FROM CONFLICT TO COLLABORATION: A STUDY OF THE ATTEMPT TO ENACT SHARED PRACTICES

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This paper studies how the enactment of collaboration unfolds. The empirical case of the paper describes an attempt to enact shared practices between two departments within a Danish public organization, which had a history of no previous shared activities and tensed relations. The paper demonstrates that the attempt to enact collaboration and shared practices demands more than mere top-down reorganizing of structure. The enactment process of collaboration must encompass interaction between several compounds making up social worlds and is thus a multifaceted process founded in the intersecting and negotiations between different kinds of perspectives.

1. INTRODUCTION

It get repeatedly declared in policy documents, research literature, and from organization themselves that learning and knowing in organizations is of immense importance if nations, companies and individuals aspire to adapt to continuous societal changes, survive and have success. This well known and powerful argument has traditionally been build upon three premises, which is the globalization of the economy, the development of information and communication technologies (ICT), and the declining importance of manual work in favor of knowledge or intellectual asset (Alavi & Leidner, 1999; Bell, 1973; Berends *et al.*, 2003; Castells, 2000; Drucker, 1993; Galbraith, 1967; Scarbrough *et al.*, 1999).

Over the past three decades a central extension of this argument has been articulated by organization researchers as well as practitioners and politicians. The core content of the extension is based on changes in the processes of work and organizing due to the above mentioned changes in post-industrial society (e.g. Victor & Boynton, 1998: 6). The changes emphasize the importance of developing relationships on various levels: between organizations; within organization; and between individuals instead of focusing on isolated individual learning and individual knowledge creation. The often mentioned intention for putting focus on relationships is that organizations and organizational actors become more efficient and innovative in a highly competitive and complex world. Thus, a central condition in the argument for adapting to continuous change and having success is closely linked to the capacity of organizations and organizational actors to work together and being able to collaborate.

But how is collaboration enacted and in what way can this enactment be conceptualized as organizational learning? It is the precisely the process of enacting emergent collaborative relations around emergent activities this paper will explore from a micro perspective. The guiding research question of the paper asks how the attempt to enact collaboration between different organizational units and actors without previously shared activities and only tensed relations was realised in a large Danish public organization within the service area of children with special needs. More specifically, collaboration refers in the paper to the working together on cases that intersect two studied

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administrations. Collaboration is conceptualized as constantly emerging combinations of different types of organizational actors around new cases of children with special needs. It is enquired whether it is possible to enact emergent collaborative relations that results in new practices primarily based on a top-down driven reorganizing and in connection to this, which aspects affect the process of the enactment of collaboration and shared practices.

The argument of the paper is structured around four main sections. The first section describes how the enactment of collaboration and shared practices can be conceptualised as organizational learning. The second section presents the research setting, methods, and analytical strategy focusing on outlining the strategic change work of the studied empirical case and how the study will answer the research questions. Further, the second section presents social world theory as the preferred theoretical take off for understanding the process of emerging collaboration thus creating a frame for understanding the presented attempt to enact collaboration as learning. The third section analyzes what characterise the process of enacting collaboration where only tensed relations and no shared practice had been before. The analytical movement progress from a description of the ideal conception of collaboration and shared practices in the perspective of the management to the analysis of how the enactment of shared practices unfolds and which recurrent themes characterised the process of enactment. Finally, in the fourth part the paper contributes with a conclusion of the findings and briefly discusses the findings in relation to the research field of organizational learning.

2. COLLABORATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

In a general perspective, the phenomenon of relationships ranges from alliances and ventures, R&D to informal relationship building between different types of organizational actors within an organizational unit has been translated into several types of empirical and theoretical concepts: networks (Brown & Duguid, 2002; Knight & Pye, 2005; Ormrod, 2007; Thomson & Perry, 2006); cooperation (Ring & Van de Ven, 1994); collaboration and collaborative capital (Beyerlein *et al.*, 2005; Boh, 2007; Engeström, 2005; Thomson & Perry, 2006; Zwarenstein & Reeves, 2006); project-based learning (Scarbrough *et al.*, 2005); social capital (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Arregle *et al.*, 2007; Inkpen & Tsang, 2005; Pichler & Wallace, 2007), and teamwork (Finn, 2008; Rico *et al.*, 2008). While the different list of concepts offers interesting and relevant knowledge vis-à-vis relationships this paper chooses to work with the collaborative concept since it seems suitable for how to conceptualize the phenomenon under study. The very broad designation of collaboration in this paper is people doing activities together aimed at the same object. However, this doing can be conducted in different kinds of situation and contexts.

The central question is how collaboration is related to organizational learning? Powell *et al.* (1996: 117) write that there exist two different strands on the relation between collaboration and organizational learning. One is a strategic approach where the decision to fuse resources between organizations depends on calculations on benefits and cutbacks. Another strand sees the linkage as a social construction process that is based on the belief that knowledge creation is conditioned by the context of the specific community where the knowledge creation process is conducted. For Powel *et al.* the two strands are defined based on their aim. In the strategic strand the aim is to create explicit knowledge (know-that) while the aim for the social strand is implicit knowledge (know-how). For both perspectives, however, the core focus is how collaboration can enhance and support learning of either implicit or explicit knowledge, which display collaboration as something distinctly different from organizational learning. Collaboration refers to the inter-organizational network or collaborative structure and comes in a temporal perspective before learning. Learning refers to the

knowledge created from the collaborative structure and comes after. This way of conceptualizing the relation is underscored in a later article titled *Learning from collaboration* where learning of knowledge from collaboration is a '*function of access to knowledge and possession of capabilities for utilizing and building on such knowledge*' (Powell, 1998: 236). For Powell and associates collaboration is hence a question of creating a structure - or rules and standard operating procedures to use statements from March - that support the acquisition and creation of knowledge.

