.3 | Ken (GM): We should have a presentation [on it for November, maybe we'll decide] |
| 5:18:18.4 | Tanya (ODir): Depending on the cost |
| 5:18:19.2 | Gavin (MarD): ok. [(Cathy) has that presentation] |
| 5:18:20.2 | Tanya (ODir): we may be at] a different stage where we weigh up the priorities, resources and ...... |

Source: Board meeting, 20th September 2011

The decision to defer decision-making is justified at 5:18:20 on the basis that the future meeting may provide more information that is currently not available. The second example relates to deciding on an initiative to streamline the number of stock control units (SKUs) being used in KT-Inc:

Extract 8.82

| 5:21:50.0 | Pete (OpsD): We have an interesting piece of work, if at the next meeting, would we be ok for that, if we presented the analysis like ya did for the stockists, |
| 5:22:01.7 | Tim (BC): Yea, the sku, [the sku's, yea] |
| 5:22:02.8 | Pete (OpsD): On the sku's], and then we could talk about [that and see] |
| 5:22:07.3 | Sill (FinD): I can get some work done but, it's year end. |
| 5:22:11.6 | Tanya (ODir): But I also think though that the, if there is to be a sales meeting, where you had the teams that would be involved in it (unintelligible), that would be a good opportunity to have it as a discussion item, ya know, because you have your UK people there, you have your Irish people there, you have your retail people, [ |
In both instances, the board is prehensively using the meetings of other groups (the PAG and the sales team) to defer decision-making for different reasons, but they are also creating a dependency on other meetings to progress the issues under discussion. In this case, decisions not to make decisions imposed the topics into the meeting streams of other groups, creating cross over points between meeting streams. A third example of the paradox of deciding not to decide is clear in Extract 8.83:

**Extract 8.83**

(0:25:02.5) Pete (OpsD): Lookit, that's what it is at the moment. We know the, it's a bigger issue. We've a couple of options. Can we revisit this next Friday then after the two of ye discuss it [Jason - yea ok] em, ....

Source: Ops team meeting, 29th April 2011

A technical issue under discussion is simply taken off line, implicitly remitted to another meeting between Jason and a colleague for further discussion, but importantly is prehensively proposed to be brought back to the Ops team meeting the following week. The prehension of future meetings is used to deparadox the undecided decision, which also implicates meetings as agents in what Andersen (2003) referred to as social deparadoxification.

### 8.3.3 The paradoxes of closing Bearings

Bearings is a pseudonym for a product line in KT-Inc that was discontinued. The role of multiple meetings in the evolution of the decision to close bearings is analysed in this section. The decision to close Bearings emerges from a sequence of paradoxes over a succession of meetings collectively before it is finally implemented. Meetings serve as locations where previous decisions to close Bearings were ignored, downplayed or explained away for not being implemented. Paradoxically, meetings collectively equally acted as key sites of decision-making and as temporal drivers to accelerate the final closing down of Bearings. Decision-making and the temporality of activities associated with the decisions are inextricably intertwined with and within meetings collectively, and while it was observationally clear that a synchronous link
existed between the two, it was difficult to determine which was driving the timing of the other.

The first reference to closing Bearings in the available data was at the May 2011 board meeting, when the company secretary reviewed the minutes of a board meeting that took place prior to the company AGM on the 15th February 2011:

**Extract 8.84**

(1:14:02.2) Gavin (MarD): A decision to initiate a process for orderly wind down and closure of (Bearings) over the next six to nine months was taken. Closure to be conducted by end of December 2011. Need for strict internal confidentiality. Team to oversee (Ken), (Sill), (Pete), (Cathy). Eh, meeting to be set up with (Jason) and team with board, including (Tim).

Source: Board meeting, 10th May 2011

Establishment of a team and calling associated meetings seemed to be a natural way for KT-Inc to progress this initiative. However, at the subsequent board meeting in July 2011 (Extract 8.85), the following exchange highlights a divergent understanding between the Finance director (Sill) and the GM (Ken):

**Extract 8.85**

(0:46:35.5) Sill (FinD): (Bearings) then, em, (Bearings) you can see the year to date they are down about 32,000, em, (Bearings) are struggling em. Their sales have picked up, in last month or so, mainly due to eh (Deveau) finished produce, the, the, ratio .......

(0:47:30.1) Sill (FinD): The, the, I can't really see a future for, for manufacturing it.

(0:47:33.6) Ken (GM): the only thing is we have picked up a piece of business in the North em, eh, one hundred thousand pounds a year (Bearings) contract

(0:47:47.6) Sill (FinD): With?

Source: Board meeting, 16th July 2011

Sill clearly knew nothing about this large order that provided a lifeline for a product that she understood was being closed down and felt had no future (at 0:47:30). Ken on the other hand, appears comfortable with the paradox of processing a large new order for the same product while a previous board decision to close down the product goes unimplemented. The company secretary Gavin, wasn't so comfortable with the
paradox and immediately seeks clarification/confirmation on the board’s previous decision on Bearings:

Extract 8.86

(0:48:47.7) Gavin (MarD): We, we made a decision two board meetings back to initiate the wind up of (Bearings), right - have we (0:48:55.2) Ken (GM): we’ve made no progress on it (0:48:56.6) Gavin (MarD): But have we, have we rowed back on that in the context of the northern (0:49:00.2) Ken (GM): Not really [Sill (FinD): no] no, I don’t think so. It’s not losing money it’s just marking time. Em,

Source: Board meeting, 16th July 2011

The paradox was (temporarily) resolved through the CEO’s rationale at 0:49:00 of having taken the order, perhaps based on his centrality as a ‘decision maker’ within the organization (Seidl & Becker, 2006b, p. 29). Ken’s behaviour is also an example of Andersen’s (2003) factual deparadoxing. However, Ken’s decision-making role has been somewhat diluted by the appointment of Tim as the new board chairman, who resolves the paradox in more determined fashion:

Extract 8.87

(0:49:51.2) Tim (BC): Yea, I think if we, we don’t see a future for it ya know, we ch, we have made a decision to, ya know, op out of it, we, we should bring it to a, bring it to a conclusion. Ya know, it’s one piece of complexity that you have taken out of the system if ya like, ya know, in terms of even, in terms of financing it, the inventory and so on.

Source: Board meeting, 16th July 2011

Tim’s response is a softly spoken but firmly asserted marker that they get on with implementing decisions that they make. From this point, the action plan to remove Bearings is progressively executed over a series of meetings, involving activity coordination through further decision-making and institutional positioning in so far as it re-positions KT-Inc in their product market segment by withdrawing from a specific sub-segment of their market. The decision culminates in (re)negotiating membership through direct redundancies for the Bearings team members.

We will see how a later board meeting in September provides an intersection point between the activity coordination and membership negotiation flows, as the necessary
coordinated action could only be taken through a series of subsequent meetings to give effect to decisions previously made. This in turn leads to further decision making being required, reflecting in practice Luhmann’s (2006c, p. 95) communication and contingency-based view of decision that we saw in Chapter 4. Decisions are paradoxically seen as resolving past options within KT-Inc in respect of Bearings, while simultaneously setting up requirements for further decision-making to address new and different possibilities arising from the previous decisions made. Tim uses the word ‘disaster’ in Extract 8.88 to emphasise the commercial consequences of accepting or failing to resolve the paradox on Bearings, a paradox Ken seemed willing to rationalise and accept:

Extract 8.88

(0:56:17.9) Tim (BC): It’s a disaster when you shut something down, a revenue stream, and you leave some of the cost behind, then you’re just spreading it over the existing part of the business.
(0:56:27.9) Sill (FinD): May as well keep the turn over, [at least you have
(0:56:29.5) Tim (BC): yea, yea, exactly. Yea, ok.
(0:56:54.4) Pete (OpsD): Sorry, sorry, before you have a coffee break, did we make a decision then?
(0:56:59.3) Ken (GM): Yea. We, we
(0:57:01.1) Gavin (MarD): Progress to sell off of (Bearings) and if there’s no progress, terminate the wind [down
(0:57:05.8) Ken (GM): We need need a team, we need to put a team together to come up with the whole implementation of it.

Source: Board meeting, 16th July 2011

Even with the paradox firmly on the table, an absence of clarity on the decision made still seems to exist. When Pete seeks clarification on the final decision actually taken, it prompts establishment of a new team at 0:57:05 and the generation of associated meetings to coordinate the shutdown activities:

An update report to the board in September indicates that progress is on target and Ken refers in Extract 8.89 to a range of different meetings with clients and the internal project team that were used to effectively manage the close down of Bearings:

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Extract 8.89

(1:12:05.8) Ken (GM): Just moving on, on the (Bearings), eh, I, I’ve kept the board members advised on eh, efforts to sell the (Bearings) unit.

(1:12:13.8) Ken (GM): Cast a very wide net eh, thought of everybody I knew who was in the (Bearings) business, through (trade group 1) and through em, (trade group 2). I got a few phone calls back from people who suggested other companies. Eh, it was .... We now have four parties interested in it ......

(1:14:01.2) Ken (GM): I’m actually keen and I’m pushing buttons now to try and move this faster because our team have met with all of our customers and told them the story and obviously customers are a little concerned about not having supply in November, or thereafter, and what we don’t want them to do is go to somebody else. Eh, we’d like to be able to go back to all the customers quickly and they’ve all agreed, verbally anyway, to stay with us, and we’ve said we’re going to find a partner to continue their business with them. Em, ....

(1:14:58.6) Tim (BC): And so, I mean, if you did a deal in October, what’s the sort of eh, phase out period?

(1:15:04.0) Ken (GM): Well, we have said we want to be out of it by the end of November, so .....that’s doable, yea.

Source: Board meeting, 20th September 2011

We can see initially that Ken has used other meeting opportunities (at 1:12:05) to keep board members briefed on progress outside normal board meetings, and that meetings with customers (at 1:14:01) formed an integral part of the winding down process.

Board meetings also enable deparadoxification through justifying the paradox (July 2011) and ultimately accomplishing the discontinuation of Bearings through coordinating the activities required to wind it down (September 2011). Previously in the membership negotiation flow we also saw how Ken used the announcement of the departure of Jack (Section 8.1.3), the sales manager, as the opportunity to advise the Bearings team that they were also on notice of redundancy:

Extract 8.90

(1:03:22.7) Ken (GM): .... Em, we notified (Jack) of his redundancy, em, and eh, I’ll go into that again in a minute, em, and we notified the (Bearings) team of the decision to exit (Bearings), and we put the team on notice of redundancy.

Source: Board meeting, 20th September 2011

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Karreman and Alvesson (2001, p. 60) suggested that decision-making is considered a normal expectation of meetings. However, decision-making can also be a significant source of paradox within meetings as we saw in this section. Haug (2015, p. 557) explores consensus as the often espoused and preferred mode of decision-making in meetings. Consensus decision-making can often result in decisions that are subsequently contested or not implemented because some people involved considered no decision to have been reached, adding another dimension to decision paradox in meetings. Meetings in KT-Inc were central to coordinating the activities of both people and processes, to implement the decision to cease production of Bearings. However, the urgency with which something was intended to happen or be progressed in KT-Inc seems to be directly related to the periodicity of the meeting stream within which it is being primarily handled. The economic profit initiative had a slow start between November 2010 and the board meeting of February 2011. Progress continued to be slow until after the July 2011 board meeting, at which it merged into the stockists rejuvenation initiative, was dispersed across non-board meeting streams that had higher meeting frequencies, from which its implementation seemed to be accelerated. Closure of the Bearings product line progressed in a similar way. Rolling from one board meeting to the next ensured a slow pace of implementation if not a partial reversal of the decision to close down the product line. The pace of implementation significantly increased when the topic was moved into meeting streams that had higher meeting frequency. Scheduling further meetings sustained or increased the pace of implementation until the product was successfully discontinued and the posts associated with the product line were actually ‘disidentified’ from KT-Inc, as we saw in the membership negotiation flow analysis in Section 8.1.3. In this context, meetings in KT-Inc could be viewed as organizational metronomes, displaying a form of temporality not ascribed explicitly (to meetings) in the meeting participants’ discourse but implicitly evident by the impact different meetings and their associated streams had on the progress or delay of particular initiatives.
**8.4 “INSTITUTIONAL POSITIONING” – THROUGH BI-DIRECTIONAL INTERACTIONS**

Institutional Positioning in the Social Order of Institutions is the full title McPhee and Zaug (2009, p. 39) gave this particular communication flow, although in the literature it is generally shortened to *institutional positioning*. Communications contributing to this flow are normally associated with identifying, creating, establishing or sustaining the relationships with external bodies that exist, are required, or ought to be discontinued, in order to establish the organization “as a “presence” in the intersystemic institutional order” (p. 40). While acknowledging that it is primarily about organizational identity in the broadest sense, McPhee and Zaug (2009, p. 40) used the word ‘positioning’ to convey that the identity established through communication also needs to be integrated into the wider social systems within which the organization operates, from political, cultural, or socio-economic perspectives (p. 41).

**8.4.1 KT-Inc standing in a peer community.**

In the context of *membership negotiation*, we have already seen in Section 8.1.2 how the GM used meetings as a vehicle to portray himself as representative of the organization in the specific setting of peer organizations, through his involvement in industry trade bodies. While it wasn’t possible to attend and record the external meetings to which Ken referred, his contributions to the internal meetings provide data to gain an appreciation of how meetings (both internal and external) formed part of KT-Inc’s institutional positioning. By Ken’s account of his interactions at those (external) meetings, we get an appreciation of the standing of KT-Inc within its peer community. In addition to the sales team and board meetings referenced in Section 8.1.2, Ken also used the staff briefing of April 2011 to advise the whole staff of the significance of KT-Inc’s position in the trade groups:

**Extract 8.91**

(0:22:37.6) Ken (GM): And we’re very lucky we’re part of a, of a buying group, eh, which is (the Trade Group 1) in Europe. Em, and it’s, we actually are chairing (the Trade Group 1) at the moment. But without (the Trade Group 1), I don’t think we could have got all the raw materials we’ve been looking for, even at up to this point. But certainly into the future I think it’s given us em, eh, a huge advantage.

Source: General staff briefing, 21st April 2011

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Ken uses the plural pronoun ‘we’ to position KT-Inc (as opposed to himself personally) as the chair of the external trade body, leaving his all-staff audience in little doubt as to their position relative to external peer companies. The prestige of KT-Inc’s standing is implicit, while the commercial benefits of membership and standing within the trade group is made explicit. In a further briefing to the annual sales team’s conference in November 2011, Ken again refers in Extract 8.92 to a second trade group meeting he attended:

Extract 8.92

(0:00:14.4) Ken (GM): I just took three quotes from the (Trade Group 2) congress which was held in eh, Dublin, in in September of this year, or October, and the leading industry eh, analysts, (BigBoss) globally, eh, I just jotted down three of the quotes that they came up with, and, the first one being, have you identified higher added value products (unintelligible) to replace traditional (product)? Em, I was kinda patting ourselves on the back there because we have brought out (Leading Product) this year, which is higher added value to replace traditional (product).

(0:00:56.2) Ken (GM): Another quote, have you maxed manufacturing and supply chain efficiencies? I know this is a, a mantra that (Tim) often em, talks about and em, I think we probably have a way to go. Operations is now a strategic business unit in the company and it has exactly these objectives of optimising supply chain

(0:01:29.3) Ken (GM): The third one, are you innovative? And these were three questions that (BigBoss) said European (product) companies need to be asking themselves today, if they’re going to have a future. And innovation has been key in (KT-Inc) eh, but it needs to spread. I think people think of innovation as product innovation, innovation o, around a new (product), but innovation needs to spread to things like stockists pricing. There’s absolutely no, no reason why we can’t innovate in lots of areas, and I think we haven’t innovated enough across enough areas and I hope that’s a theme that will, will be addressed today.

(0:02:18.2) Ken (GM): Another speaker at the (Trade Group 2) congress listed key success words. I think these are all going to be words that em, you will be able to relate to, I think these are all words that, em, we have talked about in our various meetings and, but the interesting thing is, the key to linking all these words together in a coherent strategy is, team work. And team work is the most important thing. Without team work we won’t have anything.

Source: Sales team annual conference, 30th November 2011
In this case, we can see the positioning of KT-Inc being handled differently. Benchmarks from the global industry are invoked and Ken “was kinda patting ourselves on the back” for having measured up against one of those key benchmarks (at 0:00:14). He goes on to identify where the company still has work to do, in terms of supply chain management (at 0:00:56) and innovation (at 0:01:29), but seeks to enthuse the meeting that both are happening and will continue to happen within KT-Inc. Benchmarks and performance indicators from the external peer industry and companies are made accessible to KT-Inc workers through their meetings, indicating one form of institutional positioning of KT-Inc in the wider organizational and societal setting.

8.4.2 Board meetings - opening with external economic perspectives

The previous example of meetings being used to inform members of the company’s external positioning is supplemented by a different form of ‘institutional positioning’ that is apparent in one of the habitual practices in the Board meetings. From the first full meeting recorded in May 2011, every board meeting started with a briefing and review of the current economic indicators in the wider society. This was a general commentary by the chairman on the political, social and economic activity as reported in recent media coverage. Its purpose was to provide a general point of reference against which board members could ‘position’ KT-Inc and it also informed the discussions and decisions they were about to take.

Extract 8.93

(0:02:41.8) Ken (GM): I think the biggest problem that we face is Ireland Inc, eh, which is absolutely in crisis, and the knock on effect on consumer confidence.

Source: Board meeting, 10th May 2011

The initial sweeping statement from the chairman in Extract 8.93 brings the external economic environment into the board meeting discourse, and is followed by a ten minute discussion covering the general state of the Irish economy, degrees of consumer confidence and the savings and spending habits of people during these austere financial times. This sets the platform for the discussion to seamlessly shift to the topic of stockists, providing the natural bridge through which to consider the impact of consumer spending habits on the performance of the two major consumer sales channels for the company - own stores and stockists – as illustrated in Extract 8.94:
Extract 8.94

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0:09:03.0</td>
<td>Sill (FinD):</td>
<td>And our stores as well, (Jay) will tell you that, eh, very busy, very very busy, but very small orders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:09:09.8</td>
<td>Ken (GM):</td>
<td>Yea, no I was down in Waterford a couple of weeks ago and there were three on, and we were a half hour in the shop and the three of them were tied up all the time with, there were so many people coming in, and I was thinking, this is going to be a record month for Waterford, and eh, and it wasn't, ya know, so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:09:36.7</td>
<td>Tim (BC):</td>
<td>But (Ken), isn't there a, one infer, specifically in relation to the stockists, because I mean that seems to be, ya know, one of the areas of big, greatest challenge right now. There are some stockists that are actually performing very well [Ken (GM): there are], and there are other that are not performing well....</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Board meeting, 10th May 2011

Apart from this routine practice to inform the board members of the external climate in which KT-Inc must position itself, we can also see how external consultants were engaged and interacted through board meetings to support or expand on details of that external environment. Specifically, Extract 8.95 shows how a marketing consultant was engaged to provide the July 2011 Board meeting with a more detailed analysis of consumer spending habits:

Extract 8.95

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:07:12.3</td>
<td>Mark (MC):</td>
<td>And then, (Gavin) has asked me to look at one or two things. .... looking at primarily the consumer durables markets, those which rely on eh, eh disposable income, those which rely on housing and households and people moving house etcetera etcetera which gives a feed into, into what you folk will hear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:07:37.8</td>
<td>Mark (MC):</td>
<td>Em, ... again a non-commercial piece of research eh which is looking at the impact of what you might call the senior customers or the senior consumers out there and there's been a major major major change in trends in this country, eh in the last few years towards the eh, power shifting, economic power shifting towards owner customers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Board meeting, 26th July 2011
These Board practices complement and contribute to the broader sensemaking role of meetings that we considered in Chapter 7. Aspects of the external world that are considered relevant to the institutional positioning of KT-Inc are ‘made present’, or enacted in meetings to use the sensemaking vernacular, which enables the meetings to play an active role in the ongoing positioning of the company when it comes to projecting the company image and identity to the outside world. The bi-directional flow of communication is necessary to ensure a sustainable recursive interaction between the company (members) having visibility of how KT-Inc is perceived or positioned externally, versus how they wish the company to be perceived or the image they wish to project to the outside world. Meetings provide a crucial portal through which this bi-directional communication flow is created and channelled, informing the broadest base of company members along with the broadest constituency outside the company.

As a final example of how board meetings are instrumental in institutional positioning, the relationship with the company’s banker was a topic of discussion at the September board meeting:

Extract 8.96

(0:55:58.3) Ken (GM): I think there is an issue with the bank, mister chairman, if I can just bring it up. Eh, the bank......, I’m finding them very difficult to deal with. For example you’re due a company credit card and so is (Jay). Our bank won’t issue a credit card for the company with, .... unless I sign a personal guarantee covering the maximum amount. ..... I have to sign a personal guarantee, guaranteeing the maximum monthly amount. .... They won’t issue your cards until I have, until I issue the guarantee. Now I can’t believe that they have the same requirement on Intel, that the shareholders or the managing director of Intel has to personally guarantee all the eh, ...... and at this stage I would be delighted to move all our business to a continental bank..... Yea, well, I, I just think it’s an unusual requirement that I have to sign a personal guarantee.

(0:57:53.3) Tim (BC): It is absolutely, and if I were in your shoes (Ken), I wouldn’t do it. I just simply wouldn’t do it.

(0:58:00.6) Ken (GM): particularly when, ya know, the company is in a strong and has never been, has never had a loan with them, has always been in a cash position with them.
Through the bank’s apparently unreasonable action, the board comes to the conclusion that engaging in periodic tendering processes for the provision of banking services is the appropriate way to overcome what they see as an unreasonable bank request. The company’s institutional position as a relatively large client of an external bank will now be determined through a new (tendering) method of engaging with such external commercial entities. We can also see from this exchange another dimension of the general managers membership negotiation from the banking perspective - in practical terms, the bank, through the institutional positioning flow, expresses its own view of Ken’s internal membership in KT-Inc - they see him as indistinguishable personally from the company when it comes to guaranteeing repayment of credit offered. This reinforces McPhee and Zaug’s (2009) contention that the intersection of the four flows rather than any single flow is the site of instantiating organization.

8.4.3 Sales SBU - relationship building with partners and public

One of the key aspects of institutional positioning for KT-Inc is its relationship with the general public, who ultimately buy its products and keep it in business. As we will see, this relationship is built through a range of channels (radio, TV, newspapers, magazines etc.), involving multiple meetings of many different groups, all with the end goal of promoting and selling KT-Inc product to the widest possible audience.

Stockists as independent shops selling KT-Inc products are central to the institutional positioning of KT-Inc. Stockists could be considered key mediators of the relationship between KT-Inc and the members of the general public who are product end users. For this reason, the relationship with the stockists is of crucial importance to the institutional positioning of KT-Inc, both in terms of how KT-Inc is perceived by the stockists relative to its competitors, and also how it comes to be positioned in the minds of the general public.

The stockists’ sales team had direct responsibility for selling KT-Inc product into the network of 120 stockists throughout Ireland. The sales team formed the communicative core of the Sales and Marketing SBU. Meetings of multiple groups within KT-Inc
(board, PAG, marketing forum etc.) were instrumental in providing two-way communication channels through which the sales team could update the organization on its positioning in the market place. At the same time sales team meetings provided the information needed to promote KT-Inc to that market place in the most positive way possible. Meetings, both within KT-Inc and external to it, play a central and significant role in this institutional positioning process and communication flow.

