

# *Moving moments*

Leadership and interventions in  
dynamically complex change processes

Lay-out: Jutta van Dijk  
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VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT

Moving Moments

Leadership and interventions in dynamically complex change processes

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

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de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam,  
op gezag van de rector magnificus  
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in het openbaar te verdedigen  
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door

Arend Johan Ardon

geboren te Gouda

promotor:        prof.dr. P.A.E. van de Bunt  
copromotor:    prof.dr. J.J. Boonstra



*This doctoral thesis is dedicated  
with love and gratitude  
to Jenneke and our  
children Bram and Ruth.*



## Preface/acknowledgements

This doctoral thesis deals with the question how leaders and their consultants (unintendedly) contribute to the preservation of the current situation, while talking about realizing change. This subject took me from the moment I started and still interests me strongly. In the course of this study, I have had the worthwhile opportunity to invest in my development as a researcher and as a practitioner. Conducting action research, which includes the study of my own role as a practitioner, has not always been easy but purifying. Although this period has been inspiring, I often found it quite challenging to combine a Ph.D. study with a healthy consultancy practice and a happy family life. I am grateful to the people who have supported me during this study.

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Arend Ardon  
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# 1. Introduction

*Each morning, same time, the director of the company walks through the corridor. And while he passes the room of a manager, each morning he asks: 'Hi John, everything under control?' Each morning the answer is: 'Yes, sure.' After two months, same time, same question and same answer, the director enters the room: 'I am concerned about your answer. Let's have a talk.'*<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1 Problem statement

### Box 1 'How do we get our employees in the right mode?'<sup>2</sup>

In a large Amsterdam-based company, top management is not satisfied with the customer focus of the company. With support of a consultant, they start an improvement process in the entire organization. The approach follows a cascade structure: at each level of the organization, teams develop improvement plans that aim at the shared goal, customer focus. This way, responsibility for developing ideas and bringing them into practice is combined. The approach strongly appeals to employees' ideas and insights and aims at stimulating ownership. In the short run the approach leads to creativity and practical improvement ideas that really seem to work. Top management is enthusiast about the first results. However, in the longer run the energy declines. Managers at all levels struggle with the same questions: *'Why is it so difficult to keep this alive? Why do we persistently have to push and persuade? Why aren't they intrinsically motivated? How do we get our employees in the right mode?'*

Management have conducted several interventions, but are confronted with the same problems time after time. Despite several interventions, they still face problems with lack of energy and opponent forces (in management terms: resistance). Sometimes it seems that the harder they try, the worse the result or even the larger the problems. Management try to gain control and seem to lose control. Management try 'to break through resistance', though this seems to stimulate opposition. Obvious interventions produce non-obvious consequences. It is these kinds of situations this study deals with.

Extensive literature on change management has been released over the past decades. Consultants and managers can select their own favourite approaches, models, checklists and scorecards. Still, numerous studies support the belief that there seems to be a collective incompetence to organize successful change processes (e.g. Kearny, 1997; Mourier and Smith, 2003; Boonstra, 2000;

<sup>1</sup> The quotes/narratives at the start of each chapter are illustrative of the contents of that chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Examples in the theoretical exploration have been put in boxes. They are not considered to be empirical evidence, but only illustrations to create a text that is accessible and understandable.

Pettigrew, 1997). Beer & Nohria (2000) have tried to find an unambiguous explanation (integrative conceptual framework) by bringing some leading management thinkers together to 'break the code of change'. However, in their concluding chapter they state "let's start by admitting that we have not broken the code of change" (p. 473).

Do we need more models? Is the right scorecard still not available, or do we need better change plans? Day-to-day observations as a consultant and researcher do not support this view. The vast majority of managers and management teams have knowledge about how to plan and manage change processes, how to measure progress and how to behave during this process. And if they do not, they generally pick up new insights on these topics easily. Mostly, (top) managers are able to have a thorough discussion on how to lead a change process and to select a suitable approach. More knowledge and experience seem not to be the topic. Some preliminary observations as a consultant and researcher support another view.

Regardless of their spoken change ambitions and their desired management behaviour, in action managers often show behaviour that is inconsistent with these ambitions and intentions. Illustrative are a number of post-academic courses on change management<sup>3</sup>. In almost thirty different study groups, participants (senior managers) were asked to collect the most important conditions for successful change. Without any exception, they were able to compose a list of important conditions within a couple of minutes, including creating commitment, listening to concerns and clear communication. In the next step they were participants in a game. The group was divided in subgroups with a position in a company. Only the context of the change project was described. Participants were totally free in the way they filled in their role. The assignment was to prepare a meeting on the change process, each party from its own position. The participants who represented top management tended to involve the conditions for successful change in their preparation. However, without any exception, as soon as they were confronted with different beliefs and opinions during the meeting, they showed behaviour that was entirely inconsistent with these conditions: top managers enlarged control by persuasion, neglected emotions and suppressed deviant opinions.

