

## **PH.D. THESIS SUMMARY**

**Ágnes Pulinka**

**DIALOGUE IN CHANGE MANAGEMENT**

*Conditions and possibilities of understanding, co-action and change in  
European air traffic control*

**Supervisor:**

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## **1. RESEARCH ANTECEDENTS, JUSTIFICATION OF THE TOPIC**

The central topic of my research is dialogue. Looking around in my narrower and broader surroundings now, I could hardly imagine a more adequate topic than that.

I used to work as organisational developer, and I escorted several projects, developments and changes at organisations also as change management expert. Dialogue between those concerned by a certain change is a critical element of my approach to organisational development, in line with what I learned from my masters. In my jobs I have always thought no change would be longer than middle term without dialogue. It was a surprise to me that this approach was not considered evident by all. Working with managers and with prominent representatives of my profession, I had to face the fact that it was not trivial either to responsible decision-makers, or to renown consultants. Indeed, my dialogue initiatives have sometimes raised negative feelings and even opposition. I was at a loss. Is it possible that my concept is wrong? Do I need to redefine myself as OD expert?

As a first step, still in my capacity of practitioner, I set out to study the existing change management theories. After a while my life took a new turn and I did the same as a full-time academic. By that time I have identified the broader topic of my research: What do change management theories say about the right method of change management? Does dialogue play a prominent part in it? Based on my experience, I knew that no universal answer, valid in every situation whenever and wherever it happens, existed to that question. Everything depends on the organisation, on organisational reality as it exists at a specific time, under specific conditions.

The focus point of my research thus originated basically from change management. I examined the types of change addressed by the change management theories. I came to the conclusion that the more complex the changes they aspire to solve, the more central partnership, cooperation and dialogue between management and employees are in the model. The deeper the changes they operate with, the more they affect the deepest cultural layers of organisations, the more essential the dialogue component is for the model.

At this point I felt the urge to investigate what the theories concerned actually meant by dialogue. And I was curious to see for myself what dialogue really meant, irrespective of the arguments of management schools. While exploring the dialogue concepts of change management theories, I stepped out of the framework of change management and the discipline of management in general to take a look at what other disciplines meant by dialogue. This research strand turned out to be more relevant and decisive than I expected. I invoked the dialogue theories of philosophy, theology, literary science and cultural anthropology (sociology) and created a dialogue model inspired by their merger. Actually, the disciplines concerned have made more progress in understanding and defining the dialogue than mine. Also, the current attempts of management schools are enriched and guided by their answers (and questions).

I considered it important to choose an empirical research field where my topic (change, change management, dialogue) was topical and prominent. I chose the European aviation industry and in particular air traffic control.

In 2004, the European Union passed a legislative package (the so-called Single European Sky or SES) that has led to fundamental change in European air traffic and prominently air traffic control. The primary goal was efficiency enhancement and cost reduction for airlines by eliminating fragmentation. (Crespo and Fenoulhet, 2011) This was to take place in a turbulently

developing technological environment, where continuous adaptation to the normal pace of technological development in the industry was quite a challenge already for Air Navigation Service Providers (ANSP), but given the specifics of air transport, they could definitely not risk lagging behind or being left out of the development/this change-over either.

European decision makers knew such change could not be realised without comprehensive, extensive and complex change management. They also knew that concepts and ideologies like employee commitment, stakeholder involvement, winning employees acting as carriers of change and partnership were highly important (Bakker, 2011). The European Union as depository of the effort obliged employers at European, regional and national level, respectively, to establish and operate dialogue mechanisms under institutionalised conditions (Ballesterro, 2011).

Another reason for choosing the aviation industry was its special nature, i.e. that it is a market segment where representatives of the key professions (pilots, cabin crew, air traffic controllers, airport services staffs) possess critical knowledge and skills that give them certain powers relative to management occupying a higher position in organisational hierarchy (Lofquist, 2011). This industry has always been famous (and infamous) for its never-ending employer-employee disputes and the tensions generated by them (Bruch and Sattelberger, 2001). These disputes could escalate because of the forced partnership between employers and employees. Pilots cannot be swept off the table by threats or violence in disputes they consider important. They can inflict heavy financial and quantifiable prestige losses upon their employer.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

**The aim of my research** is complex. Firstly, I want to understand what kind of dialogue goes on in a *specific* process (case) of change (1). I chose an **interpretative** approach; therefore, I had to explore and present *local meaning* based on the experience, interpretations and explanations of actors of the case under study (2). After that, I compared this local social construct, local in terms of space and time, to the theoretical constructs described in the relevant technical literature. *In other words, I brought the local social construct and the theoretical construct into dialogue with each other* (3).

It clearly followed from my research topic (dialogue) and research questions that **case study would be the most adequate method for my research**.