The first example of relationship building to position KT-Inc institutionally, is taken from the February 2011 Company AGM, in which the sales manager Jack emphasises the importance of board members playing an active role in the promotional work of the sales team:

Extract 8.97

(1:13:00.5) Jack (SaM): I always think, .... I mean even the time that (Pete) went out and (Gavin) went out with the teams out into the market, I think I did think that that helps the thing. Now I've been busy in the last month and my plan is to .... to spend more time out there, but I also think that, even helping people out, just for an odd day or two, does boost up morale if you have someone from the office with you, ya know [ok]. Appreciate what you're doing, .... When you're working on the road you're working on your own, ya know, [uh hm yea] to see somebody from the offices, it's great to have somebody with you, ya know.

(1:13:31.8) Guy (IndM): .... I think the update meetings as well from (Ken), when you give us update meetings, I don't know if they're being quarterly to being activities ya do on a quarter, just a ten minute meeting with the staff just to say, ya know, we're doing this, we're doing that, just to keep them abreast of projects that are going on and which way we're directing the company.

Source: Board meeting, 15th February 2011

This extract also illustrates an example of cross over between the 4-flows. Managers had attended this AGM, effectively acting as meeting trans-participants, when the GM asked them for feedback on morale within KT-Inc's staff. The GM's request elicits a response that reflects a certain degree of activity coordination and membership negotiation, as it shows that board members can 'double job' by joining sales teams on the ground with clients. Jack at 1:13:00 refers to an initiative called 'tag teams', in which board members were paired with sales team members, to engage in direct meetings with customers on the ground. This assisted the activity of the sales team in institutional positioning, enabling a stronger sense of commitment to be communicated
to the clients about the company, but it also enabled first-hand information from the
ground to be communicated directly back into board meetings regarding the position
of KT-Inc with the stockists. Tag teams represented one means by which bi-directional
information flowed, through the board members and board meetings, between KT-Inc
and its external environment.

The tag team initiative also contributed to the *membership negotiation* by board
members, as they show themselves to contribute to the work of other teams within the
company that they may not be part of. While Jack used the February 2011 board
meeting as an opportunity to convey the importance of the tag team interactions with
the sales team, Guy, the industrial manager also emphasised the importance and value
of short, more conventional meetings with Ken, the general manager, to keep staff abreast of internal and external developments. This also contributed to both
*membership negotiation* and *activity coordination* communication flows.

Relationships with the sales team were also essential to the development of the service
level agreement with stockists. We have seen in Section 8.3.1 on the economic profit
initiative, how meetings played a key role in assembling new groups to develop the
SLA. In Extract 8.98, we see how previous meetings were used to collect and
communicate key elements that stockists wanted to see in the SLA that was being
developed:

**Extract 8.98**

```
(1:20:48.1) Jack (SaM): So em, what, it's the first thing, we went to the (Albatros)
guys, number one item on their agenda, would be, ya know, pricing cause we have
three (Albatros) stores within a, within a run now of, of (town D).
(1:20:59.6) Gavin (MarD): So we need to have it right before we go to them.
(1:21:10.4) Jack (SaM): Anyway, this is an anomaly I throw out there because if
you went to (Albatros) now to talk about service level agreements, the first thing
would be, would be pricing being undermined in your shop, somewhere like (town
A) would have, would have (town B) catching them, they would have (town C)
with a (town D), and people do shop around, and there would have to be guidelines
for staff.
```

Source: Stockists rejuvenation initiative meeting, 16th June 2011
At (at 1:21:10), Jack also alludes to another significant factor he had raised just ten minutes previously that related to KT-Inc’s institutional positioning - competition between stockists and KT-In’s own retail stores:

Extract 8.99

(1:09:58.6) Jack (SaM): But there’s about five or six stockists within a catchment area of (town B) that have complained about the price of (KT-Inc product) in (town B). ... our default position has always been that we’ve a band of pricing for every product we have, that our shops are always within the band, and we always say, well, lookit, if you ever get a price from a customer, and they could quote you any price, so give us some written evidence, and eh, an invoice copy came down of (KT-Inc product) being sold at about 18% below the bottom end of the, bottom end of the eh, sorry the bottom end of the price band. ....... and here’s the email that followed ....

(1:11:50.6) Jack (SaM): ..... in terms of service level agreements, we’re at nothing unless we can, if there’s, if there’s a perception that one is pulling against the other

(1:11:58.1) Tim (BC): Yea, well ... I’ve raised this, it was one of the very first issues I raised with, its very difficult to be a wholesaler and a retailer at [the same time and ....

(1:12:36.5) Tim (BC): But, the way I would see a service level agreement em, eh, working is it would help to copper fasten prices, eh and that there’d be no room to hide and there’d be no room for, wiggle room for (Keith) to, like, to lower prices in order to boost his sales in retail. Ya know, it would all have to be above board and transparent, I mean that could really undermine your own business.

(1:13:05.5) Jack (SaM): Well, ..... 

(1:13:35.8) Martin (Res): Why would your own st, why would your own retail stores not be on the same service level agreement as everybody else?

(1:13:40.4) Tim (BC): It should be, that’s why I’m saying they should be.

Source: Stockists rejuvenation initiative meeting, 16th June 2011

This introduced another consideration that was subsequently brought into the SLA teams deliberations - making ‘own stores’ subject to the same basic SLA terms as the competing stockists, to avoid disaffection by the stockists from any perception of unfair competition from KT-Inc’s retail stores. The meetings in question were instrumental in developing the image of KT-Inc and the relationship with stockists (through the SLA) that would then be communicated to the (external) stockist community.
While product pricing is acknowledged as central to the stockists’ interests, KT-Inc also paid significant attention to developing the stockists’ technical knowledge of KT-Inc products. This was done through provision of training workshops that involved considerable investment of time and effort from a wide range of KT-Inc staff. Meetings provided the fora through which the necessary information sharing, role definition and activity coordination took place to support development and delivery of these workshops, which were also central to the identity KT-Inc wanted to convey to its stockists. We can see in Extract 8.100 how stockists training was ranked in the top four company projects:

Extract 8.100

(0:02:24.7) Ken (GM): I realise there’s a lot on this list, and this just relates to our stockists and projects that cross over between our stockists and our retail. So the top four the (colour project), HT, the on the road stockists training and the rollout of the (new product), .... What’s happened is we’ve added on a lot of additional ones, in terms of our stockists plan, that’s the sbu strategic business units stockists plan, ....

Source: Board meeting, 15th February 2011

This stockists training initiative was significant enough to attract a dedicated meeting in November 2011 to develop specific ideas and proposals for how it would be carried forward as a direct support for the stockists community. The meeting chair, Tanya, initially indicated the meeting purpose before providing feedback on previous experience from the stockists’ training:

Extract 8.101

(0:00:07.9) Tanya (ODir): Stockists training, because it’s been going on for, I think, since six years, em, so a, I think if we are going to continue it on it, we need to, it needs rejuvenation anyways. Secondly, we have to ask is it the right way of doing it, because, we, it, it is hugely resource intensive .......

(0:00:49.5) Tanya (ODir): And I just got some feedback, em, (Ken) was saying that em, a line that comes easy to mind if you have a key message you need to repeat repeat repeat it to improve retention.

(0:00:59.7) Tanya (ODir): We need to agree on what our key message is to stockists in 2012, probably no more than three and then each of us needs to ensure we discuss these messages and reinforce these messages in, in our respective
Tanya emphasises (at 0:00:59) the need to use “our respective presentations” to reinforce key messages, an implicit call to using them at the meetings at which they will be presented. Later in the meeting she poses the simple question on getting stockists to attend:

Extract 8.102

(0:15:43.1) Tanya (ODir): So how do we get them? Ya know, obviously incentives as well, but
(0:15:44.4) Leo (HSM): part of it is going to be part of SLAs anyway, when we talk about them .....
(0:16:14.2) Tanya (ODir): Well maybe if its more part of the SLA we'll get a better, cause I just, I really believe we need to .....

Source: Special training meeting, 30th November 2011

The very short exchange with Leo in extract 8.102 illustrates how different activities previously reviewed, arising from the meetings of different groups, are ultimately drawn together in the discourse of further meetings such as this special training meeting. Prior to the special training meeting of November 2011, in the rejuvenation team meeting of 16th June 2011, Tim, backed up by Gavin, had raised the question of brand ambassadors as shown in Extract 8.103:

Extract 8.103

(1:38:15.6) Tim (BC): The other area, that, that we em, we talk about but we need to put meat on it, is ya know, the stockists functioning as brand ambassadors, ya know, I think this is one of the, we need to define what a brand ambassador [Gavin (MarD): what that means , yea] ya know, what, what would a brand ambassador look like if we saw one here.

Source: Rejuvenation team meeting, 16th June 2011

The meaning of ‘brand ambassadors’ was not exclusively resolved at this meeting, but went on to be addressed at different meetings of different groups, over the subsequent
three month period. The stockist team picked up this topic of developing brand ambassadors at their October meeting:

**Extract 8.104**

(1:49:22.5) Leo (HSM): So here we are, back to an ambassador again [Stan (RSR3): exactly, Breda is ] I want to get common, there's goin to be, sorry (Stan), I don't mean to cut across you but there's a couple of things that are going, I'm hearing two things that's always been said so far, one is an ambassador, and I'm nearly getting there to be first.....

(1:49:38.7) Ken (GM): And that's why we've stockists [Leo (HSM): but there's two things, yea ] training programmes, that's to try and develop ambras, ambassadors and hold on to them, the ambassa, we should never take our ambassadors for granted, ya know.

Source: Stockists team meeting, 24th October 2011

The benefit of the training investment in the development of the stockists was the creation of ‘brand ambassadors’, who would carry the KT-Inc message and significantly contribute to the positioning of both KT-Inc and its product range in the minds of the general public. Ken emphasises at 1:49:38 the fact that the role of the brand ambassadors should never be taken for granted, but there can be little doubt that their role is central to the institutional positioning of KT-Inc and its products.

Building direct relationships and positioning KT-Inc products in the minds of the public is also threaded through the meetings of multiple groups in KT-Inc. The marketing forum was charged with developing ideas to do just that and we can see in Extract 8.105, how they used national radio as a zero-cost means to accomplish their desired institutional positioning at national level:

**Extract 8.105**

(2:38:23.7) Gavin (MarD): The big, the big outcome from this one (Tim) would be ah, a slot on Morning Ireland. He, (Ken's) getting a slot on Morning Ir, to me that's far more valuable than the Taoiseach's visit, ya know, [they're doing features.

(2:38:33.3) Ken (GM): But it's Ireland AM], on TV3 right?

(2:38:35.7) Gavin (MarD): No, it's it's Morning Ireland.

(2:38:36.7) Ken (GM): Oh Morning Ireland on radio.

Source: Marketing Forum meeting, 16th June 2011

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Gavin (at 2:38:23) refers to ‘Morning Ireland’, a flagship national radio show with one of the highest listenerships in Ireland, providing a significant platform from which Ken, acting in one of his roles we explored under the membership negotiation flow, can position KT-Inc as a commercial player on the national stage within their particular product segment. Gavin’s reference to that being “more valuable than the Taoiseach’s visit”, (note ‘Taoiseach’ is the Irish Prime Minister) links to another initiative that involved the whole organization hosting a community Halloween party at the company’s factory shop, positioning KT-Inc in both its local environment and also on the broader national stage.

In the broadest sense, KT-Inc’s institutional positioning can be observed through the bi-directional communication flow taking place in and through meetings. Activities, events or developments in wider society are communicated into the organization through its meetings with a view to informing the organization members of relevant activity from the outside world. The reverse communication flow can also be observed through meetings directing communication out of the organization, intended to position KT-Inc as a supplier to its customers, a partner to its stockists or a responsible corporate citizen in its community. ‘Internal to outside’ communication occurred through the meetings of many different groups. The sales and marketing SBU was particularly focused on KT-Inc’s institutional positioning and used its meetings for bi-directional communication with stockists to inform the development of the stockists’ SLA. The SLA significantly altered the institutional positioning of KT-Inc with its primary (external) sales channel. The development and projection of brand identity was another significant focus for the sales and marketing team’s meetings that was one of the most easily observed activities aimed at projecting a specific image of the company to the outside world. The concept of brand ambassadors to convey that brand identity originated in and was developed through multiple meetings of many different groups in the company.

The Extracts in this section provide a relatively small sample but a diverse range of examples of how meetings taking place in different meeting streams, combined to produce a suite of initiatives and activities (brand ambassadors, radio interviews, SLAs, community parties etc.) that were central to and played a significant part in the institutional positioning of KT-Inc. The analysis also shows that meetings deal with perceptions related to KT-Inc (both external and internal) as well as actions or activity to communicate those perceptions. For example, how KT-Inc was perceived by the
outside world was exemplified by the GM’s involvement with industry related trade bodies, while how KT-Inc perceived its own positioning with respect to the outside world was reflected in the chairman’s routinized opening of board meetings with a general economic update. Table 8.2 summarises the analysis of institutional positioning that was carried out in this section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>External to inside</th>
<th>Internal to outside</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The way KT-Inc is perceived by the external world</td>
<td>Image of KT-Inc to be conveyed to outside world.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How KT-Inc informs itself of how it is perceived by the outside world.</td>
<td>Means by which KT-Inc is conveyed to outside world.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.2 – Variations in accomplishing institutional positioning

The agency of meetings collectively as identified through the data analysis could not be accomplished by any single meeting, no matter how well planned, attended or executed. The analysis also shows that the agency of meetings collectively depends significantly on trans-participants engaging across the meetings of different groups, spanning considerable time periods. It in part arises from the hybridicity (Cooren, 2004b, p. 377) of meeting trans-participants and textual mobiles interacting in and through meetings, to channel the diversity of the whole organization into focused meeting activity to accomplish the institutional positioning of KT-Inc.

8.5 MEETINGS AT THE INTERSECTION OF THE 4-FLOWS

McPhee and Zaug (2009) were clear that organization occurs at the intersection of the four flows rather than within any individual flow. It is therefore appropriate to consider how the intersection of the flows is reflected in individual meetings and how meetings collectively are in turn constitutive of the organization. If meetings are accepted as “the organization or community writ small” (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 39), then parsing McPhee and Zaug’s (2009, p. 28) definition of organization helps us to consider how its component parts apply to meetings collectively, and by extension, how the 4-Flows and meetings collectively align to constitute organization. They define an organization as: “A social interaction system, influenced by prevailing economic and legal institutional practices, and including coordinated action and interaction within and
across a socially constructed system boundary, manifestly directed toward a privileged set of outcomes”.

We can first consider meetings collectively as “...a social interaction system...”. In so far as a social interaction system is taken to mean interactions between people, taking place in a recognisably structured form, meetings in KT-Inc clearly meet these criteria. Meeting structure in KT-Inc was defined by a written “meeting code of conduct” (see Appendix 6), but more practically by established norms and habitual practice. Meeting participants are defined in one of two key ways - standing attendees due to membership of particular cohort groups (SBUs, project teams, board, single topic groups etc.) or special invitees to contribute to a specific meeting or about a specific topic (e.g. consultant presentation to the board, SBU heads attending board meetings, research observer participants etc.). Focusing on the social interactions of Ken (the general manager) as one of a number of meeting trans-participant, we saw in Section 8.1.2 how the correlation of his different identities as owner, general manager, board member or regular team member were each conveyed at different meetings, involving different groups, both inside and outside the organization. At some meetings he is seen as being the organization, at others he speaks for the organization, while in staff briefings he portrays himself as a regular member of the organization. These multi-dimensions only become visible when we examine their occurrence across meetings collectively, since they do not generally occur together in any one single meeting.

The next consideration is to view meetings collectively as “...influenced by prevailing economic and legal institutional practices...”. We need look no further than the opening of every board meeting to see the routine practice of the chairman providing a summary of current (macro) economic activity in the country, to contextualize the forthcoming board discussion. Through the activity coordination of closing down the Bearings product line, or the membership (re)negotiation and disidentification of the sales manager from KT-Inc, the multiple meetings involved in the associated decision-making are strongly informed by legal considerations provided by expert attendees such as the HR manager or the company lawyer. In the reflexive self-structuring flow (Section 8.2), we saw how the cost of meetings and their excessively high number might be viewed in internal (micro) economic terms. Expressed concerns about meeting cost and frequency were counter balanced by a contradictory tendency for meetings to generate further meetings without much challenge. Paradoxically, this occurred without acknowledgement of how such further meetings contributed to the
economic cost and the excessive number of meetings already recognised in the company.

Reflecting on the third component of the definition directs us to consider meetings collectively as "...including coordinated action and interaction within and across a socially constructed system boundary...". Boundaries can be taken for granted and remain invisible and unremarked until they are disturbed or changed. (System) boundaries may become more apparent when efforts are made to change them, when they can come into focus having been previously unseen. In broad terms, KT-Inc meeting boundaries operated at two levels. The first level involved the habitual nature of meeting attendees. The new chairman’s proposals to change the attendees coming to board meetings had the immediate effect of blurring the boundaries between the board’s meetings and those of the company SBU meetings, while at the same time reinforcing each of these separate system components by ensuring greater cross-exchange of information and ideas. The second level, considered in broader discursive terms, sees KT-Inc meetings as separate from but still an integral part of the ongoing river of discourse of the whole organization. Pre-meeting and post-meeting talk, or “Chit-chat” (Yoerger et al., 2015), on the fringes of meetings, represents significant intersections where the discursive flows from both meetings and the organization blend together. Meetings habitually opened immediately after pre-meeting talk that involved personal, social and company-related activities. Meeting breaks and post-meeting discussions followed the same patterns and were examples of frequently occurring meeting-related activity that blurred the boundaries between meetings and the wider organization discourse, while at the same time reinforcing the fact that the meetings were still of the organization.

The final aspect of the definition to adapt to meetings collectively is how they "...manifestly directed toward a privileged set of outcomes.". Decision-making is considered a normal expectation of meetings (Karreman & Alvesson, 2001, p. 60), yet one of the recurring outcomes of the analysis under each of the four flows is the apparent indeterminate outcome of individual meetings in KT-Inc. Where discrete decisions were made and appeared to represent ‘privileged outcomes’, they also reflected Luhmann’s (2006c) decision paradox in requiring further meetings to address (new) decisions that were required following previous decisions already made. Where decisions appear to narrow down available options, or resolve contingency as Luhmann (2006c) puts it, they actually create further contingency that has to be resolved through
further rounds of decision-making. We see from the KT-Inc data that decisions made in meetings (shutting down Bearings, making Jack redundant, implementing the economic profit initiative, hiring Leo as a new HSM etc.) not only prompt further decision-making, but also prompt the formation of new (sub)groups and/or the calling of further meetings to enable and support the new rounds of decision making that will be required. In KT-Inc, decision making and meetings seem inextricably linked. As examples of this, we saw the necessity for a number of meetings to take place in order to accomplish more holistic outcomes to the negotiation of someone's membership, the coordination of specific activities or the reflexive self-structuring of component parts of the organization. Streams of meetings were necessary parts of broader decision-making processes, occurring across space and time and contributing to each of the four communicative flows.

Parsing McPhee and Zaug's definition of organization allows it be conceptually applied to define meetings collectively as much as to define the whole organization within which meetings take place. While there is no suggestion that meetings collectively are the organization, the analysis increasingly reinforces Schwartzman's view of meetings as the organization 'writ small'. Schwartzman (1989) did not make it explicitly clear if the organization was writ small within individual meetings, or if she intended to mean the organization was writ small across all of the organization's meetings when considered collectively, although the former is most probably her intention. However, she was clear and reiterated most recently, that meetings “are important social forms because they may serve as sensemaking and social-validating forms for organizations, ...” (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 737). Chapter 7 analysed meetings collectively as an integral part of the sensemaking processes taking place at whole organization level. This chapter analysed meetings from four distinct 'communication flow' perspectives. It becomes increasingly clear from both analyses that meetings exhibit varying forms of agency, to varying degrees, both individually and collectively.
8.6 CONCLUSION

Where Chapter 7 used sensemaking (ESR) as a zoomed-out analytical lens, this chapter adopted McPhee and Zaug's (2009) 4-Flows model as a zoomed-in analytical lens (Nicolini, 2009) through which to analyse the agency of KT-Inc's meetings collectively. The 4-Flows model "seek[s] to explain organizations as complex distanciated systems" (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 29), and provided "a template by which to detect, diagnose, and assess novel organizational phenomena" (p. 32) – in this case the agency of meetings collectively. The 4-Flows model is both sympathetic to and complementary of the systemic process Weltanschauung that informed the overall research, while providing a meso-level analytical lens through which to examine the contribution of meetings collectively to the constitution of organizations as distanciated systems.

Meetings collectively, as organizational phenomena, were considered in a way distinct from the individual-centered approach more traditionally adopted in meetings-focused research (Schwartzman, 2015). Their collective contribution to the four communicative flows were analysed, mindful that "complex organizations exist only in the relatedness of these four types of flow" (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 21). Individual meetings can be analysed from multiple perspectives (Cooren, 2007) but their analysis as a collective organizational resource focused on details of the discourse taking place within meetings to identify the essential drivers of the agency of meetings collectively that span time and distance in an organizational context.

Single meetings and streams of meetings collectively were seen to account for cumulative decisions and associated actions throughout KT-Inc. Meetings collectively formed a network of connected nodes that created their own paradoxes of decision-making (Luhmann, 2006c), in that meetings called to resolve issues raised from previous meetings, frequently generated new meetings. This could be viewed as an autopoietic cycle regenerating streams of meetings collectively around which the organization is discursively (re)constituted on an ongoing basis (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 165). Extending McPhee and Zaug’s (2009) anatomical metaphor of organizations “as a collection of member cells with messages the blood, the hormones, the nerve impulses” (p. 30), meetings collectively, as relatively short-lived and fleeting events, constitute a transient skeleton that is in a constant state of decay and regeneration, around which the organization grows and develops. The analysis of meetings
collectively in this chapter highlighted a number of significant features that will be expanded in Chapter 9.

Membership negotiation - whether dealing with the transformation of individuals’ roles, the passing of roles from one person to another, the induction of new organization members or the disidentification of existing members, such changes are accomplished through interactions across multiple meetings, involving multiple groups, rather than through any one single meeting.

Reflexive self-structuring - meetings collectively are central to the definition, development or alteration of organizational structures and processes. They exhibit characteristics of autopoietic regeneration by frequently prompting the establishment of yet further meetings to perpetuate these cycles of organizational self-renewal.

Activity coordination - While meetings collectively are expected to be sites of decision making, they paradoxically generate the need for further decision making arising from previous decisions made. Activity generated through such decision making is coordinated through meetings collectively, prompting further cycles of meetings to make yet more decisions. Meetings collectively could be considered the glue that holds reflexive self-structuring and activity coordination in synchronicity as essential drivers of the organization’s existential trajectory, mindful that such trajectory can be negative or positive, leading to growth or decline of organizations.

Institutional positioning - positioning of the organization is accomplished through bi-directional communication between the organization and entities in its wider environment. Through meetings collectively, the organization is kept informed of its position in the outside world along with factors that may affect that position. At the same time, through the other three flows, meetings collectively enable the organization to generate a unique identity and play an active role in communicating that identity to the outside world.
CHAPTER 9

MEETING AS SYSTEMIC PROCESS FRAMEWORK
9 THE MASP FRAMEWORK

MaSP refers to Meetings as Systemic Process and represents a consolidation of the research findings from the analysis in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. While each chapter adopted a different perspective to analyse the meetings data, this Chapter presents the research findings as a holistic integration of three perspectives. The findings are grouped under four main headings. Section 9.1 focuses on the modalities of meeting connections. These connections are sub-divided into three main sub-groups related to people, material artefacts and organizational processes, each of which will be considered in detail in Section 9.1. As well as identifying the means by which meetings are connected, the analysis also identified the temporal implications of meeting connectivity. Section 9.2 will consider temporality in more detail. This includes the ‘clock time’ temporality (Hendry & Seidl, 2003, p. 181; Orlikowski & Yates, 2002, p. 686) associated with meetings collectively, as reflected in the Systemic Meetings Model from Chapter 7. It also considers ‘experienced time’ (Hernes, 2014, pp. 33-34) or ‘socially constructed time’ (Pettigrew, 1990, p. 273) that became more evident when the meetings collectively were analysed through the CCO lens and was seen to have temporally ordering effects (Langley et al., 2013) beyond individual meetings. A section is then devoted to a third category of research findings associated with meeting utilization. This focuses on the ways in which meetings are used, but more particularly the ways in which they are perceived for use by the meeting participants. Clear intentionality in respect of convening individual meetings starkly contrasts with the apparent absence of intentionality towards meetings collectively. Section 9.4 presents the MaSP Framework as a re-conceptualisation of organizational meetings collectively arising from the data analysis, after which there is a conclusion section.