These findings are in line with observations in management practice: although managers are very well able to describe what management behaviour would be desirable during a meeting with subordinates, as soon as they are confronted with critical questions and deviant opinions their actual behaviour tends to be inconsistent with their desired behaviour and focus on enlarging control (Argyris, 1990, 2000, 2004). Preliminary observations lead to the perception that this inclination to enlarge control leads to unintended effects varying from employees who *say* yes, but *act* no, employees who just undergo the 'change project' and take no personal responsibility, and employees who come up with ideas but do not bring them into practice to

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<sup>3</sup> Courses by Holland Consulting Group, Amsterdam, conducted in the period from 2003-2008.

feelings and divergent visions that are kept undebatable (Noonan, 2007). This way, managers might contribute to the problems they face. While many managers emphasize their desire to stimulate ownership, entrepreneurship and personal responsibility, they find their employees too reactive and dependent, even cynical. Employees, in turn, perceive the organization as unsafe and management as directive. Interventions contribute to short-lived improvements but lack a long-term effect (Ardon, 2006).

These observations turn the attention from what managers *say* to what they really *do* in action and to the effects of their behaviour on the change process to which they aspire. After all, it is not the intentions but the actual management behaviour that elicits certain effects. If their behaviour in action is not or only partly governed by what they say, then what does govern their behaviour? And how does their actual behaviour relate to the change process? Might they, unintendedly, block change and –thus- contribute to the preservation of the current situation?

In the vast majority of change situations management put an emphasis on the (planned) change approach and methods: what steps and interventions lead from the current to the desired situation (Werkman, 2006)? This emphasis is in line with the mainstream literature that pays much more attention to change methods (what we talk about) than daily interactions (what we actually do). In practice, however, blocked change processes often seem to have their roots in daily interactions (Argyris, 2004; Noonan, 2007; Schwartz, 2002).

An additional perspective concerns the role of management consultants in these interactions between managers and their employees. After all, as soon as they enter an organization, they contribute directly to the interactions (McCaughan and Palmer, 1994). Especially if their focus is on supporting management in their goals, strategies and approach (Argyris, 2000; Noonan, 2007; Drukker & Verhaaren, 2002; Strikwerda, 2004), their role in stagnations in change processes cannot be neglected. For example, they might contribute to blocked change by developing and supporting strategies to break through resistance, by supporting persuasive management behaviour and by bypassing fundamental problems that are difficult to manage and control.

The focus of this study is not on development of even more descriptions of change methods and desired management behaviour. Nor does it focus on what managers and consultants do right or wrong. This study doesn't aspire to persuade that change is better than preservation of the current reality. This study aims at understanding the gap between what we say and write on the one hand and what we actually do on the other hand. The focus is not on change plans, but on how daily interactions contribute to (blocked) change processes.

This study does not address routine and simple change processes. It focuses on problematic situations that are relatively difficult to change and have a repetitive

character. 'Simple' change processes are not necessarily easy to deal with. Simple rather means 'instrumental', concerning structure and systems rather than performance, people, culture, behaviour or attitude. In this study, change processes are considered to be 'complex' in case of dynamic complexity (Senge, 1990). Senge describes two types of complexity: detail complexity and dynamic complexity. Detail complexity refers to a kind of complexity in which there are many variables. Examples are working out the timetable of a large school (McCaughan et al., 1994, p. 27), following a complex set of instructions to assemble a machine, or designing a financial planning and control cycle for a large enterprise. Detailed complexity can be dealt with by proper procedures.

Dynamic complexity is of a different order. "When the same action has dramatically different effects in the short run and the long, there is dynamic complexity. When an action had one set of consequences locally and a very different set of consequences in another part of the system, there is dynamic complexity. When obvious interventions produce nonobvious consequences, there is dynamic complexity" (Senge, 1990, p. 71). Typical examples are laborious attempts to develop entrepreneurship and ownership, recurrent patterns of resistance, and problematic relations between management and employees.

The problem statement of this study is:

*How do leaders and their consultants contribute to (de-)blocking dynamically complex change processes?*

## 1.2 Theoretical positioning

This study builds on the scientific tradition of organizational learning and systems thinking and particularly on Argyris' contributions about the effects of unilateral control on changing and learning. Argyris (e.g. 1990, 2000, 2004) has conducted extensive research upon the inconsistency between what managers say and what they do. Besides, he found that managers have a strong inclination to unilaterally control difficult situations and subordinates, especially if they experience threat and/or embarrassment. Typical expressions of this unilateral control are persuasion, neglect of emotions and suppression of deviant opinions. The consequence of – what he calls – a unilateral control model is limited learning, escalating error and in the end blocked changing.

The unilateral control concept has its roots in two scientific schools that seem to approach this concept relatively separately. The first school is the organizational learning school, as represented by Argyris. The second school is the (organizational) culture school. Interestingly, both schools differ strongly in some preconceptions.

The (organizational) culture school assumes that dominant control thinking is characteristic of modern Western culture since the Enlightenment (Kamsteeg & Koot, 2002). In this view people tend to think they can produce and control their social and natural environment. In this view we tend to focus on rational coordination in our actions (goal – means rationality). This conception of reality also influences our perception of organizations and organizational culture. Just as management can produce and control organization structure and systems, this perspective assumes one can implement culture (Kunda, 1992; Hosking, 2004). However, this is problematic, as the desire to control can easily lead to no control. The effects of this control view continuously activate their own anti-forces (Kamsteeg & Koot, 2002). As a consequence, (top) management often face complex situations. Kamsteeg and Koot argue that Dutch top managers often don't control their business processes (any more), however, they do try to convince employees, shareholders and other stakeholders that they are in control (p. 156). In their perception, (top) managers' assumptions that they can control their environment are so strong that regardless of their negative effects in the management of organizations they tend to hold them firmly.