“The case study methodology should be preferred if we have ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions; when the researcher has little control over the events, and when the focus is on a contemporary problem (...) and the boundaries between the phenomenon under study and the context are not clear.” (Yin, 2003, p. 1).

Since my goal was to investigate the theoretical dialogue model through a specific case, i.e. to understand how the dialogic situation and perhaps the dialogue itself emerged in a specific, real, situation, I considered it obvious that I should use the **explanatory case study** methodology. At the same time, I thought that a descriptive case like this must have some relevance, usefulness, also for the side of practice – in this sense, it can certainly **be interpreted also as example**. The case study methodology has made it imperative to find a field where this research topic was topical, live. That is why I chose the European aviation industry and air traffic control in particular. The introductory part of the Thesis Summary presents the industry specifics that made me surmise that European air transport would be an appropriate field for the empirical investigation of the topics of change and dialogue.

The focus of the research was further refined by my awareness (due to my previous work experience) of a project of strategic significance targeting sufficiently complex and deep changes. Moreover, I was informed by my contacts in the industry that the senior manager in charge of the project and the project leader declared that they considered dialogue between the participants highly important already at the start of the project.

My research field was an East Central European air navigation service provider (ANSP) organisation and one of its change processes of strategic relevance: **the p-SHIFT project**. The project implies highly complex changes involving the technology, work organisation and organisational position (physical and informal) of the staff. The new technology requires a new way of thinking. Those concerned call it a “paradigm shift”. For the majority, it involves more than a new technology and basic professional operation: it is also an emotional trauma. Furthermore, it was the express intention of the project leader and the senior manager in charge of the project to base the change process on dialogue. That is, this specific case was a perfect match to my topic.

The thesis presents in detail how the p-SHIFT project got a further focus matching my topic: *within my research field and in the context of the selected topic, the focal point became the dialogue between Unit B’s managers and staff during the process of change under the p-SHIFT project, from the start of the project (2011) to the end of October 2018.*

**My research objective was to understand the *hic et nunc*, the specific situation from the individuals’ respective viewpoints, that is, it was basically directed at the micro communication systems, i.e. micro semantic communities. Consequently, the most suitable data collection method was the interview and, more specifically, the semi-structured interview.** But I had an opportunity also for participatory observation. The first live operation occurred in October 2017 when the airplanes were controlled from the new unit building by the controllers for 5 days, with only so-called shadow operation going on their old unit building. This was the first occasion when the new technology was tested live, and I could spend half a day with the staff concerned.

Since my research focuses on understanding the local phenomenon, I chose the ***qualitative sampling*** methodology for my research, i.e. having a small sample, embedded in a context, that is selected according to theoretical considerations, purposefully. A total of 14 interviews were conducted, of 63 minutes on average. In I took care to have managers and employees, project leaders, and experts playing a priority role in the project and employees for and against the change in the sample (sampling strategy).

The interviews were voice-recorded and literally transcribed.

**During data analysis, in the interpretation phase, I chose the method of meaning interpretation, but I applied also meaning classification.** The latter was important since the *aim of my research was to detect and understand local meaning*. Local meaning, in turn, is made up of individual interpretations: it is the result of the individual interpretations of the persons directly concerned by the p-SHIFT project and in particular those of my interviewees, and the dynamic among them. **Meaning interpretation** targeted the exploration of the same local meaning, but with a different method of construction. In this case, I analysed the interview transcripts by first interpreting the world of a specific interviewee and outlining his/her own reading. Then, as I moved from interview to interview, I identified micro semantic/meaning communities and specified their respective shared interpretations. When I had a clear picture of these micro meaning communities, I could take a look at the processes going on among them from a higher level, to understand *how they brought what was happening, i.e. organisational reality*.

### 3. THESIS FINDINGS

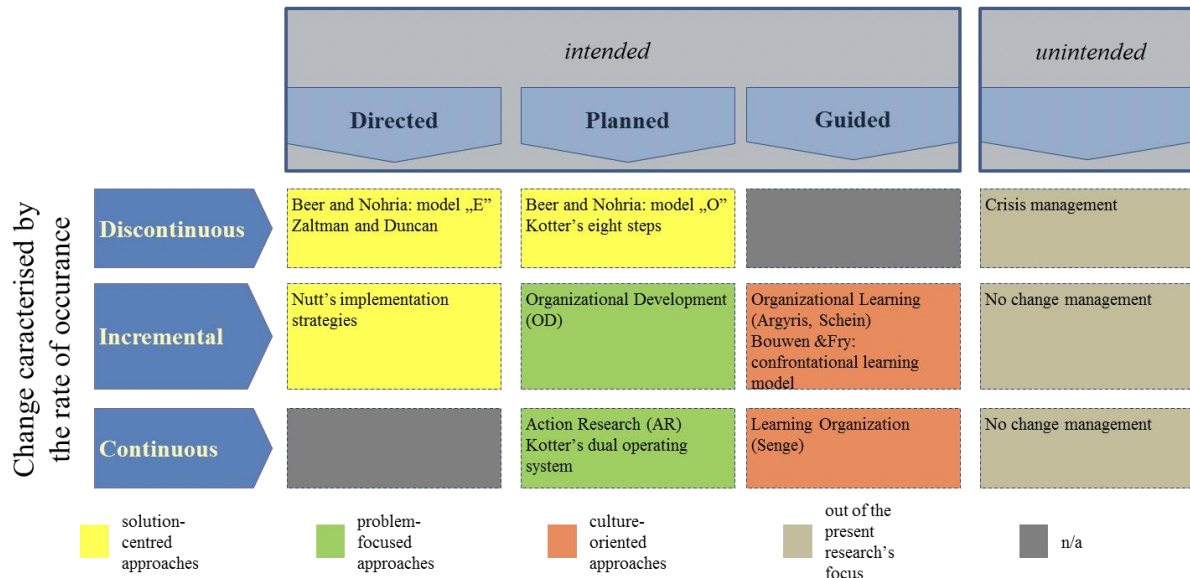
#### 3.1. Dialogue-focused reading of change management theories