9.1 MODALITIES OF MEETING CONNECTIONS

This section draws together the findings from Chapters 6, 7 and 8 to present transparticipants, material artefacts and shared processes as three principal modalities of systemic meeting connections. We will see how individually or collectively, these features combine as actors and actants to contribute to the agency of meetings collectively. Where necessary and for ease of reference they will be referred to collectively as MCs (meeting connectors).
9.1.1 Trans-participants as meeting connectors

Trans-participants are human actors who physically take part in multiple meetings, across meeting streams. Their influence as MCs is direct, overt and readily visible at meetings. Wager (1972, p. 310) identified organizational managers as ‘linking pins’, acting as seekers or givers of information depending on their status within particular groups or meetings they attend. Weick (1979, p. 19) adapted Wager’s concept to sensemaking, defining ‘link pins’ as people with membership in two or more overlapping groups who adopt superordinate and subordinate roles in meetings at different levels and promote cooperation between the separate groups (Wager, 1972, p. 308). While there are elements of ‘link pin’ characteristics in the participants in KT-Inc meetings, the analysis supports identifying a more specific type of meeting participant.

Analysis of the data identified at least four managers in KT-Inc who were considered trans-participants, operating at a relatively consistent level of influence across the meetings they attended, as illustrated in Figure 6.4 (reproduced).

These managers were habitual participants in the meetings of different groups and frequently fulfilled that role, often attending the meetings of more than two groups. Figure 6.4 also highlights one participant (the Retail Manager – Ret Man) who might technically be considered a trans-participant but operates quite infrequently in this way.
and at a more limited number of different groups' meetings. This illustrates that trans-participants may be sub-categorized, depending on their status or position in the organization, the number of different groups’ meetings they attend, the degree to which they engage in meetings, the level of influence they exert, the topics they raise or how other participants react to them. Trans-participants may therefore bring different degrees of meeting connectivity and may strongly or weakly influence the extent to which meetings are seen as collectively agential.

Participation across meetings of different streams provides a valuable opportunity for the trans-participants to experience zoomed-out and zoomed-in perspectives (Nicolini, 2009) of the whole organization. As an example, the operations director attended weekly Ops team meetings as well as many other meetings dealing with day to day operations activity, seeing KT-Inc at the zoomed-in level. He also attended bi-monthly Board meetings and executive strategy sessions affording him a zoomed-out perspective on the wider trading environment in general and on the organization itself in particular. This is a relatively privileged perspective not afforded to all meeting participants in an organization that the KT-Inc Ops director brought to bear in fulfilling his role. While Nicolini’s (2009) approach provides a methodology for studying organizations, it can also be lived in practice through the actions of trans-participants, enabling them to ‘analyse in practice’ as a means of making sense of their unfolding organizations. In this context, decisions associated with who should attend different meetings has an impact beyond the affect or emotion that meeting participants have on meetings (Lei & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015; Thomas & Allen, 2015). This point will be addressed further in Chapter 10, when considering the implications for practice of the MaSP framework.

9.1.2 Connecting meetings through ‘Ghost-participants’

Meeting connections are also achieved through involvement of what I refer to as ‘ghost-participants’, or manifestations of human actors who are not physically present but who are discursively invoked or represented in meetings and can have significant influence in and across meetings. Absent participation is achieved through invocation, while controllers-by-proxy is achieved through representation, both of which are accomplished through acts of ventriloquism.
**Absent participation**

Multiple instances recur in the data of someone not physically present at a meeting being discursively constructed and manifested within meetings. An ‘absent participation’ is therefore a discursive construction by meeting participants that broadly comes within the scope of what Cooren (2012) calls “ventriloquism”. Absent participation is observed in the way meeting participants invoke the views, opinions, or pronouncements of people who are not physically present but are articulated as though they were present.

Absent participation influences the direction of a discussion, reinforces an individual’s contribution, or provides information that should be taken into account in the current discussion largely because of its cited origins. It may also be used as a crutch by participants to reinforce their own views or standing within meetings. When used, the invoker of absent participation typically refers to something relayed by someone at another meeting, providing the premise on which the absentee is invoked, and makes the phenomenon another specific way in which meetings are connected.

The relative power of absent participation lies in the way in which the invoker characterizes the third party’s views, the specific issues on which the absent participation is referenced, or the role of the individual who is citing a third party. Absent participation is a behaviour initiated and executed by participants at meetings but it should be noted that the third party ventriloquized by a meeting attendee most probably does not know they are being invoked.

Another noted feature of absent participation is its capacity to connect organizational discourse outside meetings and make it present within meetings. It represents a form of enactment in the context of sensemaking but also provides a means of ventriloquizing in meetings the voices of people who could not or were not invited to attend particular meetings.

Recounting or relaying stories in meetings is another form of absent participation that was observed in KT-Inc’s meetings and served to connect them across time and space. Some organizations develop a storytelling culture (Hansen & Allen, 2015) which can inform organizational orientation towards meetings and is also recognised in the literature as an important contributor to organizational sensemaking (Colville et al., 2012, p. 7).
Controllers-by-Proxy

Individuals who are not present at meetings may also seek to exert influence or control in ways that are quite distinct from those who invoke absent participation. Controllers-by-proxy may deliberately or subliminally seek to be represented in meetings by influencing others to carry their message into meetings that the controllers-by-proxy do not attend. Kuhn (2008) referred to a similar concept more generally: “As actors engage with others in firm-implicating conversations, they attribute causal power (and anticipate formal and informal rewards and punishments) to the absent-yet-present actant ‘lurking’ in the image of the firm on which they operate.” (p. 1236). While Kuhn uses a similar form of words to ‘absent participation’, his expression seems more closely related to the concept of controllers-by-proxy as identified in the KT-Inc meetings data. Meetings become one of the arenas for the exercise of power that Kuhn refers to, through these discursively constructed mechanisms. The chairman’s proposal that his management philosophy, preserved on a laminated sheet (see Appendix 8), could be communicated throughout the company, could be considered a more explicit example of a controller-by-proxy proposing the use of an immutable mobile (see Section 9.1.3) at meetings he does not attend. Having documented and distributed his views on team commitments and behaviours to board members, the chairman also went on to attend numerous meetings as a trans-participant, at which he also promulgated his laminated management philosophy. This illustrates how trans-participants can act in hybridicity with material artefacts to contribute to the agency of meetings collectively.

The concept of controllers-by-proxy resembles the previous concept of absent participation, but significantly, differs in the individual who invokes it and who is also most likely to benefit from the practice – the absentee in the case of controllers-by-proxy and the individual present in the case of absent participation. Exercising control or influence is the common outcome, but it is achieved by two different individuals, in two different ways, but within the same setting of organizational meetings.

9.1.3 Material artefacts connecting meetings

The concept of textual agency, particularly as espoused by the Montreal School, was reviewed under CCO in Chapter 4. Text in this context was understood in the broadest sense as words and phrases constructed into understandable pieces of language (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 37). Significantly, these words or phrases can be written or
spoken, and both together or separately, are the ingredients of organizational discourse. Accordingly, ‘material artefacts’ is used to distinguish text or talk-based artefacts in tangible or communicable formats, from the people who might generate or carry them. Three types of such material artefacts became evident as MCs though the data analysis and are elaborated in more detail.

**Clustered Artefacts**

“Clustered artefacts,” refers to a collection of texts or documents that provide ways of connecting meetings to each other. The phrase ‘clustered’ is used to convey the sense that the individual artefacts seldom occur or operate in isolation and frequently combine with other artefacts to create inter-meeting connections. Their influence is more procedural in nature, impacting on how meetings are conducted and generally bringing a degree of consistency that otherwise may not exist.

As an example, KT-Inc has a written code of conduct for conducting meetings (Artefact 1 - see Appendix 6), that is posted in a number of meeting rooms on its premises. Not surprising is the requirement for each meeting to have an agenda (Artefact 2). Behavioural guidelines (Artefact 3) are provided for meeting conveners, as are the duties of meeting chairs and participants (Artefact 4). Unusually in my experience prior to working with KT-Inc, the policy also states that a review should take place at the end of each meeting (Artefact 5). Together, these form a cluster of five artefacts in KT-Inc. This cluster is invoked, either implicitly or explicitly, each time a meeting is held, thus connecting the meetings in a systemic way, even though some of the artefacts (such as the call for a meeting review) were ignored in practice.

The KT-Inc strategic plan was another clustered artefact, as it comprises multiple elements from SBUs or other areas that may become the subject matter of different meetings of different groups. It also came in three documented formats, each to be used in a different operational context. Many other examples could include safety manuals, procedures documents, manufacturing processes, sales techniques and so on. Clustered artefacts might be more accurately described by the oxymoron ‘static mobiles’ - static in so far as their form and content seldom change, but mobile in that they can be adopted universally across some or all meetings to standardise operational processes. The chairman’s management philosophy referred to in the previous section could also be considered an example of a ‘static mobile’, its static nature reinforced by preservation in plastic and its mobility proposed when the chairman presented it.
Immutable Mobiles

Cooren et al. (2007) adapt Latour’s (2005) “immutable mobile” concept to account for how particular aspects of organizational discourse can transport and preserve meaning across place and time and contribute toward building the distinctive essence of an organization. Adopting specific language to consistently refer to particular phenomena, or crafting focused messages on certain topics, represent different forms of immutable mobiles. Combinations of specific messages with particular trans-participants, whether written text or discursive talk, also play an important part in determining the nature and impact of immutable mobiles.

Minutes of meetings are a common and familiar form of immutable mobile but the data show them to be infrequently used, as well as a less volatile form of immutable mobile, given their textual form. In the data, a particular example of immutable mobile is worth highlighting, because it used a combination of different means of interconnections to achieve transportation between meetings. It involved the managing director, connecting meetings as a trans-participant, using a PowerPoint presentation of the recently approved company strategic plan (an immutable mobile) at up to ten different meetings of distinct organizational groups.

The reference in the meeting code of conduct (clustered artefact) to conducting a meeting review is an example of a specific artefact that more closely fits the original material conception of immutable mobile (Law, 2007). The meeting code of conduct started as an immutable mobile literally hanging on a wall in KT-Inc, but was progressively changed and adapted over time when implemented as a shared process across meetings. Through the action of multiple meetings, the immutable became mutable, and a new shared process for reviewing KT-Inc meetings was developed. A material artefact containing textualized intentions (immutable mobile), was discursively communicated as a potential process called PMI (still immutable), giving effect to an espoused intention to review meetings. Over time, PMI became a retained but changed process in the practice of different meeting streams. The KT-Inc PMI process (as distinct from the original one briefed) went undocumented and was a mutation from the original, going from immutable to mutable mobile following engagement through KT-Inc’s meetings. Levels of mutability may therefore differ between artefact types and may also change depending on which meeting streams are dealing with which immutable mobile.
**Temporal Markers**

The phrase “temporal marker” refers to events or activities that are driven by a prescribed timeline or deadline, serving as a recognizable punctuation point in the ongoing activities of an organization (Duffy & O’Rourke, 2012b). Periodic events such as an annual audit, seasonal product demand, or the calendar year’s end, to name a few, seemed to form part of a temporal drum beat, providing time-related controlling influences across KT-Inc’s meetings. Financial year end or seasonal product demands represented ‘static temporal markers’ in that they did not vary from one year to the next but recurred with clock-time predictability. In contrast, less predictable activities not governed by fixed periodicity such as market variations, customer changes, economic cycles and so on were determined by ‘event-time’ and can be described as ‘dynamic temporal markers’. Temporal markers generally had the effect of determining both the timing and content of different groups’ meetings, who the most appropriate meeting attendees might be, and also partially influenced the degree to which some meetings were explicitly connected to others. Including such markers in a systemic conceptualization of meetings provides an important temporal dimension of process (Hernes, 2014) and can guide the optimum timing and coordination of meetings to aid communication and control throughout the organization.

**9.1.4 Shared processes across meetings**

Meetings collectively represent one form of organizational memory, working as a sensemaking process to generate shared experiences, evolve common language or create textualized artefacts that can be discursively referenced or textually retrieved at a future date. We saw how meetings collectively were used to develop KT-Inc’s language for strategic planning, how different textual forms of the strategic plan were used in different ways for different meetings, and how meeting participants verbally referenced previous meetings to induct new organization members or to make sense of changes in the economic climate over an extended time period. Meetings collectively supported an iterative and recursive process of sensemaking by providing theatres in which previous experiences were (re)enacted, obviating the need for “...activating the past situation in its entirety ...” (Luhmann, 2013, p. 246). Selection as a sub-routine of sensemaking, supported making “something from the past as relevant”, while retention made it possible to “extract something from memory” in a “future situation” (Luhmann, 2013, p. 246). However, consistent application of this sensemaking process is not
necessarily a given in all circumstances and it is not always clear how retrieval from that memory can be reliably or consistently achieved. Hybridicity is considered in the next section as one means through which greater consistency of the sensemaking process across meetings collectively can be achieved.

From the more detailed analysis in Chapter 8, we saw how meetings contributed to four communicative flows that McPhee and Zaug (2000) argue constitute organization. Meetings collectively accommodated the intersection of those flows which McPhee and Zaug (2000) considered central to their constitutive capacity. The processual nature of meetings enabled patterns of shared processes across meetings collectively to be identified that supported access to and use of organizational memory. For example, the board meetings, managers meetings and sales team meetings, used a conventional process of the same individual chairing each of their meetings. While this approach may have ensured a degree of consistency as well as enhancement of the groups shared memory, the Operations team on the other hand, adopted a much less conventional approach of rotating the chair position across the team members. This ensured that the meetings were not dependent on the attendance of any particular participant (for example the Operations Director as team leader) and the weekly cycle of meetings seamlessly progressed even in his absence. It also had the effect of the group’s collective memory no longer being perceived to vest in a particular individual, but was a collective endeavour of the whole group. The processes associated with recording, writing, distributing and validating meeting outcomes, generally but not always in the form of meeting minutes, served as another form of collective memory for particular meeting streams but it was interesting to note that the Operations team did not record meeting minutes.

An additional observation from the analysis of both Chapters 7 and 8 was the use of specific meetings such as the Board AGM, PAG meetings, the annual sales team meeting or the managers meetings as intersection points for multiple meeting streams. These particular meetings were typically driven by temporal markers such as the start of the company’s financial (the annual sales team meeting in November), the filing of statutory accounts (Board AGM in February) or quarterly updates on implementing the strategic plan (Managers meeting). This formed an identifiable processual pattern in KT-Inc although there was no direct evidence in any individual meetings that they were consciously intended to serve such a purpose. It was only through observing meetings collectively over a prolonged period that the pattern became evident. Patterns of other
shared processes were also evident from the start of the data recording (e.g. broad adherence to the meetings code of conduct), or progressively developed as bespoke processes, such as the PMI meetings review process.

Reflecting on these processes collectively as they were associated with KT-Inc’s meetings, marks them as a third form of meeting connector. The collective effect of such processes shared across meetings, can itself be seen as a form of organizational memory, enabling a more consistent retrieval of past practices to inform present or future meeting practice. One aspect of memory associated with meetings collectively is embedded in the repeatability of processes in practice. The data analysis shows that this processual pattern does not necessarily arise from premeditated or purposeful design intention, but rather is an emergent outcome from the discourse taking place within meetings collectively.

9.1.5 Hybridicity of meeting connectors

Trans-participants, material artefacts or shared processes seldom acted in isolation in KT-Inc’s meetings and the data analysis shows they often occurred in hybrid pairs. For example, the GM (a trans-participant) used one of three versions of the company strategic plan (a clustered artefact) to brief different staff groups on KT-Inc’s future development. The new chairman Tim (trans-participant) prepared a laminated sheet containing his management philosophy (immutable mobile or static mobile, depending on who was using it), which was subsequently used at a number of meetings to contribute to ‘upping our game’ (shared process) as part of the culture shift required in KT-Inc. In my own role as a participant-observer (trans-participant), I presented PMI (immutable mobile) as an approach to accomplish meeting reviews, as required under the meetings code of conduct (clustered artefact), which was changed into a KT-Inc practice (mutable mobile), carried out across different meeting streams.

As another example, data related to on-line selling was discussed at a Board meeting on the 29th March 2012, as part of a market research initiative. This changed from data to information as Board members interpreted, added their views and made sense of it in the context of KT-Inc. The information created by the board was further converted to “actionable knowledge” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 415) subsequent to its presentation to the sales team at their meeting on the 15th May 2012, as they made sales plans based on the original data/information. This pattern of hybridicity contributed to a process converting raw demographic data presented at one meeting into actionable sales plans.
emerging from another. The agency of meetings collectively is evident in that they acted as mediators (Latour, 2005, p. 39) transforming inputs into different outputs which is a key purpose of such processes.

A comment by the board chairman highlighted a problem with the capacity of meetings to optimally deal with data presented to them:

Extract 9.1

(0:33:48.8) Tim (BC): Like, like the issue though, eh (Ken), is that we don’t ha, it’s not on anybody's agenda. I mean even if it was on, well it is on (Leo’s) agenda but, like for instance, at your stockist meetings, should there be, ya know, a slot on that where somebody like (Adele) or eh (Niamh) or whatever, comes and provides the numbers and looks at wha, and ya know, talks about the blogs, talks about what we’re doing, in other words that it’s, it’s an agenda item that you look at on an ongoing basis, eh and eh, like I’m not saying that we’re going to find the answer here in the next month or two months, but if it's not on people's agenda and it's not up there, I don’t think it's going to get the focus.

Source: Board meeting, 29th March 2012

In addition to the suggestion to link meeting agendas on an ongoing basis, the chairman’s suggestion in this case infers that the absence of particular people (or data) from one meeting may limit the scope of action at another meeting. The literature recognizes that data presented at meetings may have constrained meaning due to participants’ limitations to meaningfully interpret the data (Littlepage, 2015, p. 534). Insufficient requisite variety (Weick, 1979, p. 188) to deal with data presented at meetings may significantly limit the potential agency of that meeting. Tim’s contribution in Extract 9.1 suggests that matching meeting participants with planned agenda items will ensure the appropriate requisite variety of meeting participants to use the data, potentially increasing the agency of meetings collectively. It can be speculated that this is more likely to happen if the meetings are mindfully connected before they happen and then heedfully interrelated as they occur.

The data contained many such examples of connections between meetings being achieved through the hybridicity of different MCs, that enabled meetings to be considered collectively rather than in isolation of each other. Hybridicity contributed to imbrication (Taylor, 2000) as reviewed in Section 4.4.4, which positioned KT-Inc’s meetings collectively as “an infrastructure of routinized processes” (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 94) and “networks of relationship” (p. 132) that contributed to
constituting KT-Inc as an organization. The emerging patterns of activity or action cannot be attributed exclusively to any one component of the collective, whether meetings, people or artefacts, but rather to combinations of the components that reflect the agency of meetings collectively. In summary, Table 9.1 outlines the modalities of meeting connectors derived from the data analysis and extends the modes of connection identified in Section 7.6.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modalities of meeting connections</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People (Actors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material artefacts (actants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans-participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clustered artefacts (Static and dynamic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghost Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absent participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting mobiles (Mutable and immutable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controllers-by-proxy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporal Markers (Static and dynamic)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9.1 – Extended modalities of meeting connections

Viewed holistically, the data suggest that meetings can be partially reconstructed at some future date from three main elements: the original meeting agenda provides a textualized record of what the meeting participants intended to talk about; meeting minutes represent further textualized retention of particular meeting content; participants’ individual memory of discourse from the meeting they attended. In reconstructing parts of previous meetings the data show that individuals ascribe comments, opinions, or decisions to previous meetings that were not necessarily expressed on the agenda or in the minutes, but represent personal reconstructions from past meetings. This dynamic and individualistic ‘record’ of previous meetings is an important contributor to meetings collectively as an ongoing systemic process. Accessing organizational memory through this source is highly dependent on the availability of individual actors who were active participants in previous meetings. It also relies on people’s ability to recall details, which in general deteriorates with the passage of time.
9.2 TEMPORAL EFFECTS OF MEETING CONNECTIVITY

The sensemaking analysis in Chapter 7 drew initial attention to how past meetings were referenced (directly or indirectly) as a means of making sense in meetings in the present. In contrast to this linear appreciation of meeting temporality, the analysis from Chapter 8 indicates that meeting streams with higher meeting frequency deal with issues of a more immediate nature within the organization. More detailed findings reported in this section accounts for how clock-time is reflected in meetings, the temporal structuring effect of meetings, and the way in which meetings may act as a form of organizational metronome, each of which is considered in turn.

9.2.1 Clock time in meetings

Clock time is perhaps the most readily identified temporal feature of KT-Inc’s meetings. They were scheduled for particular dates/times; their internal operation generally punctuates around routine refreshment or comfort breaks (e.g. 11am, 1pm, 3.30pm); agendas came to be structured through time allocation based on topic priorities; past or future meetings were referenced as part of broader sensemaking processes. Hernes (2014, p. 38) explicitly suggests that individual meetings exhibit temporal agency in so far as they can reframe the meaning of previous meetings or define the agenda for future meetings. This is reflected in the Systemic Meetings Model (SMM) developed in Chapter 7 (Figure 7.5 – reproduced below).

![Simplified Systemic Meetings Model](image)

Figure 7.5 (reproduced) – Systemic Meetings Model (SMM)

However, meetings collectively exhibit an agency that is more elaborate than simple clock-time and is equally if not more driven by event-time. The SMM arose from a
zoomed-out perspective looking at meetings holistically, through the enactment, selection and retention of sensemaking as an organization-level process. The SMM was silent on how the retrospective and prehensive connections were accomplished, but this was revealed through the zoomed-in analysis in Chapter 8, which also revealed more details of the temporality associated with meetings collectively. The sensemaking processes on which the SMM is based are temporally open, in that they are without overt or explicit clock-time boundaries. Enactment, selection and retention processes emerge as continuous iterative cycles independent of specific temporal markers or measurement points. However, meetings became junctions at which internal meeting procedures driven by clock-time conjoin with sensemaking processes and outcomes based on event-time, in an ongoing recursive cycle that merges clock and event time. The SMM identifies four types of meeting connections grounded in the clock-time of past, present and future, but hides a more complex temporal agency of meetings collectively when the impact of meetings on organizational activity is considered more holistically.

9.2.2 Temporal structuring within and through meetings

Orlikowski and Yates (2002) integrated social practices with enacted structures (Giddens, 1984) to identify “temporal structuring” (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002, p. 685) as an organizational instantiation of time that they considered distinct from objective clock-time or subjective event-driven time (p. 686). They proposed that day-to-day organizational practice created temporal structuring for organizations, enabling a distinction to be drawn between the temporal structure within meetings, as distinct from temporal structure across meetings. The KT-Inc data demonstrated a pattern of practice, both within and across meetings, that showed a distinctive temporal structuring, reflecting the agency of its meetings collectively.