In another publication, Koot & Sabelis (2000) describe dominant values in organizations as the desire to score, schedule, program, judge, define goals, show decisiveness, run and look forward. They argue that these values, which are visible in day-to-day practice, are not consistent with the more socially desirable views one tends to talk about. Here, this school agrees with the organizational learning school.

Characteristic of the (organizational) culture school is the assumption that dominant control thinking is region and time-related: the modernistic Western world since the Enlightenment. This assumption is in strong contrast to the organizational learning school, represented by Argyris. According to Argyris, young or old, female or male, minority or majority, wealthy or poor, well-educated or poorly educated – all people use action theories that instruct them how to be in control (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Argyris 1990, 1999): to be in unilateral control, to win, and not to upset people. These action strategies are primarily selling and persuading and, when necessary, save one's own and others' faces. According to Argyris this action theory (that he calls Model I) is neither region nor time-related. In a verbal comment (The Hague, 29<sup>th</sup> June 2007) he stated that this action theory is held by almost everyone all over the world. Furthermore, he referred to his research that shows the same action theory was held by human beings in Ancient times and even by apes. In numerous publications Argyris describes how a unilateral control model leads to defensiveness and blocks organizational learning. In the end, this leads to self-fulfilling prophecies and error-escalating processes.

It is these self-fulfilling prophecies and error-escalating processes where Argyris' insights relate to circular patterns and feedback loops in systems thinking. According to Senge (1990), nothing is only a cause or only an effect. In systems thinking everything is both cause and effect (p. 75). This leads to recurrent patterns that tend to be persistent. Senge (1990), McCaughan & Palmer (1994) and Campbell et al.

(1994) describe how circular patterns lead to short-term solutions and bypass more fundamental problems.

When management is confronted with the same problems time after time, when they try to gain control yet seem to lose control, try to break through resistance yet stimulate resistance, when obvious interventions produce non-obvious consequences, their behaviour is probably cause and effect and they are probably stuck in circular patterns. However, a unilateral control model keeps them from learning about their role and instructs them to seal their ineffectiveness. Argyris has described how one can facilitate mutual learning and thus de-block changing. He introduced Model II, that aims at (i) valid, direct observable data instead of personal and hidden interpretations, (ii) internal commitment instead of saying 'yes' and thinking 'no' and (iii) free choice instead of persuasion and manipulation. A recurrent question in discussions on Argyris' work is to what extent managers and professionals are able to learn and apply Model II values (Drukker, 1999; Edmondson, 1996; Kegan, 1994; Van de Vliert, 1977).

Boonstra (2004), Putnam (1999) and Campbell et al. (1994) have described the dominance of a unilateral control model and its effect on organizational change and learning. Recently, Argyris' insights count on a new revival. Several authors have made his concepts more accessible through practical and easy-to-read publications (e.g. Noonan, 2007; Schwarz, 2002). Argyris has described many examples of meetings with managers and professionals in order to share directly observable data. This way, he illustrates what individuals say, how unilateral control leads to communication problems and how mutual learning contributes to solutions.

By building on the scientific tradition of organizational learning as represented by Argyris, this study is rooted in American pragmatism (Sauquet, 2004). This school of thought assumes that changing and learning evolve in action. When individuals are confronted with unexpected situations, they can reduce the confusion by translating the situation into a problem. The resulting problem frame serves as a starting point for further inquiry that – in turn- can lead to corrective actions. As a consequence, change and learning evolve in action. This school of thought can be distinguished from other schools, like behaviourism, the cognitive school, and situated learning (Sauquet, 2004). Argyris' insights on organizational learning have been influenced by the work of Bateson (2000), who has strongly contributed to theory on the psychology of communication.

The empirical study is a combination of longitudinal case studies (Yin, 1994; Eisenhardt, 1989; Van der Zwaan, 1990) and action research (Eden & Huxham, 1996). The study aims at developing evidence-based knowledge on the effects of unilateral control on changing, organizing and learning, and what interventions (interactions) help to de-block changing in the longer run. This way, this study tries to respond to Argyris' call for directly observable data during entire change projects and

valid information (Argyris, 1973, 1990, 1995, 2004) and Rousseau's call for evidence-based management (2006).

By collecting directly observable data (daily interactions) in three longitudinal case studies, one can observe what managers, employees and their consultants say and do, whether and how these interactions are governed by unilateral control, how they contribute to (de-)blocking of changing, organizing and learning, and how interventions affect interactions in the longer run. The process of ongoing interactions is 'slowed down' in order to understand patterns, recognize important moments and their meaning to effective changing: *moving moments*.

### 1.3 Objectives

The problem statement of this study can be translated into six specific objectives.

1. Collect data and evidence of a dominant unilateral control model by managers and their consultants.
2. Develop insight into the expressions of a dominant unilateral control model.
3. Create insight into the relation between a dominant unilateral control model and blocked changing.
4. Create insight into the practical attainability of employing alternative behaviour in interpersonal interactions.
5. Create insight into the interventionist's role in (de-)blocking of changing.
6. Develop an intervention perspective that supports de-blocking of changing.