The number of researches and empirical or theoretical articles dedicated to organisational change and change management underwent rocketing growth in the past 40 years. The assumptions of the various change and change management approaches are extremely diversified, so much so that the only common denominator in their definitions of change is that **at the end of the change process something is done differently than before** (Robbins et al., 2010).

The decisive majority of change management approaches is basically functionalist and looks for the tool(kit)s for managers to bring the change process to success. The focus is on managers (leaders); if they look at the employee perspective at all, they do so to identify clues for the leaders. They want to understand employee behaviour to upgrade the change management tools of managers so that the latter can achieve their goals as effectively as possible. My study of existing and well-known change management schools aimed also at identifying what relationship, what type of cooperation/co-action they assumed or recommended for change processes.

The early change management theories did not consider the employee a cooperating partner: in their opinion, the treatment of the inevitable resistance of employees was the priority task of change management (by such tools as manipulation, communication, pseudo- or controlled involvement, motivation, stimulation). Problem-oriented schools, on the other hand, already consider cooperation the key of change management, and dialogue a central element. Culture-oriented theories, in turn, explicitly name the dialogue as the key to change management. Partnership, cooperation and co-action are critical components according to these change management schools.

The more sophisticated, more complex the targeted changes, the more importance is assigned to dialogue, to effective and mutual, substantive cooperation between members of the organisation. The more a theory considers change an organic part of the everyday life of the organisation, the more relevance is assigned to real partnership, cooperation and dialogue.



Theories of change management by type of change and focus of change management. Source: Author's compilation.

At this point of my research it occurred to me to examine in more detail *what they meant by dialogue* and, in general, the meaning of the concept irrespective of the definitions of the various management schools. I stepped out of the field of change management and the management discipline in general to examine what other fields of science meant by dialogue.

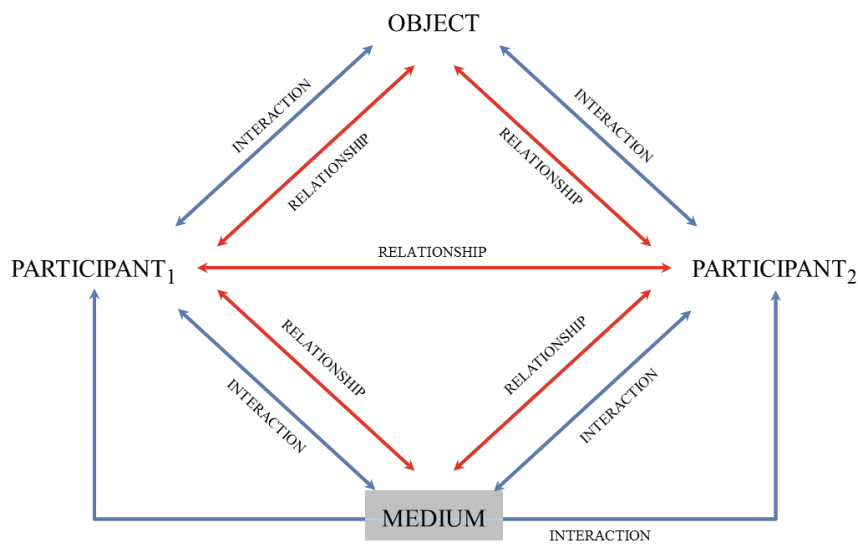
### 3.2. Complex model of the dialogue

Dialogue is a topic on the borderline of several disciplines: philosophy [the Ancient Greek, primarily Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Martin Buber, Hans G. Gadamer, Jürgen Habermas], literary science (Bahtyin, Eco) theology, sociology, communication theory (Horányi, anthropology (Geertz). I reviewed the theories concerned as part of my research and came to the conclusion that, instead of being contradictory, they complement and sometimes even amplify each other's results.