Conventionally, we might expect chaired meetings to follow the structure of the agenda, allocate defined amounts of time to agenda items and avoid re-opening topics that had been previously discussed. Meetings in KT-Inc only loosely followed these expected conventions and in many cases operated in a significantly less structured way. Chapter 8 identified how the discursive threads on topics discussed in two different board meetings in particular, were laced throughout the meetings rather than handled as single agenda items to be opened and closed in time-bound discussions. We also saw this pattern extended to the way meeting topics and associated decisions were
generated, emerged, developed and progressed across meetings of different groups in KT-Inc.

The decision to close Bearings highlighted the paradox of decision (Luhmann, 2006c) evident in many of KT-Inc's meetings: for example, when could the Bearings decision be considered to have been made? - when it was first taken, or when it was finally implemented? Whichever is chosen, it took streams of meetings collectively, coordinated over fixed timeframes, to ultimately resolve a decision paradox that was reflected in the GM's acceptance of an order for a product that was due to be discontinued. Meetings in this context enabled "temporal deparadoxifying" (Andersen, 2003). The efflux of time between meetings at which the same 'decision' was dealt with, helped to remove some decision paradoxes that meeting participants may have preferred not to deal with. The temporal deparadoxifying effect of meetings collectively also made them instrumental in changing the structural makeup of the organization over time and thus act with constitutive force.

Progressing topics to meaningful conclusions in KT-Inc often required multiple meetings to take place. This was most readily observed in how decision making and implementation was handled, highlighting the agential role of meetings in both. In so far as decisions derived from discourse, or actions derived from decisions, they both generated a temporal structure determined by the occurrence and congruence of meetings collectively, rather than being determined by deliberate fixing of associated clock-time or event-time for their accomplishment. A stop-start pattern of decision making within meetings seemed to be mirrored by the impact meetings had in either accelerating or slowing down the implementation of those decisions. The relatively rapid termination of the sales manager's position contrasted with the slow but eventual departure of the marketing director. The close down of the Bearings product line in October 2011 was effectively accomplished within two months, but only after a full year in which large orders continued to be taken for a product that was to be discontinued from one year previously. Meetings played a metronomic part in these organizational events, which will be elaborated in the following section.

9.2.3 The metronomic effect of meetings

Six months into the data gathering, a deliberate change to the frequency of board meetings saw them switched from quarterly to bi-monthly. A similar pattern was observed in other meeting streams such as the sales team and the managers' meetings.
While this appeared to be in response to the increase in the tempo of activity both inside and outside the company, it was also observed that increased meeting frequency increased the pace at which ‘things got done’ in KT-Inc. This highlights a cause-effect dichotomy in respect of the agency of meetings – it is not always obvious if the frequency of meetings drives associated activity, or if the pace of activities occurring in the organization influences the demand for more or less meetings. The analysis suggests that meetings collectively have a pace-setting effect within the organization.

For certain topics, such as closing a product line, opening a new shop, discontinuing a specialist client relationship, or reviewing the financial contribution of particular client organizations, the periodicity associated with particular meeting streams seemed to influence the progress made with the initiatives. In some instances meetings slowed down progress (e.g. Bearings closure), while in others, the infusion of new meetings to ‘exit’ the sales manager (Section 8.1.3) accelerated progress. Individual meetings represented staging posts at which progress was accelerated or retarded, but viewed collectively over time, meetings acted as an organizational metronome, defining a tempo for the organization's collective activity.

A conductor’s baton acts as a metronome to set a desired tempo for an orchestra, which the orchestra follows once the music has started. The conductor and orchestra act in hybridicity (Cooren, 2004b, p. 377) to accomplish something collectively that neither of them can accomplish alone. This pattern was reflected with KT-Inc’s meetings. Managers set the periodicity of meetings, but once set, the tempo of the meetings collectively determined the pace at which broader organizational activity took place. The scheduling of additional board meetings to ‘accelerate’ the development of the company strategic plan for 2012 was just one such example from Chapter 7 (Section 7.2.1. Extract 7.15). Further examples include the increased number of meetings used in the process of ‘exiting’ the Sales Manager, or the additional meetings held to develop a new strategic planning process. The agency of meetings collectively was accomplished through manager/meeting hybridicity, recursively positioning meetings as ‘pace makers’ for activities that went on to be transacted through further meetings.

**9.3 FEATURES OF MEETING UTILIZATION**

In the broad context of meetings utilization, the literature often speaks to the disciplines within which meetings are studied (Dittrich et al., 2011, p. 3), the categories of topics that meetings typically deal with (Allen et al., 2015a, p. 5; Olien et al., 2015, p. 14), or
particular purposes for which meetings are held (Allen, Beck, et al., 2014, p. 792). From analysing KT-Inc’s meetings data, I focus on their meeting utilization from the perspective of how meetings collectively were used rather than what the meetings were used for. In the first instance, the requisite variety (Colville et al., 2012) of KT-Inc’s meetings changed over the course of the research, largely due to deliberate steps on the part of the new board chairman. The reasons and implications for this change will be considered in Section 9.3.1. Separately, meetings in KT-Inc dealt with different aspects of company life, making them discernible as instruments of company policy, which is considered in Section 9.3.2. In Section 9.3.3, I review one of the mechanisms that limits uncontrolled proliferation of meetings given their autopoietic regeneration identified in Section 8.2. In Section 9.3.4 I will consider how meetings in KT-Inc act as building blocks for the company by extending McPhee and Zaug’s (2009, p. 30) analogy of organizations resembling the human body.

Viewed holistically, it is then possible to infer from the data, ‘cause maps’ (Weick, 1979) or ‘cognitive maps’ (Weick & Bougon, 2001) that may have informed KT-Inc’s meetings, enabling the MaSP framework to be positioned as an alternative ‘cause map’ for future consideration, which is set out in Section 9.4.

9.3.1 Requisite variety in KT-Inc’s meetings

The KT-Inc meetings data showed requisite variety in different ways. ‘TAG’ teams in KT-Inc were a novel way of increasing requisite variety of both the board and the sales team, in which board members paired with sales team members to engage directly in meetings with customers. The TAG team initiative supported the board’s sensemaking efforts both individually and collectively, and also supported the sales team members’ efforts to make sense of an increasingly challenging economic environment. Board and sales team members could each bring different ‘variety’ to the interactions with customers, improving the ability of both to make sense of the challenges and demands facing KT-Inc’s customers, as well as those facing the company.

Deliberate changes were also made to the participants attending different internal meetings. Attendance at board meetings, the marketing forum and the sales team were just three examples. The attendee base for the different meeting groups was broadened, with the stated purpose of extending the experience and expertise on which the meetings could draw. This increased the requisite variety of meeting attendees, but was driven intuitively rather than from an overtly-stated theoretical perspective. It also
improved the connectivity between meetings in KT-Inc, in turn improving their capacity to align and act with agency collectively, which was not stated as an intended outcome, but represented a positive consequence of that initiative.

Weick (1979) proposed that all you have to do to preserve your ability to adapt to change is to “complicate yourself” (p. 261), while Weick and Sutcliffe (2007) proposed that to improve sensing or acting when faced with complexity, an organization should “make your systems more complicated” (p. 113) (emphasis in the original). In the context of substantial change taking place in KT-Inc and its commercial environment, there is no doubt that changing meeting participation increased the complexity of organising and running KT-Inc’s meetings, but it also improved interconnectivity between meetings. KT-Inc changed the pattern of attendees for individual meeting streams but never showed deliberate intention to do so for their meetings at a whole organization level, in spite of concerns expressed about the number and cost of meetings taking place. The benefits that accrued for individual meetings in KT-Inc could also be expected to apply if this approach had been adopted on a whole organization basis but that did not occur during the data collection period. The options and implications of varying the attendees at meetings in practice more generally will be considered in Chapter 10.

9.3.2 Meetings as instruments of policy

The adverse financial situation in the Irish economy between 2007 and 2010 could not be avoided by KT-Inc and the company underwent a significant change programme to cope with the economic crash. Their change agenda was driven by three main considerations: (1) Economic survival and consolidation; (2) Organisation restructuring; (3) Strategic development and positioning. KT-Inc’s meetings served all three organizational pursuits. Cost control and sales optimization were the central focus of programmes such as the ‘stockists initiative’, the UK market development or the introduction of ISO quality standards to enhance product and company marketability. Strategizing (Jarzabkowski, 2008, p. 1392) is evidenced through their evolving process for developing strategy, preparing implementation plans and rolling out those plans, which were integral parts of meetings at all levels of the organization. This was entwined with changes in organizational structures, personnel and processes to support and enable the organization’s strategizing. It is not possible to definitively
distinguish where one of these activities begins and the others end, but they were evident in virtually all of the KT-Inc meetings attended.

It was clear that meetings were used to get things done both strategically (e.g. rescheduling Board meetings to change the delivery time for a new strategic plan) and tactically (e.g. making the sales manager and Bearing team redundant). Meetings were explicitly used to coordinate actions when terminating the sales manager’s position to “minimise collateral damage” within the company. While this suggests a latent tendency to use meetings in a deliberate and agential way, the intentionality focused on individual meetings rather than using meetings collectively systemically as a collective and whole-organization resource. Such intentionality towards meetings also manifested itself as prehension of future meetings and was evident in a number of distinct ways. The most obvious was the involvement of the board chairman and GM as trans-participants in the future meetings of different groups. We saw multiple examples of how particular meetings scheduled the engagement of these trans-participants in different group’s meetings, often with their contributions being scoped out and defined in advance.

In addition to human actors exercising prehension of future meetings, we also saw actants as immutable mobiles (such as strategic plans, PowerPoint presentations, meeting review procedures and so on), accessed by trans-participants to support sensemaking across meetings. In this context prehension was more than just mental appreciation or awareness of future meetings (Hernes, 2014, p. 208; Whitehead, 1927/1978, p. 20) – it involved processual scheduling of resources (people or objects) through meetings collectively to give effect to organizational policy. To the extent that meetings were scheduled prehensively to deal with broad themes (such as strategic planning) or specific topics (such as a briefing on market research), and engaged specific actors (people) or made use of specific actants (material or discursive mobiles), KT-Inc meetings were agents of company policy, although the underlying intentionality operated at the level of individual meetings. The agency of meetings collectively became visible through the retrospective analysis of the meetings data collectively.

Pre-planning meetings collectively and streams of meetings (as opposed to just meetings as discrete events), opens the possibility for meetings collectively to be prehensive of each other as well as of the themes and topics they are scheduled to deal with. Such pre-planned use of meetings collectively and meeting streams could
improve organizational sensemaking, and by extension, company performance (Thomas et al., 1993). These different elements will be integrated as part of the MaSP presented in Section 9.4 and will be considered further under the implications for practice in Chapter 10.

9.3.3 Managing meeting proliferation

Viewed in broad systems terms, meetings from multiple cultures have demonstrated a tendency to generate further meetings (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 37 & 310), reflective of the autopoietic capacity of systems to self-replicate from within their own resources (Luhmann, 2006a, p. Chapter 3; Maturana & Varela, 1979; Muller, 1994, p. 43). More specifically, Schwartzman (1989, p. 165) identified the autopoietic tendency of organizational meetings to generate further meetings, a feature specifically noted in KT-Inc’s meetings (Section 8.2.3.).

The tendency of meetings to generate meetings leaves open the possibility for an organization to become swamped in meetings, and likely in need of some mechanism to limit their spread. The officers and Board of KT-Inc came close to saying as much on a number of occasions, but never followed through with any discussion about managing or using their meetings collectively. One mechanism in KT-Inc that had the effect of limiting or controlling meeting numbers was the closure of particular meeting streams, although this was never stated as a reason for doing so. When the new head of sales and marketing was installed, the previous marketing forum was discontinued, closing off one source of meetings. The officers decided to discontinue their meetings, but no direct reason was ever established for that in the data. As part of the restructuring of KT-Inc, the UK sales team was ultimately closed down, removing a meeting stream from the overall meetings schedule in the company. Similarly, the closure of the Bearings production line removed one (small) group of workers and by extension any meetings they would have generated. In counter point to this observation, it was also noted that as the data gathering was coming to a close, a new meeting stream of SBU heads had just been initiated, but unfortunately none of its meetings were attended. This reflects a regulating effect on meeting proliferation but without that specific intention ever being articulated in any of the meetings recorded.

The Project Advisory Group (PAG) in KT-Inc had its own self-regulating policy of ‘only convening meetings when required’. Only two meetings were scheduled over the eighteen months of data recording and only one such meeting was attended as part of
this research. As a policy for convening meetings it could apply to the meetings of any organizational group and it seemed to have the effect of creating fewer meetings than the observed practice in other groups of scheduling future meetings from a meeting that was currently taking place. Other meeting streams in KT-Inc such as the retail shop units and the Industrial team had just one meeting between them (industrial team) that was attended as part of the research. Their limited meeting frequency seemed to be driven as much by geographic spread and inaccessibility as it was by any observed lack of desire or need to hold meetings in the first place. It was beyond the scope of this research to identify the full range of mechanisms that balance the (re)generation of organizational meetings, but given the time and cost of organizational meetings (Rogelberg et al., 2012), such an endeavour could be a useful focus for future research.

9.3.4 Meetings as organizational building blocks

Meetings in KT-Inc generally occurred in discernible patterns, centred on particular cohort groups conducting meetings routinely. I have called these ‘meeting streams’. There were also instances of once-off meetings, called for specific purposes, not attributable to any particular group, and unlikely to recur. Some less frequent but periodically occurring meetings in KT-Inc served as ‘cross currents’, in that the themes they addressed, the specific topics on their agendas, the participants involved or the purposes for which they were held, all set them apart from the meetings that occur as part of particular meeting streams. For example, the all-staff briefing on the company strategic plan, the annual sales team meeting or the quarterly managers meetings, fit into this category of meetings in KT-Inc. They acted as crossover points for the meeting streams of different groups and served as key communication events on a cross-organizational basis.

From the analysis in Chapter 8, we saw how meetings contributed to four communicative flows that constitute organization. McPhee and Zaug (2009, p. 30) used the human body as a metaphor to describe an organization as “...a collection of member cells, with messages as the blood, the hormones, the nerve impulses that affect and relate them” (p. 30). They stopped short of analogising what might constitute the main organs of their corporeal organization. Their organizational metaphor can be extended by considering language (Taylor, 2000) as the ‘stem cells’ of the corporate body. From language, all other types of (communicative) cells develop, depending on which organizational ‘flow’ uses and adapts them. TMS provides conceptual tools
(such as ventriloquism, immutable mobiles, imbrication, distanciation, meta-conversations etc.) to identify and account for the development of particular types of communicative ‘cells’ that can then cluster into texts or conversation to be deployed in and to constitute meetings. Through hybridicity these component parts ultimately contribute to the 4-Flows that McPhee and Zaug consider as constitutive of organization. Under this extended metaphor, particular meeting streams could then be considered analogous to different organs in the body. The board’s meetings collectively might represent the organizational brain, operations meetings the heart and lungs, and the sales team’s meetings the functions of other specialised organs. None of these groups can alone account for organization but all must combine and contribute to the communicative flows necessary to build and sustain an organization.

Meetings collectively provide the essential loci at which many of the necessary connections and overlaps take place, perpetually (re)constituting as building blocks that determine the shape, substance and ultimate development or decline of the organization. Figure 9.1 illustrates this metaphorical building process.

Figure 9.1 – Meetings collectively – Building blocks of organizations
9.4 BUILDING THE MASP FRAMEWORK

So far this Chapter summarised and consolidated the findings from the bifocal analyses in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. This section consolidates the findings further to represent them collectively in the Meetings as Systemic Process (MaSP) Framework. Consistent with the prevalence of using pictures and diagrams to emphasize inter-connectivity and the holistic nature of systems and processes (Langley, 1999, p. 700; Meadows, 2009, p. 5), the MaSP framework is presented primarily through a series of figures to show its development from the elements in the preceding sections of this Chapter.

As a presentation framework, the organization is first conceptualized in four dimensions, comprising physical and temporal space as represented by the framework in Figure 9.2.

In Figure 9.2 it should be noted that clock-time is represented longitudinally, whilst event-time if depicted on both the lateral and vertical axes. This is intended to convey that the relationships between meetings are not only denoted in terms of past or future along the clock-time axis but also occur 'in the moment' of meetings taking place. Event-time refers to the ordering and sequencing of activities (including meetings) arising from their inherent relationships, rather than their mere chronological sequencing according to clock-time.
Having established this reference framework, meetings of the same sub-group or meeting stream, can be represented as shown in Figure 9.3.

The group will set the periodicity of its own meetings, establishing a form of metronomic beat for their activities. However, meeting participants discursively alter this cadence by instantiating additional meetings, which has the effect of increasing the tempo of activity. Section 8.1.3 dealing with member disidentification illustrates how a number of meetings and activities were co-ordinated into a very short clock-time window, accentuating the relationships between meetings and associated activity. The General Manager’s description in Extract 8.24 (at 1:03:22.7) of how they “effected the plan to the minute”, is a good illustration of plans discursively constructed in earlier meetings being implemented as concurrent activity (that included further meetings with individuals and groups), within a very narrow clock-time window. Deferring discussion/decisions to future meetings, as in the case of closing down Bearings (Section 8.3.3), had the effect of slowing down organizational activity, illustrating that meetings discourse can equally speed up or slow down related organizational activity.

Each meeting stream also contains within it various elements that can act as connectors to other meetings, within the stream or in other streams, which are introduced in Figure 9.3. As additional meeting streams are integrated into the framework, a particular
stream of meetings becomes apparent as illustrated in Figure 9.4. The meeting attendees in this stream are drawn from multiple organizational groups and the meeting stream has the effect of joining the other meeting streams together. In KT-Inc this meeting stream largely comprised meetings that were driven by temporal markers such as the company AGM, the annual sales team meeting, the quarterly managers’ briefings or the bi-annual all-staff briefing.

As additional meeting streams are considered, they may operate to the same or different metronomic beats as other meeting streams. For simplicity and clarity, Figure 9.4 shows just two additional meeting streams that each have a different frequency for their meetings.

Notwithstanding their temporal differences, processes shared across meetings can also serve as ways to connect meetings and meeting streams over time. Shared processes also have the effect of connecting the other meeting streams on a pan-organizational basis. Figure 9.4 also introduces the idea that the combined effect of multiple meeting streams creates a temporal structure for the organization, combining the effects of clock-time and event-time, both of which are influenced by the discourse taking place within the meetings it the different streams.
Observing the creation of discursive connections between meetings, as meetings are taking place, draws attention to patterns of direct and indirect retrospection, as shown in Figure 9.5. Direct retrospection refers to meetings of the same stream while indirect refers to meetings of other streams. Retrospection during meetings can also occur in conjunction with varying degrees of prehension towards future meetings, which may also be direct or indirect.

![Figure 9.5 – Direct and indirect retrospective and prehensive connections](image)

Figure 9.5 also illustrates how the direct and indirect retrospective and prehensive connections between organizational meetings may form a complex lattice of connectivity throughout the organization.
Figure 9.6 – Meetings as transient skeleton

By simplifying and abstracting these inter-meeting connections, Figure 9.6 illustrates how they can be visualised as a transient skeletal framework around which the organization progressively develops over time, taking on cultural, physical or other characteristics that can be defined by the nature of the connections that are deliberately established or spontaneously occur between meetings.

Figure 9.7 draws all the key elements of the MaSP framework into a single diagram that can serve as an alternative ‘cause map’ for organization meetings.

Figure 9.7 – The MaSP Framework
The research demonstrates that the agency of meetings collectively in KT-Inc went beyond the agency of any individual meeting or the summative agency of a number of meetings. Applying the MaSP framework as a cause map, for using meetings collectively, engenders the possibility for the agency of an organization’s meetings collectively to be extended beyond their existing influence or agency. What that agency might be, or how it might be accomplished in practice, will clearly depend on a large number of variables that will differ across or even within organizations.

9.5 CONCLUSION

The analysis in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 examined the meetings of KT-Inc from three distinct perspectives – abductive conceptualization of the meetings collectively; their role in and contribution to organization-level sensemaking (Weick, 1995); and the modalities of meeting connections viewed through the lens of four communicative flows that constitute organization (McPhee & Zaug, 2000). This chapter distilled the research findings to identify how meetings are connected, the agency they exercise collectively and to present a conceptual framework representing meetings as systemic process.

Connections between meetings are created both deliberately and inadvertently. In so far as they are deliberate, they typically arise between simple pairs of meetings and are created for limited or specific purposes. Connections arise from individuals acting as trans-participants at the meetings of different groups and cross-pollinating ideas and information between the different groups’ meetings. Where some actors are not physically present at meetings, ventriloquism enables their ‘attendance’ as ‘ghost-participants’ in two distinct ways. Absent participation occurs where meeting attendees invoke or ventriloquize the views, expressions or opinions of a person who is not physically present, usually to enhance the standing of the person present at a meeting. On the other hand, controllers-by-proxy do not attend meetings but connect meetings by seeking to influence what other meeting attendees will say during meetings. In both instances, connections between meetings are created through ventriloquist acts that ‘make present’ people and their ideas, who are not physically available to make their contribution.

Material artefacts provide another means of connecting meetings. They may be tangible objects such as equipment or documents that establish guidelines or practices that inform the ways in which meetings are conducted. They may also acquire intangible form as mutable or immutable mobiles, carried in the conversational or
textual exchanges of meeting participants. Even static temporal markers such as seasonal product demand or annual planning events can act as meeting connections, providing reference points around which meetings can be scheduled and coordinated. Intrinsic to meetings are the processes and practices used to run them, which also serve as a means of connection. These shared processes ensure a degree of familiarity and consistency that enable participants from across the organization to share common approaches to different aspects of their meetings.

The modalities of connection between meetings enables them to exhibit agency that individual meetings could not achieve alone. Meetings establish temporal structure in the organization (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002) through combining clock-time and event-time to establish a sense of rhythm and pace to the organization's activity. Adjusting the metronomic pace of meetings influences the pace at which organizational activity associated with meetings is carried out beyond the meeting occasions themselves. Meetings, viewed as a collective organizational resource, become instruments of organizational policy as well as agents through which that policy is generated. They serve as building blocks of organization, providing theatres in which people, material and language interact and imbricate to form different building blocks from which organizations are constructed.

Viewed holistically, meetings form a transient skeleton around which the organization is perpetually regenerated. Their short duration relative to the longevity of the organizations in which they take place belies their indispensable contribution as connection points through which the constituent ingredients of organizations are formed to create identifying features that define the uniqueness of every organization. The MaSP framework is an integrated representation of meetings that can serve as a new cause map to inform the holistic use of meetings as a collective organizational resource.
CHAPTER 10

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS
10 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this research I propose an alternative way to conceptualise meetings based on analysis of meetings’ data using a synthesis of systemic process, sensemaking and CCO theory. The agency of organizational meetings collectively has gone largely unexplored in the literature given the individual-centeredness of previous meetings research (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 740) and this research contributes to fill that gap.

The first section of this chapter summaries the research and shows that the overall research question and objectives have been addressed. Section 10.2 sets out the research contribution to meetings literature. ‘Meetings as sensemakers’ (Boden, 1994; Schwartzman, 1989; Weick, 1995) has been previously articulated, but the originality of my work is in considering meetings collectively from a systemic process perspective and analysing their impact collectively rather than as individual episodes of sensemaking. The focus is on developing a better understanding of how meetings collectively contribute to sensemaking as an organization-level process (Weick, 1995, p. 13).

The contribution to CCO literature is set out in Section 10.3 and advances our understanding of how meetings collectively exercise agency that contributes to the communicative constitution of organizations. Meetings collectively, viewed in terms of systemic process, are shown as integral to four communicative flows (McPhee & Zaug, 2000) that constitute organization. These flows are seen to operate in meetings individually, but more significantly across meetings collectively. The thesis advances our understanding of how meetings collectively, as specific communicative events (Hernes, 2014, p. 38), display temporal agency in the constitution of organization, in spite of their amorphous ontology and temporal brevity as individual events. Integrating sensemaking with meetings as organizational building blocks introduces the potential to understand organization-level sensemaking as an emergent organizational attribute, reflective of and ultimately contributing to organizations’ ‘syncretic superstructure’ (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2008) as a fifth communicative flow that informs the broader essence of what it is to be an organization.