### 1.4 Contributions

As discussed before, several studies support the belief that there seems to be a collective incompetence to organize successful change processes (e.g. Kearny, 1997; Mourier and Smith, 2003; Boonstra, 2000; 2001; Pettigrew, 1997; Maurer, 1997; Schneier et al., 1992). All studies mention different success rates. However, regardless of the exact percentages, there is a strong belief that the return on investment (in terms of manpower, money, time and energy) of change initiatives tends to be disappointing. This study wants to contribute to an explanation of recurrent change difficulties. Not by studying what leaders *know or say*, but how they *act in interaction with people in their environment*. Not by studying what change methods are selected, but what people really do in practice. This study builds on the work of researchers like Argyris and Senge. Its contribution to scientific as well as practical knowledge can be summarized in five points.

First, this study integrates perspectives in order to give a broad overview of expressions of a unilateral control model. It not only refers to Argyris' insights, but also to other sources in the field of systems thinking and organizational change. This

leads to a diagnostic model that supports recognition of blocked changing and learning. Second, by describing three longitudinal case studies this study endeavours to gain knowledge about how dynamically complex change situations develop during a longer period and in an organizational context that goes further than the description of isolated meetings and conversations. Third, by combining longitudinal case studies and action research, the long-term effects of interventions by the consultant (interventionist) can be visualized. This leads to practical knowledge in order to develop an intervention perspective on de-blocking of dynamically complex change situations. Fourth, this study contributes to a translation of knowledge on organizational learning into practical and concrete insights that support understanding of blocked changing and to actionable interventions that contribute to de-block changing. This way, this study aims at developing evidence-based insights that are applicable to the practice of managers and consultants and that might be helpful in effective changing and learning. Fifth, unlike the emphasis of the mainstream literature, this study does not focus on 'how one should organize change', but on 'how one –unintendedly and apparently- contributes to the preservation of the current reality'.

## **1.5 Research outline**

This study consists of three parts: the theoretical exploration (chapters 1-4), the empirical study (chapters 5-10) and conclusions (chapters 11-12).

Chapter 2 presents an overview of the expressions of a unilateral control model. This chapter concludes with a diagnostic model that aims at recognising and understanding expressions of a unilateral control model in practice and how they might contribute to blocked changing and learning. Chapter 3 reviews alternative guiding principles and provides a basis for ways to de-block changing and learning. Chapter 4 reviews literature on the role of the interventionist (consultant) and intervention perspectives.

Chapter 5 summarizes the central concepts and presents the research questions, as derived from the theoretical exploration. Chapter 6 outlines the research methodology of the empirical study. Chapters 7-9 describe three case studies. Each chapter concludes with a within-case analysis. Chapter 10 compares the outcomes of the within-case analyses in a cross-case analysis and addresses similarities and differences.

Chapter 11 describes the conclusions, as based on the cross-case analysis. The conclusions concern the research questions, additional findings, as well as the research methodology. Furthermore, limitations of the present study as well as recommendations for future research are described. This study finishes with a personal reflection on the research process and a description of the individual learning process of the researcher (chapter 12).



## PART I THEORETICAL EXPLORATION



## 2. Expressions of unilateral control

*Manager: HR did an employee satisfaction survey; employees say they don't feel safe.*

*Director: What do they mean by that?*

*Manager: I have asked some of them. But I get only little information. Most of them say it is not really a problem.*

*Director: Well, then there is little we can do. We have to change the culture. People don't take initiative. We miss entrepreneurship and pro-activeness.*

*Manager: But how do we realize that?*

*Director: What about workshops?*

*Manager: We already organized workshops last year, didn't we? All the managers and team leaders had to participate.*

*Director: And?*

*Manager: All of them did participate. In the first instance I saw some initiatives. But I am afraid nothing has changed really.*

### 2.1 Introduction

The website of an Amsterdam-based clinic on mesology<sup>4</sup> displays the message: 'In our clinic we treat people with chronic complaints. For acute and life-threatening symptoms we refer you to your family doctor'.

This study does not focus on acute and life-threatening situations in organizations. Instead, this study aims at chronic problems, e.g. how can one explain that the same problems recur time after time, regardless of several interventions?

This chapter aims at exploring the expressions of unilateral control by leaders<sup>5</sup>, and the consequences for change processes. First, the phenomenon of unilateral control is described. The subsequent sections describe the expressions of a unilateral control model: the way leaders (and their consultants) perceive organization problems, how they act, how they intervene and how they design and change organizations. These insights lead to a diagnostic model that helps to recognize ineffective patterns and make them debatable.

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<sup>4</sup> Mesology is a medical science that particularly focuses on understanding and influencing underlying causes of chronic disorders, instead of applying symptomatic solutions.

<sup>5</sup> The terms 'leaders' and 'managers' refer to persons with a supervisory relationship to others. In this understanding, these terms are used alternately in this text. Here, the terms do not refer to leadership and management, which are often considered to be different concepts (see, for example, Zaleznik, 2004).

## 2.2 Unilateral control as a dominant model?

The introductory chapter describes observations regarding inconsistency between what managers say and do and the inclination to control difficult situations unilaterally. These observations are in line with results of studies by Argyris (e.g. 1990, 1995, 1999, 2004). In his opinion, human beings have implicit programs that tell them how to be in control, “especially when they face embarrassment or threat, two conditions that could lead them to get out of control” (p. 13). He distinguishes two types of programs. Firstly, people hold a set of beliefs, values and attitudes regarding how to manage their lives. He calls these sets of beliefs their espoused theories. Secondly, theories-in-use are used to design and implement their actions. In other words, people use these theories when they actually act.