**The dialogue is a special form of communication where connection of a special quality is established between interdependent life forms so that they can reach mutual understanding. The quality criteria of this connection and of mutual understanding are the necessary and sufficient conditions, respectively, of dialogue.** Where this special quality of the connection is realised, we speak of a **dialogic (speech) situation**. If some degree of **understanding** is reached as well, we speak of dialogue in the strict sense. Concerted action and genuine, real, cooperation is made possible by this mutual understanding.

The basic model of the dialogue is as follows. The dialogic act (usually) unfolds between two **subjects**. The dialogue has an **object** that is the topic of the conversation of the subjects. A dialogic process, an **interaction**, is taking place between the participants, but there is also a **relationship** between them. The interaction of the two (or more) participants is not direct, but indirect, mediated by a transmission **medium** such as the written text or the spoken language. The interaction/relationship can be interpreted not only between the participants of dialogue, but also between the medium and the subject, or the subject and the object of dialogue.





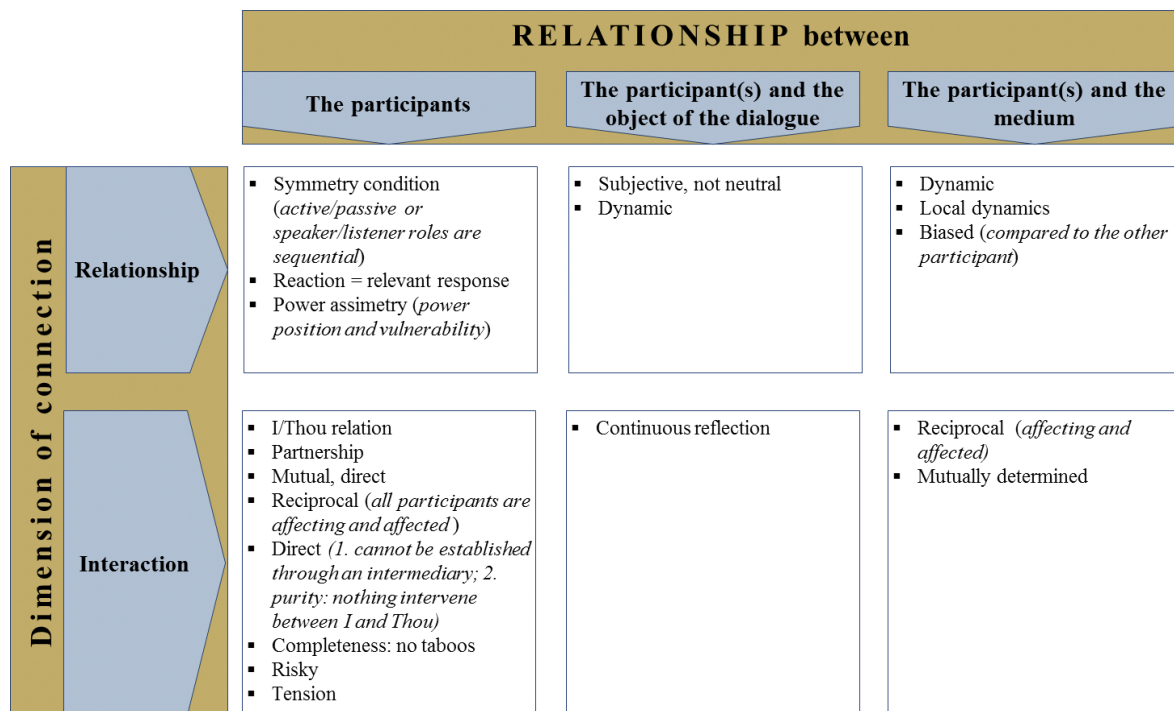
Basic dialogue model. Source: Author's compilation.

In the model the emphasis is on the interaction *and* relations between the various components (subject(s), object, medium). It is these relations and their special realisation that makes the dialogue more than and different from simple communication.

The two tables below summarise the boundary conditions of dialogue. The conditions concerned create a dialogic relationship, but they do not create the dialogue itself that requires understanding.