A key part of the contribution is also the development of practice proposals as set out in Section 10.4, to support implementation of meetings as systemic process within organizations. Adopting MaSP for organizational use could vary significantly from one organization to another. For this reason, the practice proposals in Section 10.4 are
tentative and would have to be culturally sensitised for individual organizations. These practices range from revision of the way meetings are viewed and planned, to the day-to-day practical steps to improve their interconnectivity. The focus is on how to enhance the agency of meetings collectively, rather than seeking improvement in the internal workings of individual meetings, although the former is dependent to some degree on the latter. The research shows that meetings contribute more than the sum of their individual parts and suggests that mindful implementation and heedful execution of meetings collectively, as a systemic process, could help to reduce time in meetings, increase output from meetings or improve the overall understanding of the organization both internally and external. In summary, adopting meetings collectively as systemic process could contribute to an enhancement of the organization’s overall performance (Thomas et al., 1993).

The extent to which this proposition is true and the contribution that may be made should be subjected to empirical testing in future research. Section 10.5 suggests further research, both in terms of developing the MaSP concept through other methodologies and also to consider additional ways in which the methodology adopted in this research could be extended in future. Section 10.6 provides a reflection on the methodology used in the research and also a personal reflection on the overall research journey. The thesis concludes in Section 10.7.

10.1 SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH

The research question addressed in this thesis was:

How do organizational meetings collectively contribute to the constitution of the organizations in which they take place?

This was broken down into the following objectives:

RO 1. To conceptualize meetings as a collective organizational phenomenon.

RO 2. To explore the systemic and processual nature of organizational meetings collectively.

RO 3. To examine the contribution of meetings collectively to organizational sensemaking.

RO 4. To identify mechanisms through which meetings collectively contribute to the constitution of organizations.

RO 5. To develop a theoretical proposition to account for the agency of organizational meetings collectively.
The MaSP framework answers the research question and objectives and represents a meso-level theoretical contribution to understanding the agency of meetings collectively in organizations. It is positioned between the micro perspectives favoured by the Montreal School proponents of CCO and the macro perspective of organization favoured by the Luhmannian School. While drawing on both perspectives, MaSP is most closely aligned with and developed from the meso-level 4-Flows theory of CCO advanced by McPhee's Structurationist School.

Giddens (1984), elaborating his Structuration Theory, poses what he considers to be a fundamental question of broader social theory—"...explicat[ing] how the limitations of individual 'presence' are transcended by the 'stretching' of social relations across time and space" (p. 35). In an organizational context, meetings collectively represent a meso-level mechanism that in part addresses the 'how' in Giddens' question. To understand how meetings collectively make such a contribution, it is necessary to first conceptualize them as a collective rather than individual-centered phenomenon (Schwartzman, 2015). This was achieved in the research by adopting both systems and processual perspectives towards the preliminary data analysis and is reflected in the initial Systemic Meetings Model (SMM) presented in Chapter 6. This fulfilled RO 1.

RO 2 was in part achieved through development of the SMM but also in pursuing RO 3 through the use of Sensemaking as the analytical lens to carry out the initial zoomed-out data analysis. The contributions of meetings collectively to organizational sensemaking was shown to be more than just the summation of discrete sensemaking outputs from individual meetings. Sensemaking over time and space involved both retrospective and prehensive activities within and across meetings, and was shown to be accomplished through meetings collectively in areas such as developing company strategy, refining the company strategic planning process or instituting a new company-wide meeting review process.

RO 4 was achieved through using CCO to conduct zoomed-in analysis of the meetings data, yielding insights into understanding the modalities of meeting connections in the first instance. Meeting connections were comprised of both human actors and material artefacts. People and artefacts played active roles in connecting multiple meetings into discernible meeting streams. Hybridicity (Latour, 2005), as adopted and modified by the Montreal School of CCO to more clearly distinguish between people and material artefacts as animate and inanimate objects respectively (Taylor & Cooren, 1997), was applied in the research to account for how people and material artefacts co-orientate
towards meetings to form patterns of imbrication (Taylor, 2000, 2011) in the constitution of the organization.

RO 5 is reflected in the MaSP framework that presents a consolidated view of the research findings and summarises the answer to the Research Question. The MaSP Framework reconceptualises meetings collectively as a systemic process within organizations that contributes to communicative flows and is bound together by modes of connectivity between meetings. The agency of meetings collectively identified in the research centres around how meetings are connected to each other, the temporal ordering meetings bring to the organization, and how meetings are utilized as a collective organizational resource.

10.2 CONTRIBUTION OF MASP TO MEETING SCIENCE

Meetings have been studied as a topic of interest for over thirty years, but it is only recently that they have really become a direct object of inquiry in their own right (Olien et al., 2015, p. 13; Scott, Allen, et al., 2015). As elaborated in Chapter 2, meetings research has spanned disciplines such as cultural anthropology (Schwartzman, 1989), political science (Tepper, 2004), communications studies (Taylor & Van Every, 2000), business studies (Asmuß & Svennevig, 2009), and sociology (Boden, 1994; Schwartzman, 1986, 1989), to name a few. In so far as scholars have sought to focus on meetings as their topic of research, Allen et al. (2015b) termed this ‘Meetings Science’, which is defined as “the conceptual, intellectual and practical activity used to systematically study what goes on before, during, and after a meeting; it studies the meetings themselves, their outcomes, and other meeting-related phenomena” (Olien et al., 2015, p. 13).

Commenting on five different theoretical lenses for conceptualizing the role of meetings in organizations, Scott et al. (2015, p. 21) observe that research to date has tended towards treating meetings as containers of important organizational processes or phenomena, rather than focusing on the constitutive contribution meetings make to organizations in their own right. They note a dearth of research to elaborate the ontological status of meetings and suggest five theoretical lenses through which organizational meetings could be conceptualized to improve our understanding of how they impact on individual or organizational outcomes. ‘Sensemaking’ (Scott et al., 2015, p. 33) is one of those five lenses and was used to focus the analysis in Chapter 7, while ‘Rituals’ is another that is reflected in the CCO-guided analysis in Chapter 8.
10.2.1 An unfamiliar view of meetings collectively

In contrast to many of the contributions to Allen et al.’s (2015b) volume on meeting science, Schwartzman (2015) observed “that there are many aspects of meeting functioning that (1) cannot be attributed to individuals, (2) are not actually subject to individual control, and (3) may not have been intended by anyone participating in the event.” (p. 740). If we continue an individual-centered approach towards researching meetings, the implicit challenge in Schwartzman’s observation is how to account for these meetings’ features if they are not attributable to any one meeting or meeting participant? Systems thinking suggests that if there is an over-focus on the individual components (of a system) and if sufficient heed is not taken of the interconnections between those components, the significance of interconnections may be missed and the outputs (of the whole system) can be mistakenly attributed to single system elements (Meadows, 2009, p. 14). While meetings research has moved in some way towards understanding the agency associated with meetings, such agency has tended to focus on activities within meetings that can also be observed to occur across different meetings. The systemic process orientation towards meetings adopted in this research focused attention on interconnections between meetings. Through understanding meeting interconnections, we begin to see both the modalities and outcomes of the agency of meetings collectively as an organizational phenomenon, which has had limited exposure in extant meetings’ literature. It is these interconnections, identified through the analysis of recorded meetings’ discourse that helps to address Schwartzman’s observation and contributes to fill the gap she identifies in the meetings’ literature.

10.2.2 Meeting attendees and emotion regulation

The relative status of individuals attending meetings impacts the broader emotion regulation throughout an organization (Thomas & Allen, 2015). This highlights the significance of decisions about who should attend meetings, which in turn will influence analysis of cause-effect relationships that impact the emotional state of the whole organization. Trans-participants are identified in the MaSP framework as a primary means of human connection between meetings. Ghost-participants, manifested through absent participation and controllers-by-proxy, are discursive accomplishments achieved in person or through varying means of ventriloquism by human actors, both inside and outside meetings, and represent a secondary means of
meeting-connectivity though people’s activity. To the extent that these human means of meeting-connectivity operate at a systemic process level, they represent ways in which emotion regulation may occur at individual meetings, within meeting streams or across a whole organization. MaSP provides a conceptual framework to explore the extent to which emotion regulation at individual meetings could also be a property of meetings collectively, a possibility that has yet to be explored but could represent another form of agency of organizational meetings collectively. Further research would be required to establish if meetings collectively do contribute collectively to the emotional regulation of the organization and if so, to elaborate the role and impact of trans-participants and ghost-participants in such emotion regulation.

10.2.3 Meeting processes and practices

The central disposition in this thesis is that meetings collectively can be viewed as a collective organizational resource whereas heretofore, our thinking towards them and our behaviours in them have been largely informed by what Schwartzman (2015, p. 740) calls an “individual centeredness” approach. Schwartzman suggests that moving towards a systematized view of meetings collectively (Duffy & O'Rourke, 2015) comes closest to “conceptualizing meetings as events with agency” and that a move away from the individual-centeredness approach of meetings research “may be one of the most important ideas embedded in several chapters of this book” (p740). The analyses in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 touched on different aspects of meetings as explored in detail in Allen et al.’s (2015b) volume on meeting science, but the findings in Chapter 9 have focused on informing a broader conceptual abstraction of how meetings collectively demonstrate agency that aligns with Schwartzman’s earlier noted observations.

The individual-centered approach towards researching organizational meetings explored meeting features such as agenda formats or chairing skills (Odermatt et al., 2015), training and development in meeting practices (Aksoy-Burkert & König, 2015; Kocsis et al., 2015), or activities that support on-going learning from meetings (Lacerenza et al., 2015; Scott et al., 2015), all practices that are repeatable and applicable in multiple meetings of different organizational sub-groups, or in the meetings of different organizations. As such, previous research in these areas supported and improved both our understanding and use of organizational meetings as discrete, individual events. In contrast, adopting meetings collectively as the unit of analysis drew attention to these meeting features as different means of inter-
connectivity between meetings, creating a basis to consider meetings collectively in terms of systemic process rather than standalone events. These meeting features are broadly identified in the MaSP framework as ‘material artefacts’ or ‘shared processes’. Material artefacts are divided into three sub-groups - clustered artefacts, immutable mobiles and temporal markers, each of which is an abstraction from micro-level practices observed in KT-Inc’s meetings. Each category of meeting connectors were seen to serve as actants in their own right, exhibiting agency in or through meetings. However, their agency relies on their hybridicity with human actors, which co-orientate towards individual meetings, and when combined with meetings in dyadic pairs, imbricate into broader skeletal structures of organizational meetings collectively through which the organization engages in on-going cycles of recursive regeneration.

Where actors (Sections 9.1.1 and 9.1.2) and actants (Section 9.1.3) are two categories of meeting connectors, ‘shared processes’ are an identifiable third category reflected in the MaSP framework. Shared processes represent different ways of connecting, combining or interfacing the different hybrid combinations of organizational actors and actants in and through meetings collectively, leading to different ways in which meetings can be utilized to contribute to the organization’s overall strategic accomplishments. When meeting utilization is focused on how meetings are used rather than what they are used for, their agency collectively in the constitution of organizations becomes more visible.

Considering shared processes more broadly, Lei and Lehmann-Willenbrock (2015) considered how the affective or emotional influences taking place within individual meetings can lead to convergent (generally positive) or divergent (generally negative) team affect, which may go on to have similar affective impact in the wider organization. Schwartzman (2015) identified their research as one of the threads leaning towards examination of the collective agency of meetings, in that the outcomes of individual meetings can summatively contribute to or have impact on the organizations in which they take place. These lines of research within the meetings literature identify and define aspects of the organizational culture and climate which Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott (2008) referred to as ‘syncretic superstructure’, which is less tangible but still a strongly defining characteristic of organizations. The MaSP framework serves as a cause map to help contextualize how meetings collectively contribute holistically as key organizational building blocks and can support further research in the affective influences of organizational meetings collectively.
At its broadest level, MaSP is an integrative framework that informs thinking about the before, during and after aspects of meetings around which Allen et al. (2015) structured their handbook. It provides a cause map that not only guides how meetings collectively might be viewed holistically, but also considers different and distinct modes of connectivity that exist or could be established between meetings. MaSP also identifies the temporal structuring effect of meetings collectively (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002) by examining the combination of clock-time and event-time as it occurred in meetings, providing a perspective on the temporal agency of organizational meetings collectively that has not previously been reported in the meetings literature.

10.3 MASP CONTRIBUTION FROM A CCO PERSPECTIVE

CCO theory has strong antecedents in systems and process theory, exemplified through the McPhee School’s foundations in structuration theory and the Luhmannian School’s reliance on communication and social systems theory. The Montreal scholars have increasingly focused on the concept of agency, particularly as it relates to inanimate objects and how agency is accomplished through communicative means (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Cooren & Fairhurst, 2009; Latour, 2005; Taylor & Cooren, 1997; Taylor & Van Every, 2000). While this research was primarily focused on organizational meetings and developing a contribution to the associated literature, the extensive reliance on constructs and concepts from the CCO literature opens the possibility to contribute to that developing body of work. This section considers how using McPhee and Zaug’s four flows model in Chapter 8 helps to extend our understanding of how meetings contribute to the communicative constitution of organizations, but also how meetings contribute to forming the ‘syncretic superstructure’ of an organization (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2008) that is not explicitly provided for in CCO in general or the 4-Flows model in particular.

10.3.1 Discourse and organization

Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) identified three distinct perspectives for studying organizations: as already existing entities that produce identifiable features and outcomes; as entities always evolving and changing in a state of perpetual becoming; or as entities grounded in action that generates organizational structure and form. Significantly, they held that all three orientations are necessary to account for the complexity of the relationship between discourse and organizations and urged
researchers to “address the discourse-organization relationship within their own orientations as well as within all three perspectives” (p. 21) to enhance our knowledge and understanding of the discourse-organization relationship. In this context, while MaSP is a re-conceptualization of organizational meetings built on abductive thinking informed by a systemic process approach, it is equally grounded in the discursive action of day-to-day organizational meetings, taking place in long-established organizational settings. The research showed how meetings as temporally short events, relative to the longevity of the organization, collectively represent what I refer to as a ‘transient skeleton’ around which the organization is perpetually (re)formed (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002).

Fairhurst and Putnam (2004, p. 8) attribute to Stanley Deetz the view that the function of theory is conception not definition, summarising their own view as; “the question is not what is the best way to view the discourse-organization relationship, but what are we able to see, think, and talk about if we conceive of the relationship in terms of one orientation versus another?” MaSP represents a reconceptualization of organizational meetings as a collective resource rather than as individual organizational events. MaSP is partially informed by sensemaking as an organization-level process and complemented through the zoomed-in analysis using CCO theory, emphasising a ‘grounded in action’ perspective. Adopting different perspectives as advocated by Fairhurst and Putnam overcomes the problematic dualism of focusing solely on structure or agency, and anchors the central role that meetings collectively play in both as key contributors to the discursive constitution of organizations. The MaSP framework accounts for how meetings collectively relate structure and agency across time (Bisel, 2009b, p. 617) and more specifically how meetings contribute to temporal structuring in the organization as a whole.

10.3.2 Challenges within CCO

Aligned with Fairhurst and Putnam’s view that the function of theory is conception rather than definition, MaSP adopts an integrative view of the three CCO schools, rather than assuming a preferred view from any one school’s perspective. Without denial or pretence to resolve the philosophical debates within CCO as considered in Chapter 4, MaSP contributes to addressing a number of questions raised in the CCO literature. For example, Putnam and McPhee (2009, pp. 198-202) identified key areas that should be developed to progress CCO as an organizational theory. Their first
question focused on how multiple distanciated 'sites' become integrated to form a recognisable organization (p. 198). While 'sites' in this instance does not specifically refer to organizational meetings, meetings certainly represent 'sites' of conversational discourse and key sources of textual 'surfaces', both of which Taylor and Van Every (2000, p. 34) identified as central to their concept of emergent organization. MaSP proposes that the integration of meetings collectively, acting as discourse 'sites' or 'surfaces' generators, is accomplished through an ongoing process of sensemaking in the first instance, not only within each meeting but more specifically across streams of meetings. Meetings represent sites within which participants engage in conversation and text-based discourse enabling individual sensemaking to be informed by the sensemaking and sense made by other participants. More significantly, meeting interconnections provide the communicative means by which these distanciated sites are unified into streams and ultimately into a skeletal framework around which the organization grows and emerges.

The modes of inter-connectivity between meetings are a key feature of MaSP which also helps to account for Putnam and McPhee's (2009) second challenge - accounting for the transportation of interactions across time and space (p. 199). MaSP considers time explicitly from two perspectives and implicitly from a third. By considering meetings from both clock-time and event-time perspectives (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002) we saw how meetings collectively bring temporal ordering to the organization, accelerating or slowing down the progression of different organizational activity. Where the immediate intentionality of meeting participants was evident through their discourse it was focused on the simple scheduling of 'the next meeting'. The research showed that meetings viewed collectively over time bring a degree of temporal ordering to the sequence and pacing of organizational activities. Such holistic temporal ordering was not evident as intended, controlled or attributable to any individual person or meeting in the originating meeting discourse.

The implicit nature of time in MaSP is similar to the atemporality of the sensemaking process embedded across meetings, both individually and collectively. Sensemaking as analysed in the meetings data does not explicitly adhere to either clock-time or event-time, but is driven by the 'internal clocks' of meeting participants that are aligned through their meetings-based discourse. Meetings collectively reflect a cultural organizational driver that balances clock and event-time in combination, depending on the events being made sense of. These complex interplays of organizational and
personal time and space cannot be attributed to individuals, are not subject to individual control, and may not have been intended by any one participant in particular meeting events (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 740), but they become more recognisable as the agency of meetings collectively when adopting the holistic view provided for by MaSP.

Putnam and McPhee (2009) posed a third challenge for CCO - to account for the entwinement of material objects and communication in practice (p. 202). MaSP explicitly identifies both human actors and non-human actants as two of the three essential means of connecting meetings. Hybridity (Cooren, 2004b) is used to explain the conjunction of material objects and human intentionality, to account for the communicative effects of both, within and across organizational meetings. Imbrication (Taylor, 2000) is then used to account for how such localised hybrid interactions build into meeting streams and an overall systemic process of organizational meetings collectively. MaSP also identifies shared processes as a product of the hybridicity of human actors and material actants that then serve as non-physical actants to create connections between organizational meetings.

Meetings collectively, as conceptualized in MaSP, also play an identified role in a final challenge Putnam and McPhee (2009) posed for CCO - representing and referencing multiple communities within organizations. As Putnam and McPhee put it - “organizations exist in ecological communities of practice that co-orient their activities through inter-community communication” (p. 201). MaSP recognizes that distinct meeting streams, bearing identifiable characteristics of different organizational groups, represent a significant and consistent way in which these “ecological communities” form and sustain within organizations, but then recursively combine to form their associated organizations. In addition, particular meeting streams also serve as intersection points at which these different communities come together to share information or material, agree or disagree on future organizational directions, or reconcile (or perpetuate) previous (mis)alignment of what was thought to be a shared organizational direction.

10.3.3 A Luhmannian perspective

From the perspective of the Luhmannian school of CCO, Schoeneborn (2011b) suggests that Luhmann’s Theory of Social Systems “...highlights that organizations consist of an interrelated, self-referential, and autopoietic network of communicative events, which are fundamentally grounded in paradox and are inherently contingent—
an aspect largely missing in current CCO debates" (p. 674). Speaking more specifically about adding to Luhmann’s work, Becker and Seidl (2007, p. 943) suggest taking a key theoretical aspect of Luhmann’s work, combining it with other theoretical concepts and applying them as a framework through which to focus empirical work on a given research question. The methodology adopted to extend our understanding of organizational meetings collectively gave effect to Becker and Seidl’s suggestion, while also showing how meetings directly reflect Schoeneborn’s observation about the nature of organizations from a Luhmannian perspective. Two concepts from Luhmann’s work, decision communication and autopoiesis in an organizational setting, were used to inform the analysis under two of McPhee and Zaug’s 4-Flows. Where the 4-Flows model did not prescribe how the flows might develop or be analysed empirically, Luhmann’s concepts provided fine-grained lenses through which to interpret the empirical data from the interactive discourse taking place within organizational meetings. The autopoietic tendency of meetings to generate further meetings became evident from the analysis, which also showed how decision paradox played a role as an autopoietic generator of new organizational meetings. These observations provided a basis to develop the MaSP framework and showed how different aspects of CCO theory were combined in empirical analysis to develop a new conceptualization for organizational meetings collectively.

10.3.4 Structuration and agency

In making a primary contribution to meetings literature to extend our conceptualization of organizational meetings collectively, MaSP also explicitly touches on another central debate within the CCO literature: the duality of structure (Giddens, 1984) favoured by the McPhee school, as against the Montreal school’s view that “such duality maintains an artificial opposition between agency (i.e. inter/actions) and structure (i.e. enduring systems enabling and constraining inter/actions)” (Ashcraft et al., 2009, p. 20). MaSP enters this debate in so far as it conceptualises meetings collectively as both discursive constructions created from the dyadic interactions of meeting participants, but also as structural building blocks that form a transient skeleton shaping the organization within which they take place. As meetings collectively are interconnected over time, they demonstrate collective agency that goes beyond the intentions or actions of any single meeting participant or individual meeting (Schwartzman, 2015). As previously mentioned, the organization that meetings contribute to forming, itself significantly influences how those meetings evolve.
(Schwartzman, 1986, 1989). MaSP indicates a clear recursive loop between organization and meetings collectively, where the agency of each informs the other. In this context, both the duality of structure favoured by the McPhee School, and the text-discourse favoured by the Montreal school, are each informed by the MaSP framework without any pretension to resolve the debate between them.

The structuring effect of meetings collectively can also be considered materially and discursively through the locations in which meetings are held and the various practices used that distinguish them from other organizational events. The use of meeting agendas, the conventions associated with turn-taking or meeting-chairing, or the procedures for recording, disseminating or approving meeting outcomes, all contribute to the physical and discursive ordering and structuring effect of meetings collectively. In so far as the practices of individual meetings or different meeting streams are connected over time through the activities of actors, material artefacts or shared processes, a recognisable ‘structure’ becomes evident that distinguishes the organization from other entities. This extends our understanding of the contribution of meetings to distributed and plural agency based on actual and situated connections in organizational settings (Robichaud & Cooren, 2013), and how that agency is a shared accomplishment of actors and actants working in hybridicity (Cooren, 2004b), both in and through meetings collectively.

Organizational meetings are discursive constructions comprising both conversation and texts but their status with respect to both changes over time. Within Taylor and Van Every’s (2000) conversation-text dialectic and their definitions of and distinctions between conversation and text (Putnam, 2013, p. 29; Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 74), our prehensive treatment of meetings before they take place can make them conversations, texts, or both, but in latent form awaiting more specific definition. For example, their textual nature is already being tangibly inscribed through preparation of written meeting agendas or intangibly in the expectations that participants and organizers may ascribe to forthcoming meetings. While taking place, meetings assume conversation status while also providing a process for converting conversation into textual form. They act as communicative mediators (Latour, 2005, p. 39), transforming conversation to text and also text to conversation, in a regenerative cycle that propagates the conversation-text dialectic over time through meeting streams. Once meetings have occurred, they are textually inscribed into the organization’s memory through meeting minutes or reports, or may acquire conversational form as participants
carry meeting outcomes as immutable mobiles (Cooren et al., 2007) into the organization's wider river of discourse. Their textual residue (Taylor & Van Every, 2011, p. 92) is in the form of agendas, minutes and other documented outputs from meetings, while their conversational form is seen in how they are indexically referenced in the discourse of organizational members in other meetings or organizational settings. Hardy (2004) suggests that in looking at texts “... organizational scholars must also look at what is done with them—at the processes of distribution and dissemination—to see how they move and where they move to” (p. 421). Kuhn (2008) proposes that “As cooriented conversations and texts become imbricated and validated by interactants, an abstract text is produced that represents the firm as a whole” which he calls “authoritative texts” (p. 1236). Over time, particular meetings or meeting streams, for example company AGMs or annual sales conferences, may take on the status of authoritative texts or be viewed as significant components of such texts, enabling meetings collectively to be re-presented in other organizational contexts, including in other meetings, and to be used to convey or relate to “a set of canonical firm level outcomes” (Kuhn, 2008, p. 1236). This reinforces and gives expression to Schwartzman's (1989) view that meetings are the organization writ small and also supports the view that further research is required on the collective agency of meetings (Schwartzman, 2015, p. 740). MaSP advances our understanding of the mechanisms through which meetings collectively contribute to the accomplishment of both.