In practice, the espoused theories are what we speak about. They refer to what we think we do or –at least- what we want to do. In general, these ideas have a rational focus and they are vulnerable to socially desirable opinions. Discussions in the boardroom between managers and/or professionals about how to lead a change program are led by these espoused theories. However, their actions (e.g. during the meeting with middle management) are led by theories-in-use. These theories are often not in line with the espoused theories. As a consequence, people might show behaviour that is inconsistent with the beliefs they talk about.

According to Argyris (1990) theories-in-use do not vary widely. By and large, people tend to use the same theory-in-use, although the actual behaviours that are produced by these theories can differ widely (p. 13). In his opinion, individuals tend to think from a universal set of principles, so-called Model I principles: ‘Theories-in-use are the master programs that individuals hold in order to be in control. Model I theory-in-use instructs individuals to seek to be in unilateral control, to win, and not to upset people. It recommends action strategies that are primarily selling and persuading and, when necessary, strategies that save their own and others’ face.’ (p. 13). Argyris (1983) reports that 99% of nearly 2,000 managers and professionals hold only a Model I theory-in-use. Individuals, including leaders, tend to be skilful in behaviour that is designed by Model I. This behaviour, however, leads both to a dilemma and a paradox (Argyris, 1990). The dilemma arises because is it not possible to save someone’s face and be open about this intention. As a consequence, this requires “designed lying, called white lies, as well as a cover-up of the white lies” (Argyris, 1990, p. 13). The paradox stems from the fact that in a relation only one person can effectively use Model I behaviour. The other person must be submissive, passive and dependent. As a consequence, if Model I is an effective model, it only works if other people are able and willing to be ineffective.

Drukker & Verhaaren (2004) summarize Model I behaviour as unilateral control, the desire to win, suppress feelings, to avoid testing one's own assumptions, to judge others and to be rational.

A practical consequence of this behaviour is illustrated by patterns that are visible in day-to-day (business) communication. In communication one often tends to play and accept 'a cheating game'. When individuals want to be in control, they tend not to be open about what they really think and feel. That's why they cover up what they really think and feel. And then they cover up what they cover up. The other person, however, sees the non-verbal behaviour that probably reflects the (real) feelings and thoughts. And he knows that these are not consistent with what he hears. But, in turn, he covers up this thought and these feelings and says something else. Often what we see is inconsistent with what we hear. In general, one accepts this inconsistency. In turn, what we feel/think is inconsistent with what we say. This is an ongoing circle of ineffectiveness, as depicted in figure 2.1.

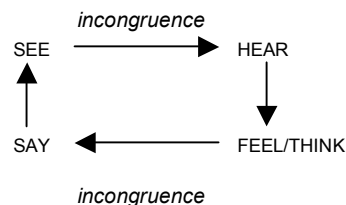


Figure 2.1 The accepted cheating game

According to Argyris we are so skilful in these behaviours that we are unaware of using them. He calls this "skilled incompetence".

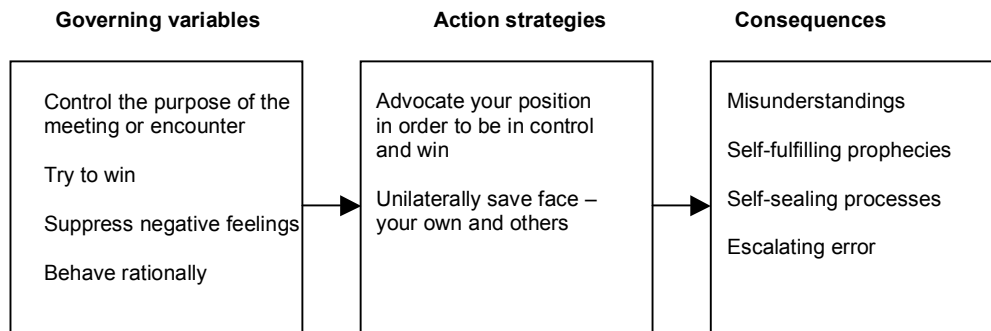
Argyris (1990) describes the consequences of this skilled incompetence:

- The errors would not exist and persist if someone was not producing them.
- Because human behaviour is activated by our own theories-in-use, there must be programs of rules in our heads that tell us how to behave.

If this is true, then we must have rules in our heads that tell us to:

1. Produce consequences that you do not intend when dealing with difficult people.
2. Hold other people or the system responsible for errors in problem solving and decision making, and do not examine your own responsibility" (p. 22-23).

In the cases he describes, Argyris often focuses on the role managers and leaders play, although his research illustrates professionals tend to show the same behaviour. In short, they tend to be very skilful in Model I behaviour. This behaviour is based on controlling, winning and not upsetting others, but they are unaware of these 'values'. As a consequence, they can produce unintended effects: misunderstandings, self-fulfilling prophecies, self-sealing processes and escalating error. Figure 2.2 depicts a Model I theory-in-use.



*Figure 2.2 Model I theory-in-use (source: Argyris, 2004, p. 391)*

Recent publications by Noonan (2007) and Schwarz (2002, 2003), who try to further enlarge the accessibility of Argyris' insights, tend to replace 'Model I' by 'unilateral control model'. Here, the latter term will be used.