This structure-based understanding of collaboration from Powell reflects a dominating perspective understanding collaboration and learning seeing the two concepts as two independent and separate elements connecting in general to organizational learning either in the structure perspective of March and Simon or the cognitive perspective of Argyris & Schön. Lin & Beyerlein (2006: 54) argues in contrast to this approach for perceiving collaboration and learning as interdependent concepts. They base their argument on the insights originating in Jean Lave and Etienne Wengers seminal work where communities of practices become containers of both collaboration and learning. Hence, the authors are trying to connect collaborative research to the practice-based approach of organizational learning as it is accounted for by e.g., Cook & Yanow (1993), Gherardi (2000), Nicolini *et al.* (Nicolini *et al.*, 2003), and Schatzki (2006).

One sees in the work of Lin & Beyerlein (2006) though only a first preliminary draft of another approach as regards the relation between collaboration and learning. This can be explained by a very strong structural tradition within the 'collaboration' community in general on expense of a practice-based approach. Nevertheless, looking to the literature of organizational learning within a practice-based approach opens up for consider the relation on collaboration and learning as interdependently related. One basic premise of the practice-based approach is that it put focus on the unfolding of practice within a socio-cultural context. Thus, relationships are in a manner of speaking from its emergence at the centre of a practice-based approach since every description and analysis attempts to understand how subjects, context, and meaning are intertwined in the actual doings and happenings within organizations. The practice-based approach has from its close connection to the sciences of sociology and anthropology the feature of collaboration and relationships as a fundamental concern.

It is underscored by Easterby-Smith *et al.* that relations is an emerging and promising research theme within organizational learning focusing on practice as the unit of analysis (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2000: 791). Blackler & McDonald (2000: 838) states in their article in the same issue that collaborative relations and the unfolding of networks from the 1980s has become a dominant and important feature of life and work processes in present organizations. The authors (ibid.) depict in a four-by-four classification general types of collaborative relationships. The classification is based on established or emergent relations in groups and how these connect to established or emergent activities within organizations. The researchers recognize these four classifications as representing four dimensions of organizational learning. Three of the dimensions - established activities in organization together with established relations (communities of practice) or with emergent group relations (e.g. routinization of newcomers) on the one side or established relations working with emergent activities (new practice and sensemaking) have all been well accounted for. Blackler & McDonald (ibid.) argues however that the fourth dimension – emergent relations with emergent and new activities or institutionalized knotworking – is more or less uncharted land within the organizational learning landscape.

In the works of Engeström (1999, 2005) one can see an attempts to study the phenomenon of emergent collaborative relations around emergent activities labelling it "knotworking". Knotworking is defined as '*rapidly pulsating, distributed, and partially improvised orchestration of*

collaborative performance between otherwise loosely connected actors and organizational units' (Engeström, 2005: 316). One of the basic tenets of knotworking is the attempt to connect separate threads of activity together in changing combinations of people and social aspects as artifacts in different kinds of spaces. It is precisely the process of 'knotworking' that this paper inquire into asking how emerging collaborative relations understood as shared practices enacted and what impedes and facilitate the process of enacting collaboration understood as bring together different kinds of activities. The understanding residing within the knotworking concept does not perceives collaboration and learning as two temporal separated elements as if collaboration comes before learning vis-à-vis acquisition of knowledge: the enactment of collaboration is learning that is a basic premise in this article.

2. RESEARCH SETTING AND METHOD

The case study was conducted in Gladsaxe that is a large Danish municipality located north of Copenhagen. The public service area this articles use as empirical platform for analytical and theoretical claims is the service area of children with special needs, which includes children with e.g. behavioural, physical, and psychological problems. The service area of children with special needs is in Denmark undergoing radical changes. These changes are in a general perspective based on New Public Management rhetoric focusing on improved quality and new ways of practices in concert with a higher degree of efficiency. The public service area 'children with special needs' embrace cases of both pedagogical-psychological as well as sociological nature. In Denmark the field of public service area of children with special needs are organized within two types of administrations: 1. Administration of social affairs that consists of social service centres and institutions that are responsible for solving problematic cases of a social character; 2. Administration of educational affairs that consist of day-care institutions, schools, and pedagogical-psychological service centre that are responsible for solving educational and psychological cases.