10.3.5 Extending the 4-Flows model

Schoenebom et al. (2014) suggest that the 4-Flows cut across meta-theories and that they could represent “four dimensions of imbrications or actant-relations exhibiting ventriloquism in varied ways.” (p. 294). As part of the same ‘live discussion’ between the principal adherents to CCO theory, Robert McPhee expressed the view that ventriloquism could be compatible with and valuably inform structuration theory, but cautioned about the fallaciousness of thinking that one person could speak for or be seen to be an actual organization (p. 301). While we may accept at face value his view that such speech acts do not constitute organizations per se, we must also remember that an organization is as much a construct in the minds of those who may perceive an organization to exist, as it is some reified entity that a single individual may wish to ventriloquize on behalf of.
The data analysis in Chapter 8 identified examples of ventriloquism that informed the specification of abstract modes of interconnection between meetings involving 'ghost-participants', specifically the role that absent participation and controllers-by-proxy play in constructing such connections. Ventriloquist acts were visible in the meetings data, whether it was the GM ventriloquizing on behalf of the whole organization as part of institutional positioning, the company chairman invoking the views of an absent GM as a form of membership negotiation in a sales team meeting, or the chairman attributing changes to the frequency of board meetings to another board member which contributed to reflexive restructuring in KT-Inc. These examples illustrate how meetings enable the presence of ventriloquism within each of the 4-Flows. The findings extend our understanding of how the flows are instantiated in day-to-day meetings practice and combine to constitute organization. The analysis also showed how meetings collectively contribute to the continuity of the 4-Flows across organizational time and space. Where Schwartzman (1989) saw meetings as the organization writ small, and McPhee and Zaug (2009) emphasised that organization was found at the intersection of their flows, MaSP provides a conceptual framework, grounded in empirical data, that contributes to understanding how both of these propositions align and occur through the day-to-day practice of organizational meetings.

Browning et al.'s (2009) analysis of the workings of a US Air Force maintenance squadron showed how the intersection of communication flows accounted for entrepreneurial characteristics of the Air Force units that seemed to be atypical for a military organization. Different pairings from the four flows were shown to account for communication that defined organizational traits of 'constitutive complexity' which is frequently displayed by living organisms and ecosystems (p. 90). Similarly, MaSP reflects how pairings of different flows combine both in and through organizational meetings and meeting streams to constitute organization. From the data analysis we saw how the representative role of the GM identified under the membership negotiation flow was also central to the projection of company identity in the institutional positioning flow. As another example, reflexive self-structuring was closely aligned but distinct from activity coordination in so far as meetings were central to decision-making associated with assembling and deploying organizational resources in reflexive self-structuring, while they also played a central role in the coordination of these roles to achieve organizational objectives in activity coordination. MaSP helps us to
understand at a systemic process level how meetings collectively integrate to display the combined constitutive effect of the 4-Flows.

Browning et al. (2009) also showed how the conjunction of different flows amounted to 'syncretism', which they defined as the process of "fusing diverse ideas into a single, general, inexact impression" (p. 106), a concept also used by Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott (2008) in their study examining employee-abusive organizations (EAOs). Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott identified how confluences between the flows contributed to the development of traits that differentiated EAOs as distinctive organizations. Their focus on message types enabled them to add more detailed layers of understanding to each of the 4-Flows that had not been explicated in the original model. In this context, MaSP enhances our understanding of some of the modalities by which such messaging in the 4-Flows may be accomplished through routine organizational meetings.

However, Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott (2008) also identified 'syncretic superstructure' (p. 310) as a key aspect of organizations that they argue the 4-Flows model did not account for. Syncretic superstructure focuses on communication that constitutes "cultural and historical Discourses" (with a capital D as proposed by Alvesson and Karreman (2000, 2011)) or what Fairhurst and Putnam (2004, p. 7) describe as "general and enduring systems of thought". Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott proposed syncretic superstructure as a 'fifth flow' to compensate the failure of the 4-Flows model to "adequately account for larger cultural and historical discourses that underpin the constitution of organizational life" (p. 310). Extending the river of discourse analogy proposed in Chapter 6, if the 4-Flows were considered to account for the shape, size and flow of water in the organizational river, syncretic superstructure is analogous to the composition of the water itself. The 4-Flows model does not provide any direct guide as to what the makeup of the actual discourse in an organization's river of discourse might be - the 4-Flows are more focused on what the output of that discourse will be such as to constitute organization when the different flows are considered in unison. The analysis and MaSP framework indicate that meetings collectively enable and contribute to the accomplishment of each of the four flows and exhibit agency that transcends the 4-Flows and contributes to something more holistically defining of the organization. The analysis identifies meetings collectively as locations and systemic processes that capture, reflect or originate cultural and historical organizational discourses. MaSP improves our understanding of
how meetings collectively act as one empirical source that contributes to syncretic superstructure within organizations.

Reflecting on Fairhurst & Putnam’s (2004, p. 7) “general and enduring systems of thought” as a product of Discourses that are broader and more systemic than dyadic and localised personal interactions, reinforces the potential role meetings collectively have in defining or contributing to organizational collective mind (Duffy & O'Rourke, 2015; Weick & Roberts, 1993) as tentatively explored in earlier stages of this research. Collective mind has received limited attention in the past but has attracted increased attention more recently in the organizational literature (Gallagher, 2013; Miller, Choi, & Pentland, 2014; Peltokorpi, 2014; Reb & Choi, 2014; Theiner, Forthcoming; Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012; Zhang, Chen, Chen, Liu, & Johnson, 2014). The MaSP framework could contribute to developing the concept of collective mind as an aspect of an organization’s syncretic superstructure not easily accounted for by the existing 4-Flows of McPhee and Zaug’s model.

Chapter 9 drew the findings of the research together to identify what meetings accomplish collectively that individual meetings cannot accomplish alone. Holt and Cornelissen’s (2014) proposition to extend our conception of sensemaking by considering the impact of something’s absence as a challenge to envisage alternative explanations, prompts the question - could organizations as we know them be communicatively constituted if meetings did not take place? If not, would just one meeting be sufficient to constitute organization? Would meetings (plural) but without any form of interconnections contribute differently to the constitution of organization, as compared to how meetings collectively as systemic process might contribute? While these questions suggest different directions for research beyond this thesis, this section concludes by briefly discussing if meetings individually or collectively are necessary and sufficient to constitute organization.

10.3.6 Meetings - necessary and sufficient to constitute organizations?

Necessity and sufficiency have been used in different ways to critique, compare or contrast a range of topics associated with CCO, including an overall constructive critique of CCO as an emerging knowledge domain (Bisel, 2010). Bisel concluded that communication was necessary but not sufficient for the overall constitution of organization. Chapter 4 considered and elaborated various tensions and debates between the CCO schools, while acknowledging their shared conviction that
communication is not just something that occurs within organizations but is necessary to constitute organizations. From a different perspective, Boden (1994: p5) argues that micro-meso-macro levels within organizations are an unnecessary illusion, artificially generated by different theoretical perspectives, while other scholars (McPhee & Zaug, 2009; Sillince, 2010) not only advocate the existence of these three levels, but strongly argue that failure to account for how they relate to each other, may well undermine acceptance of any associated theoretical propositions about organizations. In distinguishing between organizations and other forms of collectives, Sillince (2010) takes issue with McPhee and Zaug’s (2000, 2009) four flows theory as we saw in Section 4.3.5, calling it insufficient to distinguish an organization from other forms of collective such as markets, ad hoc social groups or industry trade groups. Necessity and sufficiency are also used in other ways; they are implicitly evident in Sillince’s critique of McPhee and Zaug’s four flows model; McPhee and Zaug (2009: p24) use them to identify weaknesses in Boden’s (1994) argument for the constitution of organization from micro or localized conversation; and they are explicit in McPhee and Zaug’s (2006) challenge to Cooren’s (2004a) elaboration of ‘collective minding’ and Cooren’s response to their challenge (Cooren, 2006).

Viewed normatively, MaSP provides a conceptual framework for considering the integration of meetings collectively that could enhance organizations through improving how meetings are both used and conducted, a theme developed in Section 10.4. However, on the test of necessity and sufficiency (Bisel, 2009a; McPhee & Zaug, 2000), while the nature and form of meetings may perpetually change (Brodeur, 2015; Tracy & Dimock, 2004), can we even conceive of an organization in which meetings as we know them do not take place? Can we conceive of how any organization could be formed or sustained without the use of meetings?

In the first instance, organizations require people (or actors) in order to form. People must have some means of connecting with each other, but also of connecting with, influencing or controlling material objects (or actants) that also form part of an organization. Actors and actants must then combine in particular ways, with some degree of predictability or consistency, for discernible organizations to form from their confluence. This research shows how meetings operate at multiple levels, both individually and collectively, to enable such interactions to take place. The available research on meetings in general (Allen et al., 2015b) supports the contention that organizational meetings are a necessary constituent of organization, but one can also
deduce that meetings alone are not sufficient to assure the emergence of an organization. While meetings provide a necessary means of connecting actors and actants to constitute organizations, it is clear that additional ingredients are also required to contribute to the syncretic superstructure that makes different organizations unique and distinguishable from each other. In the same way that communication is necessary but not sufficient to form organizations (Bisel, 2010), meetings are indispensable to the formation of organizations but only in so far as they are combined with other necessary ingredients that make up organizations as we know them.

10.4 IMPLICATIONS OF MASP FOR MEETINGS PRACTICE

In order to become relevant, research must set out the implications for practitioners and provide prescriptions to guide their practice (Russell Crook et al., 2006, p. 418). In the field of strategic management for example, some scholars express concern about the apparent gap between the focus and findings of research versus its under-applicability in broad civic settings (Bettis, 1991). Concerned that an over-focus on methodology causes researchers to eschew qualitative in favour of quantitative analysis, Bettis (1991) advances the view “that papers too often offer explanation but not meaningful prescription. Information is severed from thoughtful action” (p.317). More recently, some commentators (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011) express concerns that an over-emphasis on scientific rationality in organization and management research has produced theoretical contributions that are increasingly less relevant to practice.

This research was in part motivated by an interest in the practical applicability of the research findings, as much as by a desire to develop meetings theory from the observation of empirical practice. The practice implications set out in this section are intended to make the theory contribution relevant, interesting and useful beyond its academic origins, while contributing to bridging the theory-practice gap in respect of organizational meetings.

To make sense of meetings in a practice setting, it is apt to paraphrase Weick’s (1979, p. 134) sensemaking recipe and ask – ‘how can we know what we think (about meetings) until we see what we do (with meetings)?’ Where the research began by looking at what happened strategy as it was being implemented in meetings, it soon changed focus to consider what the organization was doing with meetings collectively, and also what meetings collectively were doing to the organization. From analysing how meetings collectively were used in one company, the MaSP framework was
developed as an abstraction to aid and inform how we might think about meetings collectively in organizations more broadly. Whether individually, within teams or across whole organizations, there is no doubt from extant literature that the number of organizational meetings continues to rise (Scott et al., 2012), there are many variations of orientation towards meetings (Hansen & Allen, 2015, p. 204), and such orientations impact on the performance of the organization in terms of employee engagement, knowledge transfer, risk management or dynamic capabilities (Hansen & Allen, 2015, pp. 210-212). Some organizations strongly encourage meetings, while others positively eschew them (Hansen & Allen, 2015, p. 204); some adopt meeting practices that allow if not encourage unbridled meeting proliferation (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 165), while others arrange furniture to prevent sitting during meetings to ensure their brevity (Hansen & Allen, 2015, p. 205). Whatever disposition applies, there can be little doubt that how we think about or orient towards meetings in general will have some impact on how we conduct our meetings in particular, and ultimately what benefits we might derive from them collectively. This section considers the practice implications arising from the research and proposes a number of ideas that could enhance the use of meetings as a collective organizational resource. The efficacy of these proposals remain to be tested in future research on organizational meetings.

10.4.1 Mindful disposition towards meetings

Conceptual templates, created from some previous experience, provide fundamental cues in the process of sensemaking (Holt & Cornelissen, 2014, p. 525). Weick (1995), in citing Ring and Rand’s definition of sensemaking as “a process in which individuals develop cognitive maps of their environment” (p. 5), declares a strong adherence to human cognition as the foundation of sensemaking, but equally acknowledges its processual nature and dependence on processes independent of individual cognition. Other scholars such as Holt and Cornelissen (2014) have drawn on Weick’s work to assert that “To make sense involves contextualizing a particular cue or experience in the context of a learnt frame, narrative or category, as the conceptual template, which then produces and enables interpretation” (p. 525). This raises the question: what ‘frame, narrative or category’ did KT-Inc’s meeting participants use to guide the conduct of their meetings?

There was limited evidence of either a detailed or a shared concept of how meetings in KT-Inc should be collectively used but their cost and number seemed to be a common
lens through which some managers viewed their meetings. Concerns were expressed at Officers meetings and at Board meetings that too many meetings took place in KT-Inc and that they were potentially very costly, observations that are also reflected in other meetings research (Scott et al., 2015, p. 23). Notwithstanding, we also saw a desire in KT-Inc to improve the functioning of meetings (individually), in so far as I was asked to provide feedback to groups such as the board and the Ops team about improving their meetings. There was also a desire to improve their meetings collectively, in so far as I was further requested to provide ‘training’ to the managers group on structuring meeting agendas and conducting meeting reviews through PMI, both of which the Board had adopted from earlier feedback. In both cases, neither KT-Inc personnel nor I showed any indication of considering meetings in a collective sense. The closest allusion to this was perhaps my own reference to structuring meeting agendas such as to enable individual topics to progress through different stages of development across different meetings. Significantly, my own focus at that early stage was on progressing the meeting topics rather than harnessing the agency of the meetings collectively, reflecting my own cognitive cause map for meetings as research resources rather than as research topics in their own right.

These ‘cause maps’ or frames of reference adopted by meeting participants (including myself) offer little scope for utilizing meetings in a different way. Independently of any individual’s actions, intention or control in respect of meetings (Schwartzman 2015), the analysis shows that KT-Inc’s meetings collectively were agential in defining what should be done, getting things done, and also in determining the pace at which they were done. This suggests that meetings collectively can be used in a more deliberate way if a different cause map is adopted.

In studying the link between strategic sensemaking and organizational performance, Thomas et al. (1993) concluded that if organizational sensemaking improved, then organizational performance should also improve. The agency of meetings collectively in organizational sensemaking identified in this research suggests that improving meetings may improve sensemaking, and by extension, improve organizational performance. An alternative intuitive perspective was provided by the shared thoughts of the GM and marketing director when they observed that if they could improve their meetings they would need less of them (see Extract 8.57 at 0:58:49 in section 8.2.2). To make such normative leaps for organizational meetings collectively would first require a change in the cause map(s) used to organise and manage meetings, and could
only be validated or refuted with subsequent research. This research provides an alternative cause map for meetings, viewing them as a systemic process resource, with the potential to exhibit collective agency, depending on how they are used. This Section presents MaSP as that alternative cause map.

From the outset it must be emphasised that MaSP in not a prescriptive framework to be imposed in every organization with an expectation of solving some preordained problem or delivering some expected future outcome. The practice proposals in this section are deduced from the research findings and should be seen as a menu of ideas that may improve the outcome of meetings collectively, should their number remain as at present, or lead to holding less meetings should their efficiency and effectiveness improve by treating them as a collective organizational resource.

Three questions will help to condition thinking about meetings collectively and thus help to inform any choices from the menu of options put forward: what is the current disposition towards meetings in the organization? what benefits might arise if meeting participants adopted a new conceptualization of organizational meetings?; have meeting participants anything to fear from running meetings as an integrated and collective resource rather than as isolated events?

Every organization is unique and so too is its use of meetings. A pre-requisite to adopting a MaSP-informed approach towards meetings would be to appraise the existing disposition towards meetings and then to consider the mental shift required to treat meetings as a collective phenomenon rather than as individual, isolated events. Orienting towards meetings as a systemic resource would support creating a general ‘meetings plan’ in much the same way that other organizational resource planning takes place. A meetings plan could be based on functional areas, organizational activities or any other criteria appropriate to a particular organization. A meetings plan would involve specifying the dates, sequence, attendees, agenda items etc., but in a way that is coordinated over time, between individual meetings and across meeting streams, rather than just being a schedule of individual events. A meetings plan would be distinguished by its focus on the interconnections between meetings, created through human participants, material artefacts or shared meeting processes. Treating meetings collectively as a resource would be the significant difference from current practice in many organizations.

Deliberate connections, to be established between particular meetings and meeting streams, could be identified from the outset. For example, trans-participants could be
'nominated' to play active roles in the meetings of different groups with the express intention of creating cross-pollination between groups and fostering closer cooperation and greater information-sharing to improve sensemaking across the organization. Different types of artefacts, such as agenda or minutes formats, or processes for chairing or reviewing meetings, all provide opportunities for establishing direct and indirect channels for connecting meetings, which could be activated in different combinations depending on particular meetings or meeting streams that are to be connected. Acknowledging that it is not always possible to specify exact connection modalities too far in advance, establishing a disposition to connect meetings (mindfulness towards meetings), and the means of connecting them as the meetings occur (heedful interactions in and between meetings), may go a long way towards developing meetings collectively into an organizational systemic process in practice.

Clearly it is neither practical nor beneficial to try to connect every meeting to every other meeting, so particular attention could be given to planning connections between specific meeting streams. This would entail identifying particular meeting streams appropriate to individual organizations. Figure 6.1 (reproduced below) illustrates just three examples of meeting stream types based on the data from KT-Inc.

Figure 6.1 illustrates that in addition to meetings of recognised groups, sections or departments, meetings could also be grouped into streams based on their functions such as planning events, information events, as routine updates or other activities that are relevant to each organization.
Combining the concepts of a meetings plan and meeting streams, a quarterly meeting plan might be prepared and made accessible to specified staff from different functional areas. Such a plan could communicate where specific agenda items will be dealt with, who will be invited, when the meetings will take place (relative to each other) and how outputs/inputs will be coordinated or correlated across meetings and time. Within certain meeting streams, it may then be possible to plan for some or all of the outputs from one meeting to be made available as inputs to subsequent meetings within the same (or other) streams. This would represent prehensive and mindful action in advance of meetings, even before specific meeting outputs are known. Once scheduled and published, other parts of the organization may choose to interact with particular meetings that they otherwise would not have been aware of. In this way, the organization’s meetings collectively could be mobilized to enhance shared organization-level sensemaking, achieving more than the sum of the individual meetings outputs.

10.4.2 Mindful and heedful conduct of meetings

Adopting a systematized view of meetings would likely require a review of how individual meetings are conducted. This section considers how a MaSP orientation might impact more familiar meeting practices in organizations and how they could be modified as an implication of adopting the MaSP framework. It is not practical to provide an extensive discussion about each, but rather to outline how certain practices could be modified to reflect a MaSP orientation. Some ideas may be anathema to organizations with closed or secretive cultures, while others may be readily achievable in organizations that enjoy more open and participative cultures.

**Attending meetings.** Public meetings (Tracy & Dimock, 2004) such as court hearings, certain national parliament meetings or other meetings in wider society enjoy a diversity of forms and attendance patterns. In these settings, public galleries are provided to enable freedom of attendance, selected ‘witnesses’ can be summoned to provide different perspectives, or selected meetings can be held entirely ‘in camera’ where privacy is a key requirement. Such patterns associated with public meetings can inspire a more radical form of meeting attendance for private organizational meetings. For example, meetings could be designated as ‘open’, ‘partial’ or ‘closed’ to indicate whether individuals could choose to attend, had to apply or be invited to attend, or were obliged to attend respectively. A quarterly meeting plan, as mentioned previously,
could provide notice to staff of where, when and with whom particular topics will be discussed, enabling staff to request permission to attend meetings if they felt they had something to contribute or learn from particular meetings. A further adaptation could be to designate meeting attendees as either observers or participants, enabling meetings to be used as more focused communicative events within the organization.

Fostering a MaSP orientation throughout the organization may enable meeting participants to be more contextually mindful and relationally heedful of meetings taking place within their organization. For example, with more structured and integrated meeting agendas, it may be possible for people to attend meetings for specific agenda items only that are of relevance to them individually. With technology advancements, attending meetings does not necessarily mean being physically present, enabling increased requisite variety of attendees on an item by item basis, but without requiring individual attendees to be present for an entire meeting.

**Meeting chairing/facilitation.** Dependent on the organization size and the prevalence of meetings, consideration could be given to identifying one person or a small team of people who would be responsible for managing the organization’s meetings. If treated as a service provision for all parts of the organization, this idea offers the potential to professionalise and also standardise how meetings are conducted. For example, a limited number of people could be designated and trained as meeting chairpersons. In that role, they could be called on by any group to organize and run meetings, freeing up the group’s members to focus on the meeting content. The ‘professional’ chairperson could focus on bringing the optimum meeting processes to bear to achieve the best use of the groups meeting time, commensurate with the stated purpose of the meetings for the given organization. More significantly, from a systemic process perspective, such chairpersons could also function as meeting trans-participants, bringing greater information-sharing, improve contextualization of shared information, or elaborate the sensemaking environment of previous meetings from which the information might have emerged. In the context of recorded meeting outputs (see below), these trans-participants could act in hybridicity with textualized meeting outputs to significantly enrich inputs to future meetings.

**Recording meeting outputs.** When all the talking is done, what remains from organizational meetings collectively? Current practice most frequently focuses on minutes as the most recognised record of meetings (Odermatt et al., 2015, p. 56). In KT-Inc’s case, these were seldom if ever used as an integrated and accessible
organizational resource. It is recognised in the literature that meeting minutes represent “a long-term memory of discussions, decisions, and assignments” (Volkema & Niederman, 1996, p. 278) but that they may only provide “a snapshot of what had been talked about at meetings” (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011). Immersion in KT-Inc’s meetings suggested that meeting memory was relatively weak and was dependent on personal recall by individuals rather than any systematic or routinized way of ensuring clarity of collective recall from previous meetings. However, it is also recognised that “the formalization of meaning in meeting minutes has an impact on the translation of decisions into organizational outcomes (e.g. Schwartzman, 1989; Boden, 1994; Iedema, 1999)” (Dittrich et al., 2011, p. 24). Textualization of talk can significantly alter the context within which the talk originated, impacting how the talk-now-text might be later interpreted compared to the (meeting) context in which the talk took place. This change in context can significantly impact on the meaning attributed to or understood from the textual form used to transport meaning across time and distance (Iedema, 1999).