Several authors on organizational learning and change confirm this unilateral control model (e.g. Senge, 1990; Boonstra, 2004; Campbell et al., 1994; McCaughan & Palmer, 1994; Putnam, 1999; Georgesen & Harris, 1998; Drukker & Verhaaren, 2004; De Man, 2003; Robinson, 2001; Friedman, 2001).

#### *The concept of control in psychology*

In psychology extensive research has been conducted upon the concept of control. Skinner (1996) analyzed more than 100 terms that researchers in these disciplines use when they refer to control. She concludes that this variety has led to a broad heterogeneity among the constructs. As a consequence, there is a theoretical confusion about the concept of control. Furthermore, the variety complicates a rigorous accumulation of research findings. Most research outcomes have in common that "a sense of control is a robust predictor of physical and mental well-being" (Skinner, 1996, p. 549). This finding is in line with Higgins (1997), who argues that people tend to evaluate high control as positive. Although the heterogeneity among the constructs complicates a clear positioning of Argyris' unilateral control, below this construct is related to some dominant others.

In order to organize the heterogeneous constructs related to control, Skinner (1996) distinguishes objective control, subjective control and experiences of control. Objective control refers to control conditions in the context and the individual. Subjective control refers to individuals' beliefs about how much control is available. Dominant constructs related to subjective control are perceived behavioural control and self-efficacy. Both constructs refer to people's perceived ability to perform certain behaviour, not to their ability to control the outcomes (Ajzen, 2002; Bandura, 1991). The experience of control is defined as "a person's feelings as he or she is interacting with the environment while attempting to produce a desired or prevent an undesired outcome" (Skinner, 1996, p. 551). Argyris' theory on people's inclination to be in control does not involve the question of how much control is available (objectively or subjectively). However, his theory does correspond to the notion of

experience of control. Argyris developed a goal-oriented theory: people try to realize their goals through (control-oriented) actions like trying to win, suppressing negative feelings, judging others and behaving rationally.

Argyris' claim regarding people's inclination to control is in line with Heckhausen & Schulz (1995, 1999), who describe the desire of individuals to control their environment. They distinguish primary control and secondary control. While primary control refers to the inclination of individuals to control their environment in order to fit their needs and desires, secondary control targets internal processes and serves to minimize losses and maintain and expand levels of primary control. In his prospect theory Kahneman describes the concept of loss aversion, which refers to people's tendency to prefer avoiding losses to acquiring gains (Kahneman, 2003). In situations where people have to decide between alternatives that involve risk, they tend to select the alternative that minimizes loss. In the light of this theory, the risk of losing control seems to be less attractive for managers than the potential gain. Through his research upon individuals' behaviour regarding financial decisions, Kahneman has connected psychology with economy (Tversky & Kahneman, 1991).

Argyris' unilateral control can also be related to the construct 'locus of control' (e.g. Karasec et al., 1981; Ajzen, 2002; Ng et al., 2006; Armitage & Conner, 1999; Skinner, 1996, Judge & Bono, 2001). This construct contrasts internal or agent-related causes with external or non-agent-related causes (Skinner, 1996). An individual is considered to be in control if causes (e.g. behaviours, efforts, abilities of personality) of certain outcomes are related to the person. Control, in this perspective, refers to "the range of decision-making freedom" (Karasec et al., 1981, p. 695). This relates to the paradox as described by Argyris (1990): if one person unilaterally controls another person, the former reduces the decision-making freedom of the other person. According to Argyris, the latter will consequently be submissive, passive and dependent. Or, in other words, they will experience an external locus of control. Researchers illustrated a relationship between locus of control and job satisfaction and job performance (Judge & Bono, 2001), learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975), physical health (Henry, 2005) and psychological health (Stipek, 1988). These findings justify the conclusion that restricting the control of someone else can lead to negative consequences in the longer run.

This conclusion corresponds with Argyris' argument that people's tendency to unilaterally control situations can lead to consequences like misunderstandings and escalating error. If related to the notion of experience of control, this way people produce a desired outcome in the short run (e.g. painful issues are being kept undiscussable or employees are being made to obey), however, they contribute to ineffectiveness and loss of control in the longer run. Or, in other words, their locus of control moves from internal to external. As for people's response in case of loss of control, there are some researchers who describe similar conclusions as Argyris. Skinner argues that in case of threat or loss of control, the experienced distress stimulates people to reassert control or escape from the situation (p. 557). One way of escaping from the situation is to minimize the perception of loss of control by

diverting attention away from the situation (Miller et al., 1989). Another way is to blame others. As such, blaming is related to the concept of control (Brickman et al., 1982; Skinner, 1996). In this light, escaping can be considered as a way to reassert control as well and is comparable with Argyris' construct of defensiveness (1990, 2000, 2004).

Unlike the researchers who are mentioned, Argyris elaborates on the anti-learning effects of defensiveness. In order to find out how effective their actions are, individuals need to inquire into the effects of these actions. Argyris (1990, 2000, 2004) argues that people find it hard to inquire into these effects and learn, particularly if this could lead to painful or embarrassing situations. In this way, they keep control in the short run, but lose control in the longer run (see section 2.5). In spite of the similarities, there is also an important difference between Argyris' unilateral control and the locus of control construct. The latter implies that people with a high internal control have a broad range of decision-making freedom. Argyris' unilateral control construct describes a highly automatic program; it is precisely the lack of free choice that is considered to be problematic (Argyris, 1990; Drukker, 1999). For this reason Argyris introduces a mutual learning model that involves free and informed choice (see section 3.2).