The first of January 2005 Gladsaxe implemented deep-seated organizational changes of the area of public services oriented at children with special needs. The reorganizing initiated from the management was primarily focused at changing the division of labour and creating values that should develop the collaboration and from this collaboration enact shared practices for these collaborative relations. The first part of the reorganizing, the change of division of labour was realized through the creation of the new office denoted the Visitation office. This type of reorganizing was from the perspective of top management intended to stimulate the social and educative departments, units, and organizational actors to start working together. To secure this stimulation the Visitation office was of pivotal importance (see figure 1). Before the reorganizing 1 January 2009 the units belonging to the social and educational administration was responsible for the preventive intervention as well as removals of children if the case was of such a nature that is was necessary. After the reorganizing the division of work was changed, so that these two administrations only was committed to work with preventive intervention keeping the child in the natural environment. E.g. if it became clear that a specific case was not solved based on the shared values when it was send to and inquired by the Visitation office, it was endorsed that the Visitation office had mandate to send the specific case back to the preventive system.
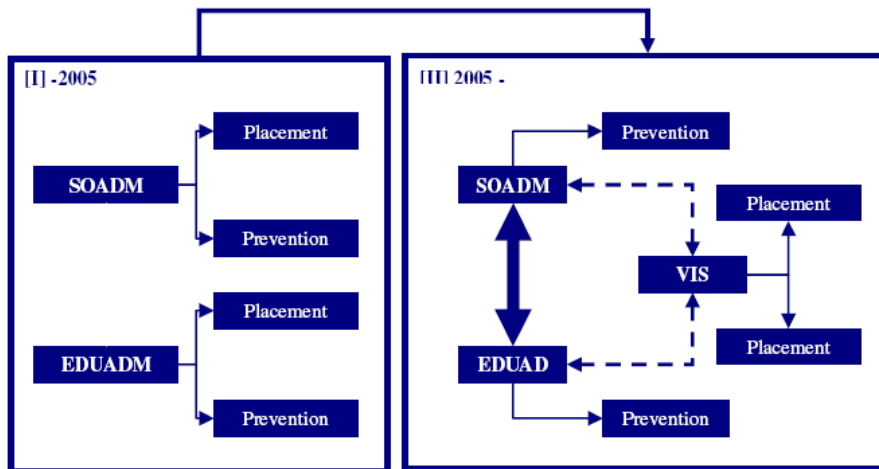
Figure 1. The organization before [I] and after [II] the reorganizing 2005.

The other part of the reorganizing was a so-called team-based model as support of the shared values. Half a year members of the district teams would meet for 'development meetings' lasting three hours. In this half year meeting members could discuss current and relevant issues vis-à-vis working with children with special needs, share professional knowledge, thus enacting a foundation for more positive relations with colleagues from other units and administrations supporting the development of a unified understanding of their prime activity: the child with special needs. Basically, this was a forum for negotiations of how to understand the shared values. The values intended to work as symbols for the new shared practice or interactions, thus oriented at harmonize the conflicting definitions and creating a foundation for a shared practice between otherwise not directly linked units and actors. Acting on shared values should make it easier to do enact collaboration on constantly emerging concrete cases. A district team consisted of organizational actors coming from all the relevant departments and institutions within the public service area: social advisors, teachers, psychologists, educational personnel, health visitors, and speech therapist. In the half year forums social workers, teachers, psychologist.

Through a period of two years from December 2004 until January 2007, I collected and analyzed the qualitative data oriented at understanding how the reorganizing enacted collaboration, thus how shared practices and collaboration was unfolded. I conducted semi-structured interviews through two phases. In the first phase in the beginning of 2005 I conducted 11 interviews. In the second phase in the end of 2006, I conducted 29 interviews with organizational actors at all levels in the organization. Two types of observations were carried out in Gladsaxe. Firstly, I performed non participant observations of meetings at both administrative, specialist, and practitioner's level in the public organization during the two year of data collection. My focus was from the observations on how organizational actors interacted and comprehended collaboration and how the enactment of collaborative relations unfolded through negotiations. Second, I stayed in Gladsaxe a significant part of time during the two years of data collection. Additionally, I have collected a substantial amount of documents of different kinds. The research design is process oriented and longitudinal, which is a design often mentioned as cohesive in the study of organizational learning processes within organization studies (Bryman, 2001; Pettigrew, 1990). The analytical strategy and technique for analyzing data connects to the explorative and inductive logic articulated in grounded theory by Strauss and Corbin (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Social world theory represents the chosen theoretical frame for the analysis of the case in this paper. Social world is a notion originating from early social studies characteristic of the Chicago school. Firmly rooted in the classical pragmatism of Dewey and symbolic interactionism of Mead one of its most prominent scholars, Anselm Strauss, developed social world theory into a conceptual frame for understanding how activity develops through and between different types of collective conglomerates in organizations defined as:

"Groups with shared commitments to certain activities, sharing resources of many kinds to achieve their goals, and building shared ideologies about how to go about their business" (Clarke, 1991: 131)

In a social world perspective, there are 'commitments', 'goals' and 'ideologies' that 'belong' to a group. There are not only 'patterns of access and participation' even if they are also present. In a social world understanding, organizations are arenas of coordinated collective actions in which social worlds emerge as a result of commitment to organizational activities. Organisations as arenas made up by social worlds allows for identifying different commitments to organisational activities (Strauss, 1993). It is the tensions between these that may create avenues for questioning existing practices opening up potential organizational learning tracks. We see that a basic strand of social world theory is that it percieve change of activity within and between social worlds as coming from processes of tensions and contradictions (Strauss, 1978: 124). One especially relevant aspect in the social world theory is that it put explicately focus on the intersecting and segmentation processes between social worlds (Strauss, 1978: 123; 1993: 39). Intersecting is of special relevance in this paper since it focus on the discovery of the bridging and interpenetrating processes of social worlds where social worlds and its actors engage in shared courses of action.