| THE PARTICIPANT(S)  | THE OBJECT   | THE MEDIUM   |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Biased (<i>preconceptions, assumptions, prejudices, expectations, motives</i>)</li> <li>▪ Free (<i>willingness of suspending the formers</i>)</li> <li>▪ Voluntary (<i>no pressure</i>)</li> <li>▪ Situated: socially and historically</li> <li>▪ Claim to truth</li> <li>▪ Autonomy (<i>without self-defence</i>)</li> <li>▪ Authentic (<i>the object of dialogue has meaning</i>)</li> <li>▪ Open (<i>to the other participant or to the dialogue</i>)</li> <li>▪ Driven by trust (<i>1. the other party may be right; 2. try to make the other's argument even stronger/clearer; 3. show themselves straight out</i>) Truthfulness or sincerity(<i>long time!</i>)</li> <li>▪ Intelligibility (<i>linguistic and communicative competencies</i>)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Independent (<i>not under anyone's control</i>)</li> <li>▪ Not specified in advance</li> <li>▪ Unfolds in the process, between the participants</li> <li>▪ Not constant in space or time</li> <li>▪ Situated (<i>takes place in a given situation, here and now</i>)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Written or spoken language, culture</li> <li>▪ Dynamic (<i>continuously changing</i>)</li> <li>▪ Independent (<i>not under anyone's control</i>)</li> <li>▪ Power problem (<i>whose language is used</i>)</li> <li>▪ Purely mediatory role in exeptional cases</li> <li>▪ There is no common, neutral language</li> </ul> |

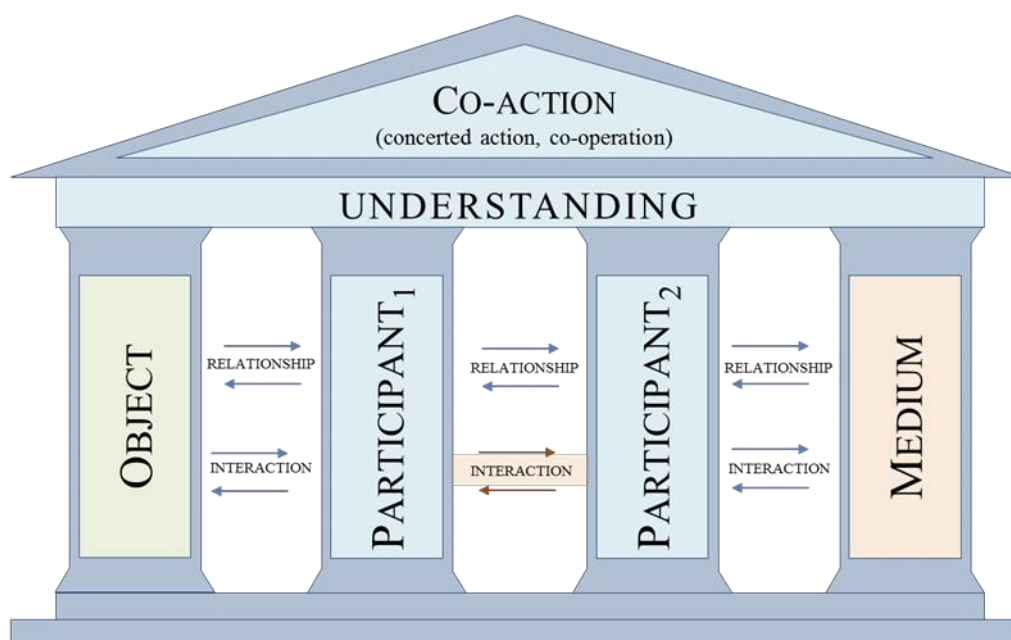
Boundary conditions of the dialogue's elements Source: Author's diagram.



Boundary conditions of connections in dialogue. Source: Author's diagram.

The goal and essence of dialogue is not agreement itself or to come to an agreement, but to mutually unfold diversity, to come to mutual understanding, to understand each other and, ultimately, to become able to realise concerted action/cooperation through mutual understanding. The essence of dialogue is this mutual understanding when “by contemplating the person facing us, the essence is revealed to the understanding party” (Buber, 1994, p. 48) Mutual and common understanding leads to concerted action, to high-level cooperation (Habermas, 2011).

Such revelation is not within the competence, under the control, of either of the parties; understanding, as Buber (1994) puts it, is a question of grace. “Something that happens, not something we do.” (Fehér M., 2013, p. 28) Something you must aim at, but cannot guarantee, being outside the sphere of control of the participants. In my opinion, this is the greatest paradox of dialogue.



Relationship between understanding and the elements of dialogue and the possibility of cooperation and co-action. Source: Author's diagram

### 3.3. Comparison of change management schools and dialogue philosophies

In my theoretical research, I examined to what extent the change management theories treating dialogue explicitly contradicted or agreed with the dialogue theories of other disciplines. Are their conclusions different? What are their similarities and differences?

The dialogue is explicitly mentioned in the following change management theories: organisational development (OD), action research (AR), organisational learning (work of Argyris, Schein, and fourth model of the theory of Bouwen and Fry) and Learning Organisation (the concept of Senge).

**The theories concerned speak of the same thing as the dialogue philosophies, but they add that the first step to construction is deconstruction, i.e. the identification and dismantling of the wrong, ingrained, behaviour patterns.**

Another point of difference concerns the boundary conditions of dialogue discussed in the context of the establishment of the dialogic relationship. **They do not discuss these conditions as comprehensively as the dialogue philosophies. They emphasise instead, and that is very important, one or another of the conditions concerned, based on their empirical experience.** OD/AR stress the truthfulness claim, Schein the language and the pre-conception, Argyris the mental models, and the autonomy (lack of self-defence mechanisms) of the individual, Bouwen and Fry the relevance of emotional presence and the collective constructionist nature of the process.