Altogether, research in psychology confirms people's tendency to control their environment and people's positive evaluation of being in control. In addition, the locus of control construct supports Argyris' insights regarding the potentially negative consequences of unilateral control in the longer run. Additionally, there is scientific evidence that in case of threat or loss of control, people try to reassert control as a consequence of experienced distress. Unlike the researchers who are mentioned, Argyris elaborates on the anti-learning effects of defensiveness.

## **2.3 Expressions of unilateral control**

The main value of a unilateral control model seems to be obvious: keeping things under control. A deeper study demonstrates that the expressions go much further than only keeping the reins short and forcing obedience. Unilateral control by managers becomes manifest in their

1. perception of (organization) problems
2. behaviours in interaction with people in the environment
3. interventions in change processes
4. design of organization
5. change of organization

In all these areas managers may block change, contrary to their spoken desires. By and large, the way changing is blocked is by subtle and sophisticated patterns that are mostly recognized only with a delay (if they are recognized at all), as these



patterns seem logical and obvious. The expressions as mentioned are described in the next paragraphs.

## **2.4 Perception of (organization) problems (expression 1)**

Organizational change normally starts with diagnosing 'what is going on'. Thus, the way one perceives the current reality is relevant. Typical of unilateral control is to isolate problems in such a way that we can think of a solution. That is how we keep things under control.

An example illustrates how this can 'paralyse' individuals and keep them from creating a real solution.

### **Box 2 How to teach employees the new culture?**

Top management of a Dutch service organization has implemented a new organizational design. The management team members concluded, however, that things were not going well: employees did not behave in line with a performance culture. Structure was implemented, but the culture had not been changed, they agreed. The next step was an assessment of the culture. Management consultants were invited to conduct interviews with staff members in order to draw a picture of the current culture. One week later the consultants had finished their report. Main conclusion: in most staff members' perception top management was not clear about their business goals and expectations. Besides, they failed to provide proper coaching. The consultants did not feel comfortable with these outcomes, however 'their professional standard' required them to be open. In a meeting the management team members and consultants agreed that the outcomes confirmed what top management already had thought: 'employees were not able and/or willing to reflect on their own role; they only pointed at top management'. What was needed to change this culture? During the same meeting they agreed on an approach of workshops aiming at teaching employees the desired behaviour.

Interestingly, the managers (and their consultants) put the problem outside themselves: they distance themselves and observe, analyse and solve. According to Campbell et al. (1994), we tend to see the world as if we stand outside this world. This way, we stay at a (safe) distance and we don't have to be afraid we lose control. Campbell et al. (1994) put it this way: "Typically, each of us sees the organization around us from our own perspective, as though it exists 'out there', separate from our own influence upon it. So, for example, it is easier to see a communication problem in terms of other people not responding to memos or speaking openly at meetings, but it is difficult to see what we ourselves do that contributes to that process" (p. 20).

As a consequence, rather than being actors who react to each other and who are engaged in mutual influence, we tend to isolate problems that should be solved. Ask someone in an organization what the problem is, and the answer will refer to others, environment or abstractions. Individuals seldom seek 'the problem' in the interactions they are personally involved in. Argyris calls this phenomenon 'distancing'. Or in other words, one tends to make a picture of the situation that does not include oneself (De Man, 2003). Senge (1990) uses different words for the same pattern: "We tend to blame outside circumstances for our problems [...]; (however) you and the cause of your problems are part of a single system" (p. 67).

These findings correspond to the psychological concept of self-serving bias, as introduced by Miller & Ross (1975) and elaborated by other authors (e.g. Babcock & Loewenstein, 1997; Campbell & Sedikides, 1999). This concept refers to people's tendency to attribute their success to internal or personal characteristics, while they attribute their failures to contextual factors beyond their control, such as other persons and circumstances. Wagner & Gooding (1997) specifically describe managers' inclination to show a self-serving bias. Illustrative quotes are:

*'They are not committed',  
'They tend to speak in 'we-they' terms' and  
'They are not pro-active'.*

This way of thinking keeps leaders from reflecting on their own influence on the observed behaviour of others. If one is not aware of one's own behaviour, one will not be aware of the effects one produces oneself. According to Argyris (1990), our inclination to neglect our own role leads to unintended effects. These unintended effects are also described by authors on systems thinking. McCaughan et al. (1994): "We look no further than the presenting problem, and so propose quick-fix, symptomatic solutions that leave unaddressed the larger dysfunctional processes that are giving rise to the problem we are worried about" (p. 22). And: "We attribute all the difficulties to a blameworthy individual (or group), whose behaviour has to be changed" (p. 23).

Managers in the example in box 2 respond relatively instrumentally to the signal. They reduce the 'culture problem' to an isolated problem (employees' attitude) and find a concrete solution (workshops that aim at teaching the desired attitude). The process of reducing complex problems to simple and manageable categories of incidents and small problems is referred to as 'reductionism' (Van Dongen et al., 1996, p. 65). This phenomenon is directly linked to 'distancing'.