Strauss classifies social world by three overall concepts. The concept of trajectory denotes that every social world unfolds processual. Strauss defines trajectory as "*(1) the course of any experienced phenomenon as it evolves over time and (2) the actions and interactions contributing to its evolution. That is, phenomena do not automatically unfold nor are they straightforwardly determined by economic, political, cultural, or other circumstances; rather, they are in part shaped by the interactions or concerned actors*" (1993: 53-54). The phenomenon at the centre of trajectory does hence not unfold through an "internal logic" but is instead shaped through actions and interactions with others kinds of aspects making up the social world. This leads to the next fundamental concept, which are the conditions making up the social worlds. Strauss (1978: 122, 1982: 357) writes that a social world includes: the sharing of resources, information, and assumptions; common activities or work objects; technologies and signs; spaces and building; people; plans and rules; and a certain division of labour.

Finally, Strauss (1982) underscores the significance of negotiation as the third concept. Negotiation alludes to the fundamental trait that both illustrate the dynamical and political characteristic of social world. Every social world is characterized by intersections processes where social worlds from both internal as well as external (between social worlds) conflicts and contradictions convey negotiations giving rise to segmentation/intersecting processes that creates avenues for organizational learning vis-à-vis creating new relations between social worlds and practices within social worlds. Thus, segmentation/intersecting is through its dependence on negotiations or processual ordering as Strauss (1993: 254) later opted for a highly political process. In this paper the concept of segmentation/intersecting is used as interchangeable for knotworkings from Engeström.

3. ENACTED COLLABORATIONS AND SHARED PRACTICES

The ideal practice

The ideal practice as understood from the top management was clear and quite simple in its outset: When a child with special needs was 'discovered' by involved actors the case should be solved based on orchestrated actions by members from both the educative and social worlds given the case was of such a nature that it could not be solved within one social world. More concretely it meant that if e.g. a school teacher experienced a child as having behavioural difficulties the teacher should contact and collaborate with e.g. a social worker from the social world trying to find a coherent solution thereby avoid conveying the case to the Visitation office. Seen with the lenses of the top management the process of enacting collaboration referred to an improved coordination of multidisciplinary work efforts. The basic idea guiding this focus on the great possibilities of multidisciplinary work or enacted collaboration was that experience displayed that in most cases a child with special needs encompassed both world at the same time. Why not coordinating efforts instead of solving the social problems within one world and the educational problems in another was the basic dictum expressed at the managerial level. However, history within the arena reveals that collaboration and multidisciplinary work was quite unusual within the field of children with special needs, but massive increase in expenses made novel initiatives compelling.

The management of Gladsaxe constructed a so-called team-based model that functioned as a structure that should support the materialisation of the ideal practice. Focus was to generate well coordinated relationships despite differences between social worlds and their actors. One can say that the whole objective for the management was to create a 'spirit of collaboration' dissolving the existent contra-productive relations. The structure consisted of organizing 13 district teams equal to the number of school districts in Gladsaxe. The overall purpose of the district team was to establish a platform for improving shared practices in relation to the work with specific cases, hence qualifying collaboration. A core element of the team-based model was that in relevant cases a member of a district team could assemble appropriate members aiming at solving a case. Assembling or combining members around specific case were organized on an ad hoc basis and was termed network meeting, which refers to the process of enacting collaboration understood as knotworking of relations.

The understanding residing in the description of an ideal practice was that from collaboration the two social worlds and its actors could prevent that a case would be passed on to the Visitation office. Hence, the arena of children with special needs could avoid expensive solutions. Two major implications emanate from this ideal practice. Firstly, that the members of the social worlds should conceive cases of children with special needs as potential collaborative events or prolific intersections between social worlds instead of seeing cases as belonging to only one social world. Secondly, that the top management perceived the enactment of constantly emerging collaboration around emerging (and sometimes quite complex) cases as something that could add quality to activities within the service area of children with special needs and that the actors of the social worlds were capable of enacting such kind of knotworking.

Two social worlds: tensions and contradictions

The analysis of data reveals that the arena of children with special needs in Gladsaxe consisted of two distinctively different social worlds. The social world of the social administration, its departments, and actors was characterized by a fundamental commitment to solve social problems, thus to support and provide services to families and children with special needs. The social world consisted of 150 employees (including managers) that were located in a building in the same building as the city hall of Gladsaxe. The social world included primarily social workers and health visitors and managers and administrative personnel. The majority of the employees had been educated within the social field. A leading idea for employees in the social world was that the family was the best place to stay for the child and that all cases of children with special needs always should be understood as a contextualised and social problem – never solely as an individual problem. The social world had to follow and comply with the Danish Social service law that more or less framed the possible activity space of the social world. An official journal system existed where all case descriptions, investigations, solutions, and documentation of case trajectories was an important tool in the work processes of actors within this social world. In addition, the normal work pattern was primarily meetings in the main building with families (sometimes phone meetings) or visiting families and children with special needs in their home, thus investigating and describing potential cases and how a specific case should be solved.