Of all authors, it is Peter Senge who approaches dialogue in the most complex way and whose approach is closest to that of the dialogue philosophies. **Actually, the dialogue philosophies do not go into such details of the meaning of collective action as he does.** The essence of collective or co-action, in the focus of the entire dialogue, is to create high-quality *alignment* (1). The individual interest does not dissolve in the common interest, it does not come to an end or get subordinated in the dialogue process. As emphasised by the dialogue philosophies, otherness does not end, but gets sharper. Senge says that *the individual interest becomes an extension* (2). The third component of co-action is the *I/Thou relation* (3).

**Schein, Argyris, and the OD and AR schools take a step back from dialogue, putting the emphasis on what culturally coded (Schein), learned (Argyris) behaviours are to be eliminated individually, with the support of the community, to let the dialogic relationship be created.** In these initial processes the focus is on the I. The Thou will not necessary turn into It, but the I tends to pay more attention inwards and less to the I/Thou relation. The I/Thou interaction is the central element in the model of Bouwen and Fry model and that of Senge. These are the two concepts where explicit emotional commitment, the relevance of emotions is discussed as well. Because the I/Thou relationship does not leave the participants unaffected. OD, AR, Argyris and Schein are more detached, putting more emphasis on the cognitive/mental processes as schools/researchers. Basically, this is the relation that will decide what action type we speak of in the sense of Habermas. Co-action is a communicative action where the other party is the Thou, where an I/Thou relation exists. In all the other action types (dramaturgical, strategic, normative) the other party is It, and the relation is an I/It one.

The main strength of the change management schools is that they rely on experience. Schein's writings reflect almost 50 years of experience as consultant (Schein, 2006ab). Argyris developed his models on the basis of more than 6000 corporate cases (Dixon, 1996). Bouwen and Frey analysed 13 innovation projects, monitoring them for 8-18 months (Bouwen and Frey,

1991). In the books of Senge (1990, 2006), one case study follows the other. This empirical basis is all the more important since their conclusions are akin to those of the dialogue philosophies, that is, they confirm the latter. A further contribution of the change management theories to the philosophy of the dialogue is the exploration of the relevance of organisational situatedness and the presentation of its functioning mechanism (in the works of Schein, Senge in the first place). The theory of Argyris on the defence mechanisms is significant: it presents the functioning mechanism of self-defence at the level of the individual in more depth than the dialogue philosophies, and Schein complements that by the presentation of the community-level mechanism (mutual face-saving). A further contribution by the change theories is the specification of co-action in the works of Senge, but in my opinion this needs to be supplemented by all means by Buber's concept of the I/Thou relation and Habermas' theory of communicative action to make it complete.

My theoretical research has confirmed that it is worthwhile to lift your head from your own discipline and look around to find out what other sciences say about phenomena that you consider important. I believe in **interdisciplinary dialogue**, and I sincerely hope that my theoretical research described here serves as its demonstration and shows its value.

### 3.4. Empirical research findings

Given my interpretative approach, first I examined the experience and interpretations of the actors of the case study, to explore the *local meaning* through these (so-called first-order contructions). I identified the micro-semantics, i.e. detected the semantic micro communities concerned. In the p-SHIFT project, these are the following: *senior management*, *project leadership*, *Unit B leadership (middle management)* and *Unit B's staff*, and 3 distinct semantic sub-communities in the last group. Other topics, other changes would not necessarily define the same micro communities. My thesis presents the findings from various perspectives separately. I had to understand the semantic micro communities first, to be able to take a look at the processes going on between them from a higher level, to understand how the communication systems of the micro communities concerned bring about what happens, i.e. organisational reality.

The analysis produced the following main answers to my research questions:

1. Individual explanations **turn into small-community narratives** due to the regular interactions of micro community members separately from ANSP as organisation due to their work schedule and work organisation.
2. The small-community semantics typically **coincide with the subcultures originating from organisational hierarchy**: there are clearly distinct employee and middle management readings/explanations.
3. Subsystems emerge also within the group of employees The fault line is defined by whether the individuals concerned are still open to dialogue à propos the change.
4. A **dominant narrative** emerged that was difficult to disagree with. *Disagreeing individuals* are afraid the community might expel them, so they prefer not to express their opinion openly. *Small isles of misunderstood individuals emerge*.
5. *By October 2018*, despite the emergence of a semantic micro community among them, *the representatives of the dominant narrative had also become small isles of misunderstood individuals*. They were emotionally upset. Management, or employees approaching change on a technical/rational basis, offered technical/rational answers to their display of emotions. That, however, was not an adequate response for them: *they felt they were not understood and*. Moreover, employees who typically operate in the technical/rational sphere, tend to respond to emotional expression of the dominant

narrative by reciprocating *withdrawal*. *This results in a reciprocal feelings of being misunderstood and in mutual withdrawals.*