For the reasons outlined above, it seems reasonable to question if the form and content of meeting minutes are the most appropriate way to achieve what I would call cross meeting messaging, if the aim is to foster more direct connections between meetings under MaSP. The current form and indeed content of minutes may preclude them from ever becoming more useful than they already are. Adopting the concept ofprehension that informs the MaSP framework, consideration could be given to developing more specific forms of cross meeting messaging to reflect the feeling, mood and emotion (Hernes, 2014; Whitehead, 1927/1978) that lies behind particular messages, rather than mere words on a page that may tell less than half the relevant story. As Boden (1994) reminds us, meetings and their associated outputs can represent “minor moves” in alerting relevant organizational actors to “the current state of earlier conversations, informational items and agreements” (p. 134), but it is through the layering or lamination of these moves that plans and actions emerge to define the organization. Greater attention to organizing meetings to simplify but formalise this lamination process could see greater productivity and improved overall performance from holding the meetings in the first place.

**Topic management.** Adopting a universal agenda format for organizational meetings could provide a framework for connecting meetings, with individual connections to be defined more explicitly as meetings take place. For example, during the data collection,
an agenda format (see Appendix 7) was suggested to KT-Inc to improve time keeping during their meetings. Focusing on the structure of meeting agendas offers one possibility to create structured connections between meetings. Agenda items could be designated under one of five headings – for information; for discussion; for recommendation; for decision; for action (I pick five for illustration purposes only). An item designated as 'for information' at early meetings (note the plural) could progress as a 'for discussion' item at a later meeting (singular) involving more cross functional participants. The same topic could appear later again as a 'for decision' item at a meeting whose participants have the specific authority or responsibility to make a final decision on the topic in question. Temporally ordered, information might be initially shared at one meeting, before more detailed discussion in a later meeting. Still later, one group might then make recommendations before passing it on to other team meetings for decision making and/or further action to be taken. In such circumstances, the topic would be a transient form of connection between meetings but the agenda format as a common meetings artefact would represent a more enduring processual connection between meetings.

Time keeping. The agenda-structuring envisaged under 'topic management' above would also support improved estimation of time required for particular topics at particular meetings. For example, if it had become routine practice to structure agendas in this way and to schedule topics to be handled across a number of meetings, then very limited time might be allocated for information at early meetings, while considerably more time could then be allocated at later meetings for discussion or decisions that would be expected to take longer to complete. By improving the estimation of time needed for agenda items, a group's ability to manage their time during meetings would be expected to improve. Where allotted time has been reached on one topic, informed choices could be made during the meeting on extending the time allocated, reorganizing the time for remaining topics, or remitting the topic to a future meeting. Treating meetings collectively as a holistic resource and organizing/managing them accordingly, could open possibilities not previously considered for optimising their use collectively.

Many practical possibilities can be envisioned by considering meetings collectively, which is not to say all of them would work or should necessarily be embraced. Any such implications for practice would need to be considered in the cultural and historical context of individual organizations, but certainly could evolve over time if a systemic approach to meetings was implemented in practice. The accumulation of such meeting
practices, and more particularly their deployment across meetings collectively, increases the possibility that they contribute to the 'shared process' connectors envisaged in the MaSP framework. But it must also be acknowledged that different organizations may come to use considerably different shared processes to connect their meetings. It is beyond the scope of this section to assert if any benefits would ultimately accrue from such changes in practice, but this might provide an interesting direction for future research in which meetings collectively are taken as the unit of analysis in organizations that use meetings as a collective and systemic resource.

10.4.3 Heedfully learning from meetings

One of my earliest surprises in KT-Inc was to find an explicit provision for post-meeting reviews in their code of meeting practice (see Appendix 6). My surprise was compounded when I found that the prescribed reviews did not happen and that KT-Inc had no methods for doing them! The meetings literature distinguishes between the type of post-meeting review envisaged by KT-Inc, in which each meeting is itself reviewed, versus conducting a particular type of meeting as a means of reviewing some wider organizational activity or event (Lacerenza et al., 2015; Scott et al., 2015). Where some views prevail that 'debrief meetings' or 'review meetings' are not the same as traditional meetings because they normally operate in a different way (Lacerenza et al., 2015), from a MaSP perspective, debrief or review meetings would be seen as just another organizational meeting (along with workshops, planning sessions, focus groups etc.), that could be connected within meeting streams, in order to lever their systemic process connections. Seeing them in this way would be more a matter of practice choice rather than theory dogma.

Learning from meetings does not have to be restricted to what might come from such formally structured after-action reviews. There seems ample opportunity to integrate short, focused review discussions into each meeting agenda in the way that KT-Inc did, once they had access to a particular method for doing so. Learning from meetings could also have as much to do with being mindful of the potential to learn and being heedful of learning opportunities as they arise, as it has to do with setting up any particular process to do so. Learning could also come from critical observation of embedded cross-meeting messaging that might be established from adopting a MaSP orientation, and then simply updating practices to retain and develop those that show positive benefits and to cease those that show no value. This was largely the approach
adopted by KT-Inc, referred to as PMI (Sections 7.3 and 7.4), that enabled them to develop their own tailored meeting review practice that was markedly different from the method they started with some twelve months earlier (see Appendix 7).

An extension of this idea could be an explicit action for every agenda item, to query if the item had been addressed at any other known meetings and what the outcome was. Equal attention could be given to identifying future meetings that the agenda item might be relevant to and any specific message(s) to be conveyed from the present meeting to those future meetings. Deliberately adopting this retrospective and prehensive orientation could inform sensemaking taking place in the moment, which would prompt consideration of how particular messages might be communicated to other meetings to assist their sensemaking activities.

The redundancy of the sales manager from KT-Inc as reviewed in Section 8.1.3, reflects how careful timing of meetings can ensure smooth transitions, causing the least collateral damage. Careful timing and coordination of meetings of different groups can help to minimise leaking of sensitive information and ensure the whole organization moves in the same direction on a given topic, at the same time. While this may sound self-evident, it can only be accomplished if meetings collectively are considered and arranged in a way similar to that envisaged in the MaSP framework. Achieving such shared organizational focus is reminiscent of collective mind (Weick & Roberts, 1993) that informed earlier stages of this research (Duffy, 2013; Duffy & O'Rourke, 2013a, 2013b, 2015). Weick and Roberts (1993) suggested that collective mind “... in the pattern of interrelated activities among many people” (p. 360). The inter-meeting connections inherent in MaSP create the potential to collectively create a processually focused practice of meetings that could provide a rich learning resource that could not be accomplished by any of the connections individually. Borrowing from research into high reliability organizations, vulnerability to unexpected upsets can be significantly reduced if we “... redesign organizing processes so that richer thinking is activated more quickly among a greater number of people all of whom try to update what they know regardless of its source.” (Weick, 2009, p. 49). MaSP provides one cause map to inform the development of such processes for mainstream organizations through the use of their organizational meetings.

As we saw in Section 3.5, requisite variety refers to what is needed by a system to carry out its intended function. More specifically, it impacts the degree to which control over a system can be exercised in so far as “the larger the variety of action available to a
control system, the larger the variety of perturbations it is able to compensate” (Weick, 2009, p. 159). In the context of adopting MaSP for planning organizational meetings, two aspects of requisite variety could be considered - (1) ensuring the right ‘variety’ of meetings to enable meetings collectively to deliver the broader organizational outputs envisaged; (2) ensuring the right variety of attendees in those meetings to accomplish the intended outcomes from individual meetings or meeting streams.

10.4.4 Building requisite variety of meetings

As discussed in Section 2.3, meeting types can be formal or informal (Boden, 1994; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2007), scheduled or unscheduled (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2007; Mintzberg, 1971; Schwartzman, 1989). In a refinement based on statistical analysis of meeting purposes, Allen et al. (2014) developed a taxonomy of meeting purposes with sixteen purpose categories for meetings, which they distilled into just two primary categories – ‘instrumental meetings’ that focus on accomplishing some task, and ‘content meetings’ focused on discussion of some topic.

The MaSP framework does not explicitly focus on meeting types or purpose, but rather considers ‘meeting streams’ defined largely by meetings that broadly share the same participants, or have overlapping or shared purpose within the organization. Within these streams, meeting purposes may differ considerably and each organization will necessarily have its own cultural disposition towards the degree of formality to be adopted or the number of meetings focused on accomplishing specific outcomes or discussing ranges of topics. Meeting streams provide a conceptual guide for grouping meetings in ways that may exhibit particular systemic characteristics, such as temporal ordering or metronomic pacing for achieving particular outcomes. Clustering meetings into different streams may also aid communication across different groups by making more visible to wider organizational audiences the subject matter of different meetings, as well as where and when they take place, and who might be involved in them.

In line with the systemic process Weltanschauung informing this research, these features of meetings should be viewed in association with how they integrate into the wider systems and processes operating within the organization. Specific ‘in meeting’ practices associated with preparation and communication of agendas, invitations to participate in particular meetings, or communication of meeting outputs, enable cross-meeting connectivity before, during or after meetings.

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10.4.5 Enhancing requisite variety in meetings.

The data analysis in Chapters 7 and 8 contained examples of demographic, geographic or customer-related data being presented at board meetings. The board interpreted the data, transforming it into information and passing it on to other functional teams’ meetings. These teams in turn made more refined and specific use of the information before further transforming it into “actionable knowledge” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 415). This was possible because they had the appropriate meeting attendees (requisite variety) with specialist technical or sales knowledge that enabled use of the information in ways distinct from how the board used it. These examples highlight that data presented at one meeting may have constrained meaning due to participants’ limitations to meaningfully interpret the data (Littlepage, 2015). Similarly, withholding particular data from meetings may unnecessarily constrain the ability of meeting participants to contribute to their full potential. Acknowledging and addressing such limitations and explicitly sharing people and data across different meetings, will enable a contribution from meetings collectively that is more than the sum of their individual contributions. The same data presented at different meetings may be converted into useful information through the input of different participants who can make sense of it in different ways. This is more likely to happen if the meetings are mindfully connected before they happen and then heedfully interrelated while they are taking place.

The availability of meeting-related technology now makes possible the connection of two or more meetings while they are taking place simultaneously, creating interesting possibilities for scheduling meetings to run concurrently, and then deliberately connecting them for specific meeting agenda items. Such creative meeting scheduling would also require synchronising agendas, but could increase the requisite variety of participants within meetings, without increasing the number of meetings that individuals would have to attend. Increasing such requisite variety is not confined to human actors and may also include material artefacts as actants within meetings.

In a broad sense, the more diverse the participation of actors or actants in meetings (i.e. requisite variety in meetings), the more likely the meeting participants will be able to make sense of an increasingly complex environment. The narrower the base of meeting participants (i.e. a lower requisite variety of meeting participants) the more likely the organization will form a limited and potentially constraining view of its wider environmental context. This must also be balanced with maintaining a manageable scale of meetings such that they can be efficiently conducted to achieve their stated
purpose. The requisite variety of meeting participants may therefore significantly inform the sensemaking (ESR) taking place in meetings individually. By extension, the degree to which participants can cross over to take part in other meetings could also significantly impact on how effective meetings collectively are as an organizational sensemaking resource.

Littlepage (2015) identified availability of expertise as a critical factor in determining the outcome of meetings. Where particular meetings have to consider specific information with a view to using it to achieve particular outcomes, it becomes important to ensure the appropriate people are in attendance who can understand, interpret and use the available information most productively. Having more people than is necessary to achieve a meeting’s specified purpose would be to waste peoples’ time for no additional benefit. Clearly an appropriate balance is required, most likely informed by the intended purpose ascribed to meetings individually or collectively. But such a balance within individual meetings can only be established if the meetings are considered holistically.

In general, there are two primary ways in which people come to attend meetings - they are instructed (or obliged) to attend, or they are free to exercise their own judgement and choose to attend. In a traditional sense, people typically attend meetings because they are expected to due to their role/position, they have been requested to attend by someone or some group, or they have asked to attend for their own stated reasons. Adopting a MaSP orientation towards meetings might encourage an individual disposition that requires neither an expectation nor an instruction/invitation to attend particular meetings. Participants could simply choose to attend because they feel they have something useful to contribute or they may learn something useful, or both. This could only happen if the organization was culturally accepting of such ‘free’ attendance at meetings, and also if sufficient details about forthcoming meetings such as date/time/location/agenda were freely available to all organization members. This idea could be considered challenging, provocative or even subversive in some organizations but has interesting potential if implemented in practice.

Considering the law of requisite variety and applying it to meetings collectively in practice, reaffirms that everyone does not have to attend every meeting in order for meetings collectively to follow a systemic process orientation. Viewed as part of a broader organizational sensemaking process, individual meetings could be focused on more specific purposes, mindful that their outputs are being deliberately tailored to feed
into other meetings that will collectively be used for broader organization level sensemaking. In this context, the requisite variety required \emph{within} individual meetings (i.e. the spectrum of attendees required) may be curtailed to only those participants whose requisite variety matches or just exceeds the variety of the subject matter the meeting is scheduled to deal with. However, such an approach would also need more careful planning of the variety \emph{of} meeting types to be held, to achieve the systemic purpose assigned to meetings collectively.

\subsection*{10.4.6 Summary from a practice perspective.}

Clear intentionality in respect of convening individual meetings in KT-Inc stood in stark contrast to the absence of any observed or recorded intentionality about using meetings collectively in the organization. In so far as meetings were mentioned or considered collectively, they were criticised for being too many, too costly or too repetitive. And yet the data indicates meetings were the first resort when decisions could not be made or agreed, particular matters needed to be accelerated, or strategizing was required to develop action plans to deal with commercial or organizational problems. In the company’s drive to ‘up our game’ and to develop a high performance culture, it seems reasonable to question if they missed a significant opportunity to use their prolific meetings to do just that? Was a resource that was entirely within their control and readily accessible to them, simply overlooked because meetings had never been viewed as a collective resource in the past?

In the officers meeting of 22nd June 2011, members of KT-Inc come closest to critically analysing their meetings on a holistic basis, but fell far short of reaching any holistic conclusions. Their focus on reductionist details about individual meetings seemed to blind them (and me as a participant observer at the time) to the possibilities of taking action to synchronize, integrate and harmonize their meetings holistically across time and space in the whole organization. These apparent meeting dichotomies within KT-Inc provide valuable inspiration to develop practice proposals that may enhance the contribution of meetings collectively to organizations more generally. However, it is acknowledged that any normative deductions derived from untested theory should be treated with a degree of caution by practitioners but more hopefully, with a degree of curiosity and interest by future researchers of this topic.

This thesis has given considerable prominence to Weick’s (1979) recipe for sensemaking, as a means of structuring the analysis of KT-Inc’s meetings’ data. Other
perspectives on sensemaking include Holt and Cornellisens’s (2014) proposal for ‘absence’, ‘mood’ and ‘openness to possibility’ as three alternative ‘ingredients’ to sensemaking that represent a call towards action to augment or even replace the retrospective use of retained cognitive maps for sensemaking (Weick, 1979, 1995). Extending this call towards action to aid sensemaking, Colville et al. (2012, p. 7) suggest “you can also act your way into meaning”. Simple action and reaction to instant events can make sense in the moment, prompting the immediate next action/reaction to set up a localized and near instant cause-effect loop operating independently of any influence from previously retained cause maps. Action, even when informed by a ‘wrong’ cause map, can still have positive outcomes, perhaps best exemplified by a Hungarian military team lost in a blizzard in the Swiss Alps yet who found their way to safety using a map of the Pyrenees! (Duffy, 2013; Weick, 2007). In their case, doing trumped thinking. This anecdote illustrates that ‘the map’ may only be a very small part of the final outcome, depending on the disposition of the parties making use of the map in the first place. More importantly, it illustrates that cause maps are not necessarily right or wrong - they merely provide initial frames of reference against which comparisons can take place, sense can be made, and tentative action taken as part of an ongoing sensemaking cycle. The functional brilliance or complete fallibility of any cause map are more product of the disposition of those using them, than direct attributes of the cause maps themselves. Weick (1979) offered his own caution about cause maps when he said: “Anything that can be done to form a cause map can be undone to change it” (p. 86). It is in this vein that the MaSP framework is advanced as a yet untested cause map to inform the practices associated with meetings collectively as considered in this section.

Weick (1979) takes the commonly used folk aphorism (Gioia, 2006, p. 1714) “I’ll believe it when I see it” and switches it to “I’ll see it when I believe it”, using it to assert that “Beliefs are cause maps that people impose on the world after which they ‘see’ what they have already imposed” (Weick, 1979, p. 135). Viewed in this light, a conceptual cause map such as MaSP must first be ‘believed’, before any potential benefits might arise from it in practice. But that is not to suggest that it is infallible, is cast in stone, or can guarantee any future improvements in the contribution meetings collectively make to their organizations. It can only ever be a part of a recursive and iterative cycle of theory - informing practice – informing theory, ultimately leading to organizational (meeting) practices that both reflect and are sympathetic to the
organization’s underlying culture, while at the same time contributing to the definition of what that culture might become (Giddens, 1984; Schwartzman, 1989).

Believing in MaSP will be a prerequisite to its implementation, before any benefits from it might be seen. Changing existing organizational meeting practices is likely to require a degree of ‘seeing it when I believe it’, on the simple premise that meetings are unlikely to change themselves without some form of disruption, informed by initial belief in an alternative view of how they might be conducted collectively. MaSP was derived from analysis after ‘seeing’ how KT-Inc handled its meetings. Practice informed the development of MaSP as a new conceptualization of organization derived from that analysis. MaSP facilitates envisaging new meeting practices yet to be implemented in practice. The efficacy or efficiency of any such changes to practice must then be tested in follow-on research in a continued iterative theory–practice–theory cycle to inform changes to either or both where necessary. Believing in MaSP does not in any way preclude changing it based on observed experience that reflects new inputs not accounted for in this research. MaSP is a conceptualization of organizational meetings informed by observed practice. It should remain true to that heritage and change as informed by any future practice that may embrace it.

Adopting a more mindful disposition towards meetings before they happen, with the heedful intention of connecting them more explicitly while they are happening, requires focus on how they would then be connected in practice. The discussion in this section of the various types of connections between meetings provides some resources for practical consideration. From systems theory, Luhmann (2013) suggests that “...the highly selective extraction of invariants, of moments of meaning that are sufficient for the concrete purpose and operation of connecting the past with the future, succeeds in some way”. However, he also cautions that “When we use something again, it has to fit into the changed situation”, but that “One can then imagine that the structures become somewhat identifiable through the sequence of their repeated use” (p. 246). Past Meetings could be viewed as libraries of previous organizational activity, but are generally poorly recorded, poorly catalogued and poorly indexed for reference. Developing systemic process practices informed by MaSP creates the potential to significantly improve the indexicality of past meetings, offering opportunity to better inform present or future meetings. Any such benefits can never arise from their mere theoretical proposition. They can only develop from experimentation in practice, followed by retention of those practices that seem to offer most promise. Over time,
such evolving practices should prompt or inform further research that could negate, modify or confirm the propositions arising from this thesis.

10.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Throughout this chapter references have been made to individual aspects of MaSP that could benefit from further research. This section consolidates the potential for further research relating to MaSP as a theory on meetings, under the following three headings — testing MaSP’s underlying assumptions, implications or predictions based on the framework; further development of MaSP as a meetings theory; and the potential to use MaSP in other organizational research in which meetings are not the research topic.

10.5.1 Testing MaSP

MaSP as a theory accounts for how the agency of meetings collectively may be accomplished and the effects that agency has on the organization. The propositions associated with MaSP remain to be tested. Section 10.4 sets out, deductively, the implications for meetings practice, arising from the adoption of MaSP to guide the conduct of an organization’s meetings collectively. The impact of deploying an organization’s meetings more holistically as a systemic process resource can only be speculated at this stage. The MaSP framework lends itself to developing a range of hypotheses which could be subjected to future testing from a positivist perspective, in contrast to the constructionist perspective adopted for the development of MaSP. The following are illustrative rather than developed examples of what might emerge as hypotheses from the MaSP framework. To be tested in further research, they would require careful framing in the context of the specific research topic and the unit of analysis being used.

At its broadest level, a hypothesis (H1) could be framed as — An organization’s performance will be improved by operating its meetings as a systemic process resource. Clearly, criteria to measure or assess ‘performance’ would have to be identified, appropriate to the organization and research settings in question.

If each of the three categories of findings in Chapter 9 are considered separately, each could prompt more detailed hypotheses such as (H2) - Controllers-by-proxy and absent participation operate as equally effective mechanisms to exercise power within and across meeting streams in organizations. ‘Effective mechanisms’ and ‘exercise power’ would require detailed definition to enable further development and testing.
A third hypothesis could be derived from the findings on the temporal structuring effects of meetings collectively, for example (H3) – if the time frame within which initiatives are required to be actioned are not aligned with the periodicity of the meetings to which they are assigned, then action and outcomes will be unnecessarily delayed, increasing the cost to the organization. In this case, the concepts of ‘actioned’, ‘meeting periodicity’, ‘alignment’, ‘unnecessary delay’ and ‘cost’ would all have to be carefully scoped out to enable appropriate testing of such hypotheses.

Under the utility of meetings, quantitative analysis could be carried out, to consider the relationship between the outcomes of meetings collectively over time for a group adopting a systemic process orientation, as against the outcomes for another group using an individual-centered approach towards its meetings – (H4) – Groups adopting a MaSP orientation towards their meetings require less meetings than those adopting an individual-centered approach. An alternative but broader framing could be (H5) – Meeting streams conducted using a MaSP approach are more efficient that those following an individual-centered approach.

These examples of hypotheses are necessarily general, but illustrate the ways in which the MaSP framework could be tested through the use of case studies (Creswell, 2009; Eisenhardt, 1989), action research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005) or quantitative research methods. Any such testing would involve assessing the ‘current state’ of an organization’s disposition towards meetings and the impact of its existing meeting arrangements. Normative changes to existing meeting practices, introduced as a result of MaSP, could then be assessed for their impact, to validate if hypotheses derived from the MaSP framework are valid or if the framework itself needs to be changed.

10.5.2 Further MaSP development

The MaSP framework examined the agency of meetings collectively, and while the bifocal methodology aimed to account for macro and micro perspectives on meetings collectively, limitations of the research have also been acknowledged in terms of the scope of the data collected, the scale of the organization involved, and the methods used to analyse the data. There can be little doubt that collection and analysis of meetings’ data from other types or sizes of organization may identify features of the agency of meetings collectively that have not yet come to light through this research.

Apart from the potential for future research to extend the MaSP framework, there is also potential to refine different aspects of the framework. For example, meeting
connections created through human actors were sub-divided to consider how trans-
participants and ghost participants contributed to the agency of meetings collectively.
Material artefacts or shared processes may also be used in different ways or to different
degrees, as other modes of connecting the meetings of different organizational groups.
Each of these could be subject to more detailed examination to understand how they
vary across different organizational groups, to understand the different levels of impact
they may exercise, or to extend our understanding of why such variations might occur.

The available data are also rich with examples of dyadic interactions between particular
meeting participants (the KT-Inc GM and Chairman dyad is just one example), that
could reveal more detailed insights using analytical methods such as Conversation
Analysis (Asmuß, 2015; Woffitt, 2005) or Critical Discourse Analysis (van Dijk,
2001). More detailed examination of the hybridicity of different actors, different
modes of connections and different meeting streams represents another way in which
the MaSP framework could be developed.

10.5.3 MaSP-informed organizational research

Before meetings became a topic of research in their own right, they were used as
research resources for a wide range of other aspects of organizations that contributed
to our understanding of organizational meetings. From Allen et al.’s (2015b) most
recent work on meeting science, we have seen how meetings research may contribute
to understanding other organizational phenomena drawn from different research
disciplines. However, Schwartzman (2015) considered much of the extant meetings
research to be individual-centered and suggested that a move away from this focus
should be “underlined and theorized in more detail in future research” (p. 740).
Meetings research that heretofore has been considered individual-centered could now
be considered more holistically in the context of the MaSP framework. The framework
could be used to explore how connections between meetings and their collective agency
might impact on areas such as emotion regulation (Thomas & Allen, 2015), consensus
decision making (Haug, 2013; Haug, 2015) or social dynamics (Meinecke & Lehmann-
Willenbrock, 2015) throughout the organization.