The aspects making up the educational world differed quite drastically from the social world. To start with, the actors of the educational world were committed to support learning and development of the individual child. This was quite contrary to the commitment of the social world that had only one engagement to children and families having social problems – here the commitment of the educational world was two-folded but primarily oriented to develop the 'normal' child in schools. The steering idea of the educational world was that if a child had learning problems it was a psychological and individual problem that in many cases could be solved without the family – not meaning that the family was not oriented if there was problems. The educational world was scattered around the municipality centred on the 13 schools while the administration was located in the main building of city hall. The educational world consisted of approximately 2500 persons that included teachers, kinder garden teachers, psychologists, speech and hearing educator, managers (often educated as teacher with supplemental education on master level), and administrative personnel. The division of work was characterized as follows: when there was a child that displayed special educational needs – which the single school could not include in the normal environment - the school contacted the psychological unit or the social world saying that they had to find a proper solution. Similar to the social world the guiding regulations for the educational world were to be located in the Danish School law.

In 2001, Gladsaxe employed a new CEO of the social administration having one primary task, which was to reduce the number of removals of children thus reducing costs. This task was solved by a 'meaning' change within the social world aimed at solving case of children with special needs of social character based on a more holistic approach. 'Meaning' change refers to a distinct different way of understanding children (and families) with special needs. The 'meaning' change was based upon a new concrete idea of practice that attempted to see a child with special needs as a subject and the surrounding context (family, relatives, friends, etc) containing fertile resources instead of just being a problem. E.g. instead of hurrying the removal of children with special needs (of which Denmark is one of the countries that removes most frequently children from the biological family into foster care) from its biological family the value that should guide practice was to see the family as a potential resource that was able to support the child thereby being able to stay at home or in local settings.

The 'meaning' change had though two consequences: 1. the Family department witnessed a considerable decrease in the number of removals thus a consecutive decrease in expenses; 2. the relation with the educational institutions (day-care, schools) became extremely tensed. The reason for the rise in tensions was that the Family department (social world) understood the educational world as to quickly in removing children with special needs – not being able to see the resources within the context of the child. From the perspective of the educational world the social world never did anything to solve cases: they did not collaborate since they never responded when e.g. a school reported a case of a child with special needs – often a child with behavioural problems. But this was because the social world simply meant that this specific child could be included in the normal school, which was the job of the educational world to solve.

Intersecting social worlds through negotiations

What happened during the two years of collecting and analyzing data? Where there any examples of new emerging combinations of members organized around new activities vis-à-vis intersecting between the educational and social worlds? Did the ideal practice become a reality accordingly to plan? The short and disappointing answer is that no intersecting was observed nor any shared practices appeared. Box 1 summarizes the lack of enacted collaboration quite clear. The observation was conducted at a third district team meeting in 2006. In the end of the meeting there was a lot of debate around the wished (ideal) shared practice. However, it became quite clear that there had been no enacted collaboration or sharing of practices.
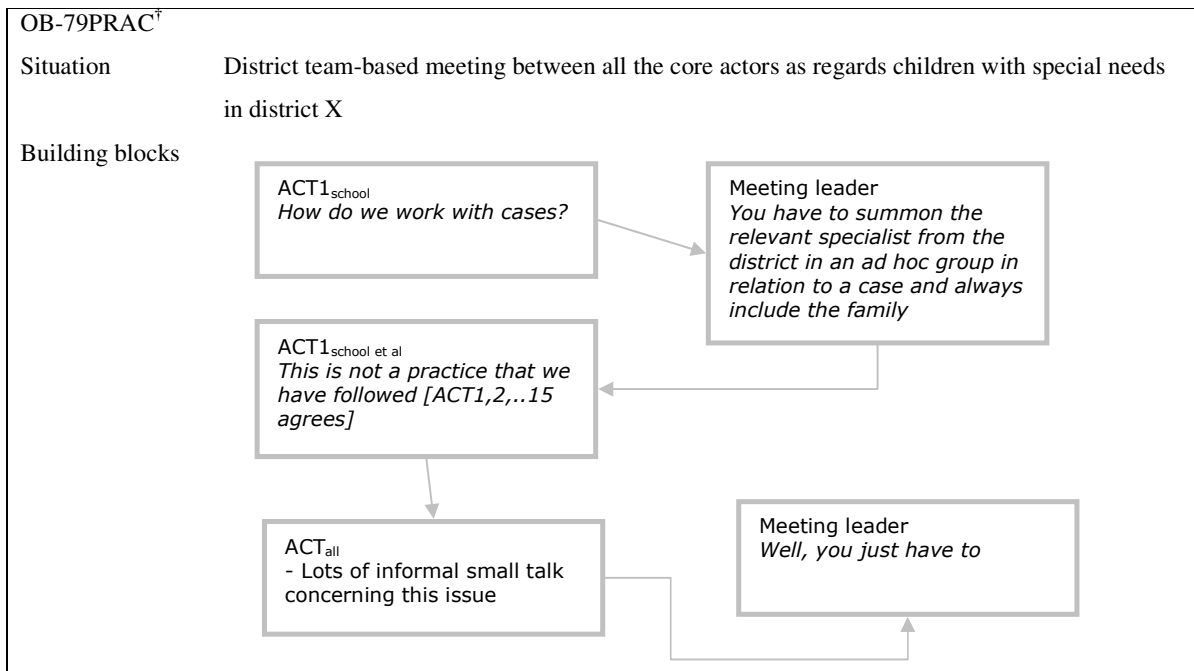
Box 1. Negotiations at district team meeting.