6. **The staff of Unit B broke up into small isles of misunderstood individuals.** The entire staff became fragmented, and typically the majority of individuals locked themselves up in their respective individual worlds.
7. **The group of middle managers responded to the display of emotions they experienced by feeling misunderstood, but they have not withdrawn yet.** The reason for that was the appointment of a new head of unit that provided them a possibility for renewal, re-connection.
8. **Top management and the trade union have only an indirect, but strong, effect on the interrelationships concerned.** Both stay, basically, at a distance from the p-SHIFT project, albeit I could not get acquainted with the interpretations of the first. The common feature of top management and the trade union is that **their conflicts in parallel organisational processes** (changes, projects) **and their interest-driven games exert an influence also on interrelationships within the p-SHIFT project.**
9. **In the ANSP's p-SHIFT project, the participants do not feel involved in a dialogue, nor in a dialogic relationship. Small isles of misunderstood individuals emerge – basically, each individual is a separate isle.** Some would still be open to dialogue, but they also show signs of burnout and apathy. In this situation characterised by lack of energy and inability to adopt an open stance towards others the only hope lies in the new manager (head of Unit B). The thesis provides a detailed overview of how this situation came about by October 2018, how the reactions and manifestations of the players interacted.

#### 4. SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

According to the relevant theories and the practice of the ANSP's p-SHIFT project, **genuine in-depth change requires a paradigm change** of employee thinking and work performance. This, however, **is inconceivable without the mutual understanding of parties involved in the change.** Mutual understanding could represent a basis that **does not necessarily mean agreement**, but **might imply co-action** that could bring change.

Within European air traffic control, at the start the ANSP's p-SHIFT project was a serious opportunity for arriving at mutual understanding among the participants, because it meant starting to build a dialogic relationship among the parties. The relevant efforts, however, failed for the reasons and decisions presented in the thesis, but they could be revived, since the change itself affects the very bases of work done by the staff concerned – consequently, **change**, the subject matter of the dialogue, **is highly important for them individually.**

1. In summary we can note that **the majority of dialogue conditions applicable to the participants are fulfilled in the p-SHIFT project.** Only the criterion of voluntary involvement/under no pressure involvement is absent for some participants. The dilemma for me here is whether an employee can actually say “no” to dialogue in the context of a project that is the result of a decision of top management pertaining to changing the basic working conditions of employees, in the present case the staff. Can the individual make a voluntary, free, choice in such an organisational situation? My study of the p-SHIFT case suggests that *this is no dilemma for the individuals concerned: if dialogue gives them a real chance to form the change, they would opt for it.* This applies to the condition pertaining to the object of the dialogue: it is not subject to the unilateral control of either party. If this, however, is violated, that undermines the credibility of the dialogue and cancels the any dialogic relations.
2. **The majority of conditions applicable to dialogic relations is not fulfilled in the ANSP's p-SHIFT project.** Mutuality and reciprocal effects existed, typically at the

start of the project. The I/Thou relationship, however, was missing almost throughout the process. This is the point where concurrent organisational events can exert the strongest influence on dialogue within the organisation. If in a parallel project, a parallel organisational event I/It relations prevail between the parties, I can hardly imagine, on the basis of the case under study, that I-Thou relations could be established at other fora. My analysis of the case suggests that it would be possible to develop an I/Thou relation between middle management and the staff in the ANSP p-SHIFT project. For top management and the trade union that would require further research.

3. **A lot depends on interactions between the participants of dialogue**, but the failure of dialogic relations in the p-SHIFT project was mainly due to the unsettled nature of relationships. Symmetry and a taboo-free approach in the interaction are in vain if no I/Thou relationship, no partnership of merit and consequently no chance for a dialogic relation evolves. The case study demonstrates also the critical importance of substantive, adequate responses. The main reason for the emergence of fragmented small isles of misunderstood individuals was that the community of the dominant narrative did not consider the responses they received or perceived at the beginning of the project substantive.
4. If change is really important for the organisational players, **no organisational past, experience, situation or bias will make substantive dialogue impossible**. Concurrent, parallel, organisational events may occur that make it a must to suspend the dialogue, but in the case I found that it can always be re-established.
5. **The organisation is a complex system where several events/processes are taking place concurrently, bringing in their respective emotional and rational sets of objectives and/or interests. Their interaction cannot be avoided, but it can be managed**. One must be able to prioritise the parallel events and systems, to suspend one or another among them in the interest of a more important one. Top management has an obvious function in this prioritisation, and they must be aware also that they establish priorities even if they do not do that deliberately. In vain did top management label the p-SHIFT project a strategic project if they paid no attention to the effects that other, parallel, organisational events within their competence had on it.
6. One must also be aware of the fact that the **system of dialogic relations, dialogue itself, is out of the ordinary in contemporary organisations. Patience and empathy are needed at the start to accept initial aversion**. Lack of understanding in the beginning must be seen for what it is, its real causes need to be understood. And what is even more important: **understanding is more than a cognitive act. Empathy is needed for understanding also the emotional state of the other**. Questions, dilemmas, displays of emotions **must be answered accordingly**. A mediator, in this case the project management, can play a crucial role in this early stage. As quasi-independent actor, he/she can promote the mutual understanding of the parties, while being aware of the temporary nature of his/her function, i.e. to establish contact; after that, only space and time needed for the dialogue must be provided.