In so far as meetings are implicated in organizational research focused on systemic or
processual thinking (Hernes & Maitlis, 2010; Langley et al., 2013) (for example in
strategy development (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008)), or relates to organizational
sensemaking (Brown et al., 2015; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014) (for example relating

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to organizational power politics (Whittle et al., 2016)), the MaSP framework could be used to inform our understanding of how meetings collectively contribute to these or other aspects of organizations.

Separate from the MaSP framework as a conceptual tool with which to study organizational meetings further, the analysis in Chapter 7 highlights a potentially significant gap in our understanding of how meetings contribute to sensemaking as a whole organization phenomenon. Maitlis and Christianson's (2014) comprehensive review of sensemaking literature emphasises and focuses on its processual nature (p. 62), acknowledges the ontological differences between being an individual (cognitive) versus a shared (discursive) accomplishment (p. 62), and guides future research into when, where and how organizational sensemaking takes place (p. 94). Combining this view with the conviction expressed in meetings' literature on the centrality of meetings to sensemaking in organizations (Boden 1994: Schwartzman 1989; Scott et al., 2015), suggests considerably greater scope for combining meetings and sensemaking as a joint topic of research. Related to this perspective, is also the potential to pursue a greater understanding of the operation of organizational collective mind (Gallagher, 2013; Miller, Choi, & Pentland, 2014; Peltokorpi, 2014; Reb & Choi, 2014; Theiner, Forthcoming; Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012; Zhang, Chen, Chen, Liu, & Johnson, 2014), a topic that informed the early stages of this research. The role that collective mind might play in organizational sensemaking, whether from a cognitive or discursive/constructivist perspective, and how meetings may contribute to both, could be another fruitful direction to explore the agency of meetings, using sensemaking, collective mind or meetings as the research topic.

10.6 METHODOLOGICAL AND PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

10.6.1 Methodological reflections

The bifocal analysis in this research was informed and guided by Discourse Analysis, in part to bring consistency to the two levels at which the analysis was carried out. Nicolini (2009) used his zooming-in and zooming-out approach to study the effects of socio-material organizational practices. His zoomed-in perspective focused on discursive and material accomplishment, while the zoomed-out perspective identified how here-and-now practices connect with there-and-then practice, which closely relates to Montreal School scholarship on distanciation and teleaction in organizations.
(Cooren & Fairhurst, 2009; Vasquez, 2013; Vásquez & Cooren, 2013). As used by Nicolini, both perspectives were informed by distinct theoretical lenses appropriate to the level of detail being examined under each perspective. These characteristics made Nicolini’s approach particularly apt to analyse the meetings data in this research, given the socio-material makeup of meeting practice, and the desire to consider meetings collectively based on recorded data from individual meetings.

Adopting the bifocal approach did not come without attendant challenges. In the first instance, it required theoretical guidance from two distinct but related bodies of knowledge. Where sensemaking and CCO theory guided the zoomed-out and zoomed-in analysis respectively, they were each underpinned by systems and processual theory which also informed the original abductive conceptualization of meetings collectively as a collective organizational phenomenon. Where each perspective took a different view of the level of detail being considered about meetings collectively, the analytical output needed to be harmonised into a single framework to which each contributed but that neither could have accounted for alone. Distinguishing between the effects and contribution of individual system components, versus their collective impact when they act systemically, is one of the acknowledged challenges of systems and processual thinking (Meadows, 2009), and was no less challenging in this research.

Perhaps the biggest personal challenge in using the bifocal analysis was maintaining perspective on meetings collectively as the unit of analysis, particularly during the zoomed-in analysis. As details were engaged about meeting features, or as particular topics were used to track connectivity across meetings, it was a constant challenge to resist pursuing these discrete analytical threads as topics of interest in their own right. At the earlier stages, curiosity sometimes overcame focus and the individual-centered nature of previous meetings’ research reinforced this challenge. The challenge was largely addressed by adopting a repetitive question to myself, based closely on the research question – ‘what does this have to do with meetings collectively and their collective contribution to constituting the organization?’ This helped to remain focused on the analysis and findings associated with the agency of meetings collectively, rather than on individual meetings or their constituent parts.

10.6.2 A personal reflection

In undertaking this journey, I feel like I’ve walked through the grand canyon of organizations but explored only one small crevice on organizational meetings. All too
often during this ‘field trip’, there seemed little time to be even aware of what might be happening beyond the high walls of the particular topography being explored. Immersion in a small subset of the landscape being explored required the application of another small subset of tools for interpreting and understanding the imminent surroundings I encountered. As the journey unfolded, I had uncertainties as to the appropriateness of the tools I selected for the journey. But then I quickly realized that it is not possible to bring all the tools that might be available, or that you might like to have, and so you continue to move on to do the best you can with the equipment at your disposal. I can only hope that I have done some justice to the tools I have used, to the data entrusted to my care, and to faithfully reporting the outcome of my work with both.

As I emerge at the end of this intensely personal yet more widely shared journey, I look beyond one grand canyon and see the innumerable others that remain to be explored. The view is at once humbling and inspiring - humbling as I realize how little I have managed to see of a vast landscape, but inspiring in knowing how much I have learned and can bring to the next part of my personal journey. I have come to appreciate that if I undertook the same journey starting tomorrow, there would be a new set of experiences to be conquered all over again, even if I travelled through the same landscape. I might also find that insights considered new on the first journey, feel passé on the second encounter. What appeared novel the first time may feel familiar or even dated the second time around. But this cannot negate or detract from the unique personal development that comes with something seen or experienced for the first time.

10.7 CONCLUSION

“In certain social systems it is meetings produce ‘organization’, although it is much more common to assume the opposite” (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 41). This short quotation most aptly summarises the recursive nature of organizational meetings that lies at the heart of this thesis. Meetings research has more often adopted an individual-centered focus, rather than exploring the agency that meetings might collectively exhibit in an organizational setting (Schwartzman, 2015). Through adopting meetings as research topic and meetings collectively as a unit of analysis, this thesis contributes to our understanding of the agency of meetings collectively, and may inform, guide or challenge future practice and research into organizational meetings.

Sensemaking, as a process of enactment, selection and retention, informed analysis of meetings discourse data from a broader zoomed-out systemic process perspective, and
was used to understand the impact that meetings collectively have at a whole-organization level. CCO and the constructive tensions between its three pillars (Schoeneborn et al., 2014) guided a more fine-grained or zoomed-in analysis of the data, to unpack and understand some of the mechanisms that enable meetings collectively to display agency.

The combined findings from this bifocal analysis supports positioning organizational meetings as systemic processual events with porous communicative boundaries (Luhmann, 2006d), constructed through the minute-by-minute interactive conversation of participants (Cooren, 2004a), contributing to but also being shaped by the incessant, multiple flows (McPhee & Zaug, 2000) in an organization’s ongoing river of discourse. Meetings are exemplars of the duality of structure (Giddens, 1984), recursively shaped by, while simultaneously shaping, the organizations in which they take place.

The MaSP framework, developed from the discourse taking place in one organization’s meetings, provides a new cause map (Bougon, 1992; Weick, 1979; Weick & Bougon, 2001) that may inspire alternative ways to view organizational meetings as a collective resource (Hansen & Allen, 2015), can guide organizations to implement meetings as systemic process (Odermatt et al., 2015), and I hope encourages future research to better understand the agency of meetings collectively (Schwartzman, 2015).

I conclude this thesis with a quotation that I hope will guide future scholars as much as it inspired me to continue on a path that so few others seemed to take to explore meetings collectively as a topic of research.

Intentional cultivation of interest is not quite as ludicrous as it might sound. If any theory is true somewhere, sometime for someone, then you as an inquirer might as well work with theories that interest you as theories that don’t, since whatever you find interesting should be found interesting by someone else and be relevant to still other people. Pursuit of an interesting inaccurate theory can also be justified because the offshoots of the thinking, the things observed in the process of speculating, may themselves be more accurate. Interest is a good point of departure and can lead to relevant material.

Karl E. Weick - The Social Psychology of Organizing 1979, p59
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX 1 - PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Front page

Research on strategy implementation
Participant consent form

Researcher: Martin Duffy
Research supervisor: Dr Brendan O'Rourke
College: Dublin Institute of Technology

1. This research concerns the discourse (talk and communications) associated with strategy development and implementation in an SME, particularly focusing on the role of discourse in implementing strategy.

2. I agree to take part in discussions involving the company strategy and its implementation, for the purpose of the research named above.

3. The general nature of the discussions is intended to be a routine part of day-to-day activity. Some special meetings may be arranged with other managers, staff and the researcher to discuss aspects of the company's strategy and its implementation.

4. I agree that discussions in which I am involved as part of this research may be electronically recorded. I understand that transcripts of the recordings will be made for the sole purpose of conducting academic research. I further understand that the recordings will not be used for any other purpose.

5. I understand that the following specific conditions will apply to the security of the material generated from the workshop:
   a. The names of the organization and participants will not be identified in any material written up, published or presented from this research. Every effort will be made to ensure that the organisation and individuals will not be identifiable in any material generated from this research.
   b. The recordings, and any transcripts from the recordings, will be used for research purposes only.
   c. Recordings and associated transcripts will be secured by the researcher and will only be accessed for research purposes.

6. This consent form was provided to participants in advance of any discussions being recorded. Any questions I wished to ask about the research were answered to my satisfaction.
I have read and understood the content of this consent form as set out overleaf and I agree to take part in the research based on the conditions outlined.

Name of participant: __________________________

Signature of participant: ______________________

Date: ________________

I hereby agree to abide by the conditions set out overleaf for handling the material generated from participants in this research.

Name of researcher: Martin Duffy

Signature of researcher: ______________________

Date: ________________
Dear colleagues,

Following approval by the Board and General Manager and their agreement to participate in a PhD research project, I'm very grateful for the opportunity to present my request for your participation and assistance in conducting my research. I hope this research will be beneficial to your company and your participation would significantly contribute to my PhD research.

For confidentiality reasons, I have deliberately omitted the name of your organisation in this correspondence, as it will form part of the material comprising the final PhD.

I propose using a research methodology called Discourse Analysis (DA). The main focus of DA is on how language-based interactions (verbal or written) can impact in the area or topic being researched.

In this case, my interest is in examining how the discourse interactions at board, management and staff levels impact on the implementation of company strategy. This requires recording contemporaneous discussions about company strategy and its implementation. Ideally, these should be as close to naturally occurring interactions and discussions as possible. Such recordings may be transcribed for later analysis by the researcher.

In the specific context of your company, I would like to record your discussions in your routine management, staff and team-based meetings.

Accompanying this briefing note is a consent form, representing the 'contract' between the researcher and participants, particularly relating to issues of research ethics and confidentiality and the use to which recordings and transcripts may be put. If participants feel I have omitted any key factors they would like to have protected, I will be happy to discuss amendment of the consent form to meet any concerns raised.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request. I will be very happy to answer any questions or concerns in-person, should that be required.

Kind Regards

Martin Duffy
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**Notes:**

1. The costs refer to basic salary costs only, taking a rounded annual salary of €220 work days per year and 8 work hours to calculate an hourly rate for every meeting participant.
2. Additional costs such as catering, room hire, etc. where used are not included.
3. Where individuals attended meetings for a short duration to present on a topic they have not been included. Only 1 participant who attended for the full duration of the meeting is included.

**Total Meeting Costs for Board:**

- €17,817.05
- €16,545.28
- €17,799.90
- €17,799.90
- €16,452.80
- €688.03
- €2,417.06

**Total Meeting Costs for Board & Retail:**

- €11,715.49
- €9,545.31
- €12,922.55
- €7,539.99
- €1,923.44
- €589.45
- €1,477.20
- €1,056.98

**Total Meeting Costs for Operations (1):**

- €1,501.34
- €1,048.37
- €185.14
- €3,60.60
- €234.15
- €169.55
- €1,046.05
- €22.10

**Total Meeting Costs for Operations (2):**

- €1,756.50
- €1,266.55
- €192.86
- €97.82
- €234.15
- €1,388.66
- €1,168.35
- €84.37
- €199.42

**Total Meeting Costs for Export:**

- €2,162.59
- €1,83.83
- €289.92
- €199.42
- €1,516.90

**Total Meeting Costs for Management Team:**

- €1,452.59
- €1,046.05
- €22.10

**Total Meeting Costs for Marketing Forum:**

- €1,519.69
- €411.08
- €9.51
- €201.26
- €289.47
- €105.49
- €63.15
- €91.90

**Total Meeting Costs for Single (once off) Meetings:**

- €43,972.74
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Total: 63 meetings 162:56:00
A concept map for developing a strategic plan

Part 1 - The People

Vision
- A clear and accepted destination

- Strategic Goals
  - Strategic objectives
  - Operational tasks

- Operational Staff

- Operational management
- Executive management

- Input

Level 3 activity
Sanity checking

Level 2 activity
Sanity checking

Level 1 activity
Sanity checking

Board


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A concept map for developing a strategic plan – Part 2 – The plan

Themes: Sales/ Organisation development/ Technology/ New products etc as appropriate

18 to 36 months duration

Strategic Goals (1)

9 to 18 months duration

Strategic objective 1.1

6 weeks to 3 months duration

Strategic objective 1.2

Operational task 1.2.1

Strategic objective 1.3

Operational task 1.2.2

Operational task 1.2.3

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A concept map for developing a strategic plan

Part 1 - The People

Managing Director

Group Vision

A clear and accepted destination for the Group

Managing Director

SBU Head

SBU Vision

A clear and accepted destination for the SBU

SBU Management teams

Individual Managers

Team members

Level 1 activity

Level 2 activity

Level 3 activity

Sanity checking!

SBU Tasks

Targets/metrics developed by specific teams

SBU Objectives

Targets/metrics developed by specific teams

Group Goals (1)

Input:

Targets/metrics developed by specific teams

Goa ls (1)

Input:

Major Input

Major Input


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A concept map for developing a strategic plan – Part 2 – The plan

Goals may be grouped under themes, depending on number of goals:
Sales/ Organisation development/ Technology/
New products etc as appropriate

1 to 3 years duration

6 to 12 months duration

6 weeks to 3 months duration

SBU Objective 1.1

SBU Objective 1.2

SBU Objective 1.3

SBU task 1.2.1

SBU task 1.2.2

SBU task 1.2.3

Group Goals (1)

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APPENDIX 6 - KT-INC MEETING CODE OF CONDUCT

Note: A portion of the first page is redacted to protect the identity of the participating company

MEETING CODE OF CONDUCT

ATTENDEE’S RESPONSIBILITIES

In preparing for the meeting attendees will:
A1 Prepare fully for meeting by reading any documents
A2 Review action plans from previous meeting and ensure tasks allocated to them have been completed
A3 Bring their own copy of agenda, action plan and documents to meeting
A4 Send apologies if unable to attend the meeting or if scheduled to make presentation, arrange for a colleague to present on your behalf or advise on progress on actions

During the meeting attendees will display the following behaviours:
A5 Be on time
A6 Be prepared, attentive and contribute
A7 Respect the role of the chair and others
A8 Stick to fixed agenda and allotted times
A9 Use parking lot
A10 Show empathy
A11 Stay solution focused
A12 Will not engage in griping, hogging, side talking or bombshells
A13 Listen to all contributions; comment and criticise positively and respectfully
A14 Stay positive
A15 Be civil
A16 Will not interrupt meeting with phone calls or disruptions
A17 Respect company culture
A18 Contribute to meeting success review

Following meeting attendees will:
A19 Carry out and complete agreed actions
MEETING CODE OF CONDUCT

CHAIRPERSON’S RESPONSIBILITIES

In preparing for the meeting the Chairperson is responsible for:

C1 Circulating the agenda and any supporting documents three working days in advance of meeting
C2 Inviting only relevant people to attend the meeting
C3 Preparing an agenda which outlines topic, person responsible and time slots
C4 Including as the first item on agenda a review of previous actions
C5 Ensuring the final item on agenda is a meeting success review
C6 Confirming the next meeting date at the end of the meeting
C7 Bringing extra copies of agenda, documents etc to meeting
C8 Appointing meeting roles e.g. scribe and time keeper, if required, prior to meeting

During the meeting the Chairperson will display the following behaviours:

C9 Begin meeting on time
C10 Be prepared, attentive and contribute
C11 Respect the role of the chair and others
C12 At the beginning of the meeting state its purpose and reinforce this at intervals during the meeting if required to keep focus
C13 Stick to fixed agenda and allotted times
C14 Use parking lot
C15 Show empathy
C16 Regularly summarise views, decision and agreed actions
C17 Stay solution focused
C18 Do not allow griping, hogging, side talking or bombshells
C19 Listen to all contributions; comment and criticise positively and respectfully
C20 Stay positive
C21 Be civil
C22 Do not allow meeting to be interrupted by phone calls or disruptions
C23 Respect company culture
C24 At end of meeting record concisely decisions reached and action plan, stating clear deadlines and persons responsible.
C25 Record minutes if relevant
C26 Conduct meeting success review

Following meeting the chairperson will:
C27 Promptly circulate decisions, agreed action plan and minutes if relevant to all meeting attendees within three working days
APPENDIX 7 - AGENDA TEMPLATE AND PMI BRIEFING

APPENDIX-XX.-AGENDA-TEMPLATE-AND-PMI-BRIEFING

Meeting Agenda for: Group name - Date: 

The purpose of the meeting is to (This should reflect the overall aims or expected outcome of the meeting, to help keep the discussion focused and on-topic)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Owner</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Time allocation</th>
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<tr>
<td>XX</td>
<td>Meeting review - Plus/Minus/Interesting (PMI)</td>
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Notes (Delete when preparing a live agenda)

1. Each agenda item should be categorised under one of the following headings: Information - Discussion - Comment - Recommendation - Decision.

2. Allocating an estimated time to each item (depending on what category it is in) will help to manage time during the meeting and ensure balanced time across all agenda items.

3. The PMI should not last more than five minutes (approx one minute per element) and the rules should be made clear before the PMI starts. The PMI is focused on the group's conduct of the meeting, NOT on any item that came up on the agenda. Guidelines for conducting the PMI are on the following page. The most important point is to always start the PMI with the positive feedback.
This simple approach to self review a group's activities was developed by Edward de Bono.

You should always start with the positive brain storm.

The spirit of this approach is to provide a 'safe' opportunity for all participants to give feedback to each other, in a constructive way, with a view to improving the group's performance the next time they work together.

The three short brain storms should be limited to a max of 2 minutes each. The process should not take more than five minutes.

The PMI can span all aspects of the group's interactions: room, catering, sound, light, tones of voice, interruptions, negativity, positivity, notice of meeting, etc.

The PMI should NOT re-open discussion on any agenda item.

The PMI output should form part of the meeting minutes.

Some or even all of the points raised should be consciously reflected on by all participants before the next group meeting. The chair (or any individual) might remind the group of a point that came from the previous PMI that the group should keep in mind for this meeting.

Purpose: To provide a structured approach to enable a group to self evaluate aspects of their own performance and provide a basis for improving performance in any subsequent events.

Plus - any aspect of the group's activities, interactions or behaviours which were considered positive, helpful or constructive.

Minus - any aspect of the group's activities, interactions or behaviours which were unhelpful or hindered effective use of the group's time.

Interesting - any points which don't fit into the plus or minus category, but came up during the meeting and were found to be worthy of mention and perhaps further exploration/ action/ development on another occasion.

Notes:

1. Carry out a brain storm of the positive aspects of the issue under review.
2. Carry out a brain storm of the negative or minus aspects of the issue(s) under review.
3. Carry out a brain storm of any points which participants found to have been 'interesting' i.e. thought provoking and maybe worthy of further exploration at a future date.

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Extracts from two meetings, briefly outlining the PMI process.

Extract A7-1

(3:32:56.5) Martin (Res): One of the recommendations I frequently make is to do what I call a PMI. Edward de Bono is the thinking guru who came up with it. Its Plus Minus Interesting. A three minute exercise. One minute under each heading. No debate or discussion is allowed. People are just simply asked anything that was positive about the meeting. Somebody just takes the words no big explanations or debates discussions it's simply anything that somebody thought was positive, just say it, a word a sentence [um] keep it simple. Anything that was negative, any minus, and then anything that came up that was interesting. And what it does is it allows people, it gives people permission to have a point of view about the meeting not the content, the meeting itself as an event, so that it doesn't walk the corridors. And it also allows you the next time that we're going to have a meeting we'll avoid the minuses. So I kept on getting interrupted, or somebody insisted on interrupting everytime somebody else spoke. You don't have to name names, you don't have to fall out with anybody but we'll all pretty much know [um] we're interrupting each other [um]. So the next time ya know you just have said it and it just can have a catalytic effect

(3:34:13.1) Marketing consultant: Could you tell me that again please, plus minus


Source: KT-Inc Marketing Forum meeting, 16th June 2011
(0:05:37.6) Martin (Res): Can I make a couple of key points about it. It should always start with the positives ok, you don't jump into the negatives. You start always with the positives, you always follow that with the minuses, whatever wasn't particularly good about the meeting and then you go to the interesting. The idea with interesting is that it doesn't fit into either of the other two categories, and it can cover anything that came up at the meeting. Some of the mistakes that I've most often seen with the PMI. People think or use it as an opportunity to rehash items on the agenda. That is not what it's for, it's not to rerun the meeting. It should be limited to absolutely max five minutes, it should take really no more than three minutes. It should be one word or one sentence contribution, it shouldn't be big rambling discussion. Its purpose is to give ourselves permission to be a little bit self-critical and self-praising, so that we can feed it forward to the next time we get together and make maximum or best use of the time that we've got, ok. Em, so I suppose the biggest caution about the plus minus interesting is we we grab onto an item that came up, we start the conversation again and then it goes all over the place and then the PMI is lost, ok. So trying to keep the PMI on target is is a bit challenging initially until people get the hang of this is what it's about, it's only about the event that we've run, it's about the meeting and it can be about the lighting or the noise or it can be about Martin or you mightn't name anybody but I was constantly interrupted or I didn't feel that I got a fair hearing here or I don't think that we held to our times on the agenda and my item suffered or whatever the comment is negative, and it can be anything that's positive ya know, it was a constructive meeting, people engaged well, people were open and frank, whatever positive you you see there, ok. So really that's what the plus minus interesting is about, it's it's a structured way to be self-critical in a positive sense, in a negative sense but always with a view to feeding into the next meeting to say how can we so this better. How can we make better use of our time and be a little bit more productive.

Source: KT-Inc Managers meeting, 30th August 2011
APPENDIX 8 – CHAIRMAN’S MANAGEMENT PHILOSOPHY

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**“Great people in teams deliver great Business results”**

**Team Commitments/Behaviors**

**Full Participation**
- offer support, give your discretionary effort, solicit input/points of view, communicate
- make decisions and move on at pace.

**Discretion**
- spend time on truly relevant/skin in the game priorities, kill non value adding pet projects,
- slaughter the “sacred cows”

**Honesty/Directness**
- speak your mind and have the courage of your convictions, don’t say what you believe others want to hear.

**Closure**
- end as many initiatives as you start, follow through, take accountability.

**Listen “HARD”**
- don’t jump to conclusions, don’t pre judge,

**Always assume positive intent**
- kill the conspiracy theories, the hidden agenda’s, the negative intent.

**Don’t play “politics”**
- leave it to the Politicians, this is Business.

**Accept cabinet responsibility and accountability**
- don’t hide, don’t make excuses, sit out in the sun.

**Collaborative Leadership**
- everyone is a leader, use your leadership skills.

**Communication**
- your ability to communicate will determine how you are viewed inside & outside the business, take it seriously.

**Culture**
- make sure it is a high performance culture and not a high dependency one.
APPENDIX 9 – PUBLICATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH THIS RESEARCH