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† OB-79PRAC means data source no.79, OB stands for 'observation', and PRAC for 'practitioner level'.
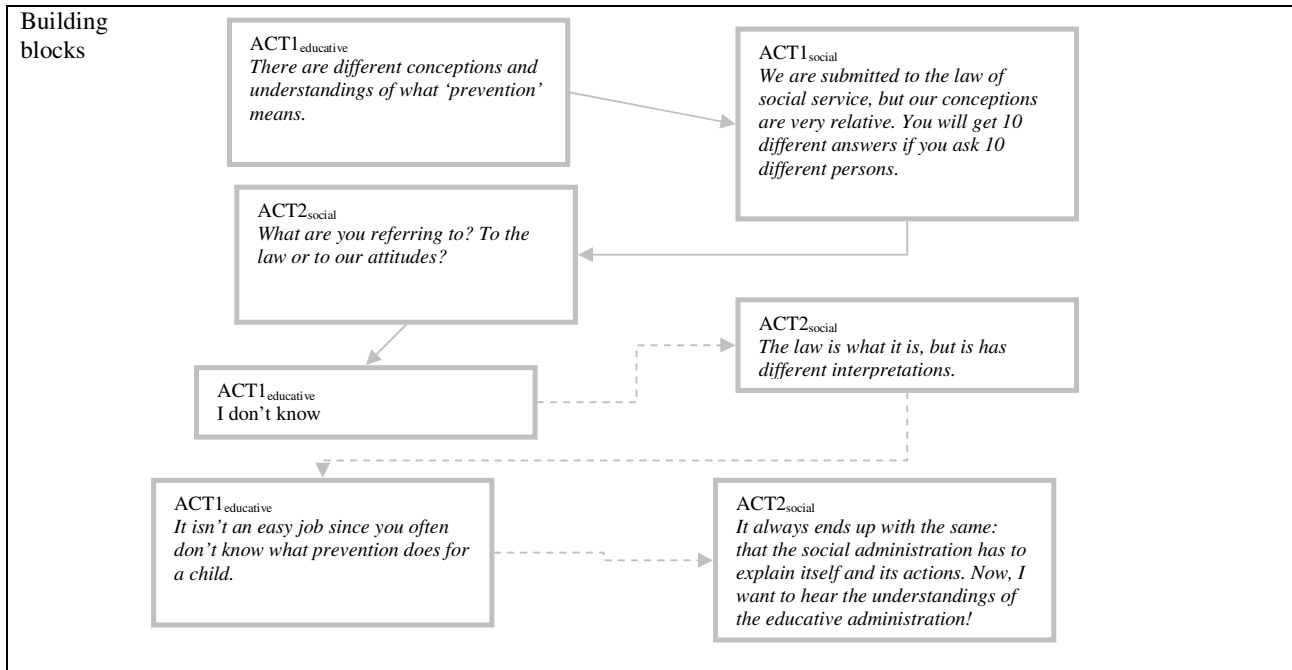
The last statement '*Well, you just have to'* sums very up very well the intention and attitude from the management side. The reorganizing was to be followed accordingly in concrete activities without any hesitation. The attempt to enact collaboration did however not unfold as planned because of comprehensive differences within and between the two worlds and the visitation office. One sees very different social worlds that differ in almost every component from commitment to rules guiding everyday doings as well as the technologies and signs within the world. E.g. it stayed unclear how organizational actors from the social worlds were to communicate since organizational actors were applying different digital communication software. In interviews with practitioners it was underscored that it could take a considerable amount of time to summon a network meeting between different organizational actors in a specific case since some were using Microsoft outlook and other Lotus notes. The organizational actors experienced the differences in communication technologies as an impeding aspect creating inertia for the enactment of collaboration and shared practices.

Another concrete contradiction not solved by the reorganizing and the team-based model was that actors within the two worlds had very different commitment to their work object - even though it seemed that there were only one work object within the arena: the child with special needs. Actors from the educational world perceived the child with special needs from an individual and psychological perspective while actors from the social world understood the same child from a social perspective. Tensions emerged around these contradictory commitments. Several specific practices illustrate this tension. E.g. the social law had issued the so-called clause 38 investigation. §38 gave specific guidelines for how social workers should act in concrete cases of children with special needs. The social worker should gather information of the child from relevant stakeholders as teachers, parents, health advisors, doctors, etc. The investigation process resulted in a conclusion pointing at a potential diagnosis and which initiative was best suited in the specific case. This ready made method did not exist within the educational that consisted of many different methods as regards the psychological investigating of a child with special need and how to support teachers in keeping children with special needs in schools. The conclusion was thus that there were no common commitments across the social worlds. This lack of commitment hindered the enactment of new collaborative relations and the facilitation of shared practices. What became clear was thus that practices of the social worlds were organized around the meanings and commitment that each work activity had for the different actors in the social and educational world.

Following the social world theory from Strauss (1993) one has to put special focus on the negotiations or processual ordering between actors from the social and educational world as the process from which enactment of new collaborative interactions can emerge. Negotiation was observed at almost all meetings at all levels in Gladsaxe. One example was the attempt at meetings at managerial levels to come up with a shared definition of 'preventive acts', which are illustrated in box 2.