**In addition to the above findings, another important result of my research was that change management theories raise a series of dilemmas concerning the dialogue and change that are answered by the dialogue philosophies; my empirical research has actually provided me with some relevant local answers in this regard.**

- I. How can **power asymmetry** due to language use, sequencing (e.g. who is the initiator, who is the client), to familiarity with dialogue (e.g. role of a counsellor) **be resolved**?
  - a. Answer of the dialogue philosophies: Power asymmetry is immanent to the dialogue. It can only be resolved by the relationship of the participants, i.e. their underlying attitudes to each other and the process concerned. If I turn to the other with openness and real attention, because instead of acquiring control I would like to cooperate/co-act, I do not abuse my power.

- b. This case has shed light also on formal and informal power asymmetry. The above-quoted answer of the dialogue philosophies turned out to be true also for the latter: the dominant factor here is the effect of the parties' attitude of each other; that can override their power relations. The p-SHIFT project has also shown that the role of client, initiator are definitely power factors. How much elbow room do all these give the participants? If there is room for manoeuvre, it is possible to have an effect on the object of the dialogue, and power asymmetry can also be resolved in the process.
- II. **Is the dialogue feasible in an organisational context along the dimensions of openness and vulnerability?**
  - a. Answer of the dialogue philosophies: The hermeneutics of goodwill is always vulnerable, i.e. exposed. It is not supported by rational arguments. It depends on our individual decisions and fundamental view of the world and of men whether we believe in the meaningfulness of the dialogue despite any difficulties and obvious risks.
  - b. I encountered a partly related phenomenon during my analysis of the case: those who became disappointed and therefore replaced their initial openness with seclusion did not feel exposed and vulnerable in the dialogue situation, but rather sorry "they believed this would be feasible". This implies regretted goodwill rather than vulnerability. If this is the case, the answer of the dialogue philosophies, namely that goodwill is always risky if it does not meet with reciprocal goodwill and/or openness to partner contact is perfectly adequate here, too.
- III. **How can suspicion to goodwill be dissolved?**
  - a. Answer of the dialogue philosophies: In an organisational context, goodwill will always be viewed with suspicion; constant demonstration is needed to convince those concerned of its being genuine, and you must constantly fight for goodwill. Credibility means a never-ending "burden of proof".
  - b. I have seen this to be partly true in the case. Because of the parallel organisational developments, where a dialogic system of relations does not necessarily emerge, it may even be justified to suspend the dialogue temporarily. This, however, can be accepted, and it is also true that a suspended dialogue cannot always be picked up again at the same point. There is always a need to re-build trust to some extent – the time needed for that may vary. Interest groups like top management or the trade union turning up in the p-SHIFT project must probably make more efforts to be credited in a dialogue process. My analysis of the p-SHIFT project has covered these two perspectives unilaterally only, but it was clearly discernible from the stories of the project management, middle management or the staff that these two players must fight a lot to be considered trustworthy in a dialogic relationship.
- IV. **What if past grievances are so deep in an organisation that the resulting strong suspicion makes dialogue impossible?**
  - a. Answer of the dialogue philosophies: The hermeneutics of goodwill is finite: certain wounds cannot be healed; in such cases, withdrawal from understanding remains the only alternative.
  - b. I found no incurable wounds in the p-SHIFT case. On the contrary, what I saw was that even the far-from-ideal relationship of the previous management of Unit B and staff could not undermine dialogue in itself. The object of the dialogue, i.e. p-SHIFT change, was so important personally and individually for the staff that this made them overcome their alleged or real past grievances.
- V. **Can organisational situatedness be overridden by commitment to dialogue?**
  - a. Answer of the dialogue philosophies: It depends on our individual decisions and fundamental view of the world and of men whether we believe in the meaningfulness of the dialogue despite any difficulties and obvious risks.

- b. The case suggests that the answer is partly positive: neither past events, nor hierarchical positions could influence the dialogue, because its object was personally important to all actors concerned. One addendum to this answer, however, is that parallel organisational processes can make the dialogue impossible. The solution in such case is to temporarily suspend the dialogue; after that, efforts will certainly be needed to re-build the dialogic relations.



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