OB-67ADM[‡]	
Situation	Meeting between 9 of the core actors on an administrative level as regards children with special needs. The goal with the meeting was to improve collaboration between the educational and social worlds.

[‡] OB-67ADM means data source no.79 in Atlas ti, OB stands for 'observation', and ADM for 'administrative level'.

Building blocks

ACT1_educative
There are different conceptions and understandings of what 'prevention' means.

ACT1_social
We are submitted to the law of social service, but our conceptions are very relative. You will get 10 different answers if you ask 10 different persons.

ACT2_social
What are you referring to? To the law or to our attitudes?

ACT2_social
The law is what it is, but is has different interpretations.

ACT1_educative
I don't know

ACT1_educative
It isn't an easy job since you often don't know what prevention does for a child.

ACT2_social
It always ends up with the same: that the social administration has to explain itself and its actions. Now, I want to hear the understandings of the educative administration!

Box 2. Negotiations on administrative level.

We see in the extract from the meeting at administrative level that there were many different opinions as regards the definition of 'prevention'. One remarkable feature from the extract is the closure from a high ranked manager in the social world. This closure reflects in general how the members of the social world felt: they had a feeling that it was always members of the social world that had to defend themselves. During the process of negotiation it became clear that negotiation functioned as a continuous interplay or ping pong between actors from both worlds without this resulting in concrete unified document or decision of one official understanding. This type of negotiation was typical for how the attempt to enact collaboration appeared within the arena: it always ended as stale mate since they always attempted to find some kind of consensus or a middle way. The problem was just that this middle way did not exist nor where the social world members able to construct such a middle way.

It was obvious that even though management had reorganized the arena of children with special needs with the Visitation office on top, this reorganizing had maintained the social worlds responsible for preventive activities in separate administrations, which clearly was a significant obstacle for the intersecting process, for finding a middle way. Negotiations on all levels had constantly to transcend the border of ones own administration. Further, practitioners had in a similar manner to transcend spatial belonging when social world members tried to intersect and convey collaborative effort oriented at solving specific cases together. And this was an impossible endeavour taking into account the other distinctly differences between the social worlds.

The point here is that there was no dominating actor or social world that could impugn their commitment to children with special needs. Naturally, the top management had attempted mediated by the reorganizing to create a structure that could facilitate the realization of emerging relations and shared practices around children with special needs. However, even though the top management had been able to frame children with special needs, it became clear in the second interview phase with top managers that the whole structure had from its birth been one incoherent

compromise. During 2003 the suggested reorganized structure was to organize the Visitation office (the unit instigated with power to assess the work of the preventive units) in one social world: the social administration. However, the resistance from the educational world to this proposed structure was so harsh that the top management had to come up with a compromise. The core content of the resistance to the proposed organization of the Visitation office was lack of trust:

'*…our experience has been that the social administration too often hasn't participated actively in the solution of different kinds of problems. Thus, we do not see it as a solution to entrust the whole visitation to a corps that solely are placed under the social administration. It should instead be placed under an independent third part*' (P74:18-IW EDU)[§].

The top management says in an interview that they (top managers) knew that this structure would not be able to enact – by itself – collaboration and shared practices. The whole change project was so to speak stillborn from its outset due to the negotiations and interactions throughout the development phase in 2003. However, the management was forced to act since expenses was rising, thus a compromise was the result. But a result that leaved the odds of enacting collaboration in a very uncertain state. Top managers actually stated that the period of 2005 and 2006 was to be seen as a preparing or interim trajectory. They recognized the Danish national structure reform 1 January 2007 as the event that could give top management a mandate to reorganize the arena once again – this time following a more coherent structure seen with the lenses of management that could support collaboration and the materialisation of shared practices.

The relationship between the two worlds was characterized by interactions that impeded any initiatives oriented at enacting collaboration from the reorganizing from 1 January 2005. However, the new organizing of labour with the implementation of the Visitation office 'on top' had one remarkable consequence. It totally reconfigured the tensions and contradictions within the arena. The tensions before the reorganizing had existed between the social and educational world – as already demonstrated – the tensions was after 1 January 2005 directed towards the Visitation office that was endorsed the power to decide whether a case forwarded from the preventive part of the arena – social and educative world – was acceptable or should be send back to the preventive part of the arena where the worlds based on collaboration should be able to solve it. Even though the reorganizing diminished the previously open conflict and lack of relations between the social and educational world, the reorganizing did not support the enactment of collaboration.

P80-OBS VIS committe	
Situation	Meeting between the Department of families (social world) and the Visitation office (emerging world) with the Department of schools.

[§] Data source no.74 in Atlas.ti. and it is clip no.18. IW stands for 'interview', and EDU refers to a respondent from the educational world.
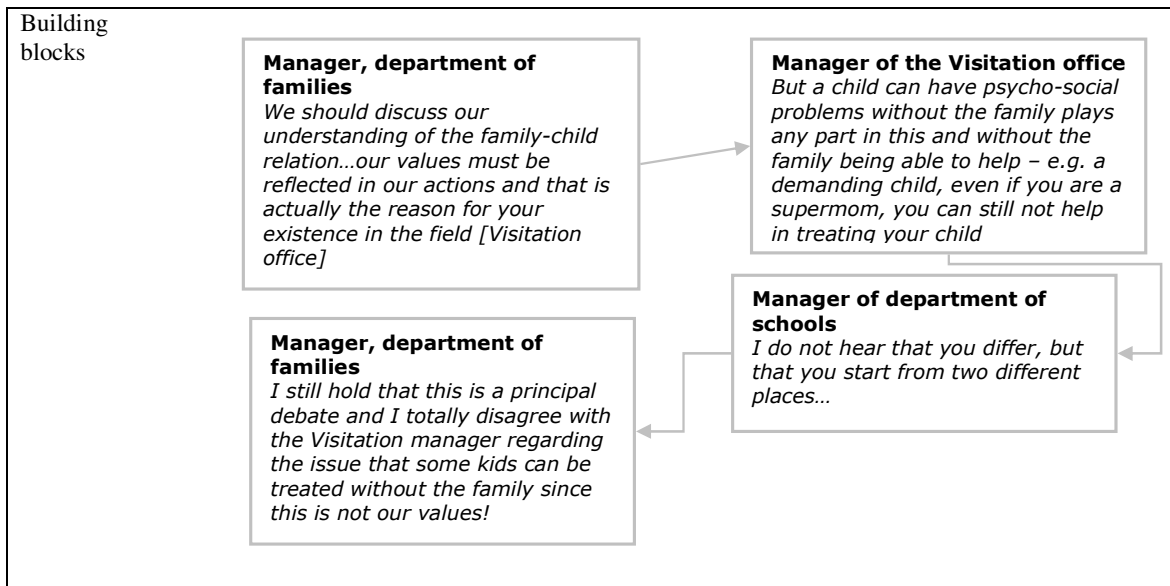
Box 3. Negotiations at managerial level.

The reconfiguration of tensions totally changed the focus for the actors of the social and educational worlds. Actors from the social world harshly criticized the Visitation office for not assessing cases on the proper interpretation of the values (see box 3). Actors from the educational world in a similar manner disparaged the Visitation office for not dealing correctly in the case management as well in the inquiry of cases. Thus, no intersecting process was initiated as goes for enacting collaboration except for a more open a less tensed relationship between the social and educational world. However, this did not result in changes in the intersecting process and the concrete development of shared practices.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper is an inquiry into how collaboration unfolds seen from a micro perspective. The studied collaborative performance was oriented at children with special needs. It included enacting relationship between different social worlds and actors without previously relations through a reorganizing process in a Danish municipality. The case put hence focus on the attempt to create avenues for improving collaborative relations between actors with different disciplinary background and social world belonging. It was demonstrated that the phenomenon under scrutiny was what Engeström calls knotworking understood as the orchestration of performances between otherwise not normal connected actors and organizational departments and units. In the chosen theoretical frame founded in classical pragmatism of Dewey knotworking was understood as segmentation/intersecting processes between social worlds as developed in the works by Anselm Strauss.

Interpretation of the case demonstrates that collaborating around cases of children with special needs is a negotiated and fluid process that is shaped through the interactions and practices of its actors and other constituent component making up the social world. Hence, working with children with special needs is characterized by certain types of interactional scaffolding referring to: 1. actors viewed the child with special needs in different ways; 2. the interactional processes was

constitutes upon certain components including plans and rules, division of work, technology, work objects, commitments, ideologies, space, and actors.

The reorganizing process and the attempt to enact collaboration between two social worlds only took into consideration the division of work process and did not change other aspects within the social worlds. The result of this was that no shared practice in the meeting point between the social and educational world was generated. During the two years of data collection and interpretation the tensions or deep-seated differences between the two social worlds components stayed status quo: the two social worlds belonged to different administrations, the two social worlds employed different technologies, the two social worlds mediated their activities on different understanding of values and signs, and the two social worlds applied different rules and commitments to cases. Thus, enacting collaboration and realizing shared practices had very difficult working conditions and was thus not realized since the reorganizing structure simply lacked a more multi-faceted model taking into account the non-linearity of the trajectory of intersecting processes.

It was emphasized that organizational learning was identified with the enactment process and outcome of collaborative performances. Thus, the paper has demonstrated that the organizational learning process of generating shared practices between otherwise loosely coupled social worlds and actors are a highly political informed process. Additionally, the paper has illustrated that the enacting process of intersecting social worlds is characterized by dynamic interactions between different components making up social worlds.

It can be discussed though whether social world theory contributes with anything novel within the practice based theoretical strand within the field of organizational learning compared with activity system theory originating in the works of Vygotsky. In general, it seems as there is a extremely close relationship between activity theory and social world theory. Engeström and Miettinen (1999: 7) also states that social world theory as unit of analysis is roughly equal to the activity system. This gets supported by Strauss, which in a note writes that "*There seems to be much overlap between this theory of activity and the interactionist theory of action*" (1993: 80n). Maybe it should come as no surprise since the basic endavour of pragmatism can be formulated as the transcendence of dualism between e.g. theory and practice, fact and values, etc. that levels practice as the primary aspect in understanding the world (Putnam, 1995), which also functions as one of the basic tenets of activity theory from its birth in Vygotskys work.

Words: 6820

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