These observations are in line with the so-called 'Subject-Object' construction of relations. A Subject-Object (or S-O) relation is between an active agent (subject) and an acted upon (passive) object. Often, Subject and Object are perceived as being sharply separated entities. In this view, organizational leaders are assumed to be the ones who inquire, develop knowledge and design and implement necessary changes based on this knowledge (Hosking, 2004; Homan, 2005). If the leader (Subject) considers his actions to be effective, the ultimate effectiveness is perceived as dependent on the loyalty and competence of the employees (Objects). Common quotes in this light are 'how can we make them follow us?', 'how do we get them in the right mode?', and 'how can we commit them to our strategy?' A Subject-Object perception of reality can be considered as quite dominant in management thinking. Kotter (2002), for example, recommends an eight-step plan to successfully realize change, e.g. increase urgency, create a vision and communicate for buy-in. This structure, that is quite common in management literature, is based on the assumption that the top develops a vision that subsequently has to be imposed upon employees and thus is in line with a Subject-Object construction of relations. This line of reasoning is also confirmed by the well-known formula on change management  $E = Q \times A$ , the effect of the change process is the product of the quality of the change plan and the acceptance by employees.

The effectiveness of a Subject-Object perspective cannot be separated from the specific character of an era. During times when it was normal and usual that employees did what their boss instructed them (nothing more or less), Subject-Object thinking was highly functional: espoused theory and theory-in-use were consistent. However, problems occur when managers tend to speak about stimulation of (internal) entrepreneurship, personal responsibility, pro-activity, empowerment and ownership. As long as managers' perception and action are still governed by Subject-Object thinking, espoused theory and theory-in-use will be inconsistent: managers say that they desire ownership and entrepreneurship, but their actions stimulate dependency and reactivity. Even if managers see this inconsistency, it is not easy to behave consistently. Typical expressions of this struggle are double bind assignments like *'I don't want you to do it for me, but I want you to do it for yourself'*.

People tend to see separate parties (see Hosking, 2004), rather than mutually interlinked processes. As long as top management and staff see the cause of the problems outside their own influence, the recommended solutions will always focus on only a part of the system. In the best case, these solutions will be implemented reactively, because one party 'obeys' the other party. This behaviour is in line with a unilateral control model.

Empirical evidence can be derived from Mastenbroek et al. (2004), who conducted the Dutch national study on stimulating and blocking factors in change processes. The outcomes are based upon 1970 respondents to a questionnaire on the Internet. Two factors appear to be most obvious:

1. Top management have no clear and challenging perspective on what should be improved. They lack a vision on innovation and do not communicate transparently.

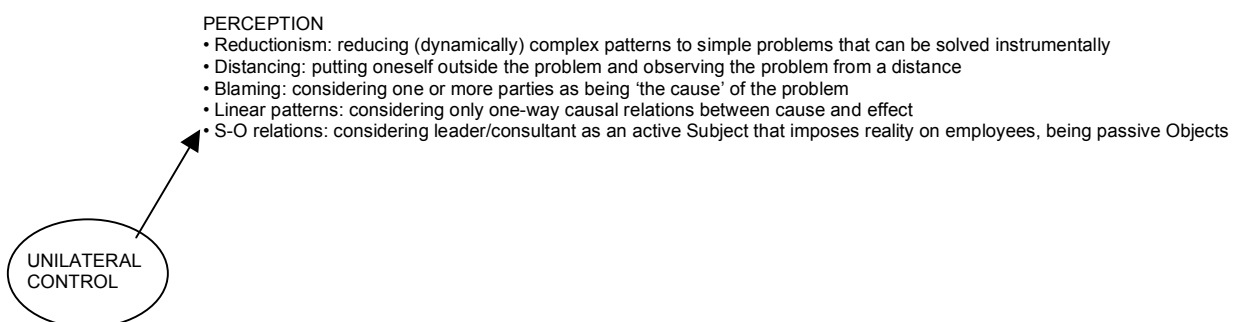
2. The vast majority of staff members show resistance to change.

Further examination of the research outcomes leads to the observation that the first factor is mainly brought in by employees and middle managers, and the second one by top management. In their recommendations, the researchers focus on improvements that can be linked directly to creating a clear vision and commitment. It would be rewarding to find out the extent to which these are symptoms of an underlying pattern that reflects blaming, distancing and a reactive attitude.

These insights seem to justify a number of conclusions regarding how leaders tend to perceive organization problems and select solutions.

- Individuals tend to underestimate their own influence on (social, process) problems they face.
- Individuals tend to isolate problems outside themselves rather than seeing a (circular) pattern that produces the problems.
- Individuals tend to be reactive in the sense that solutions are expected to start outside themselves. This does not mean that they are not willing to take initiative to support a solution.
- Individuals tend to see 'the other party' and themselves as separated parties, who act autonomously, rather than seeing a bigger pattern/system that they produce together. They tend to 'cure' only a part of the system instead of the underlying patterns and interactions that produce the recurrent problems.

Figure 2.3 summarizes the way unilateral control influences our perception of organization problems.



*Figure 2.3 Expressions of unilateral control: perception*

## 2.5 Behaviours in interaction with people in the environment (expression 2)

### Box 3 How managers stifle employees' entrepreneurship

A knowledge-based company is confronted with problems with their market position. Management decide that more entrepreneurship is needed. However, they feel discouraged by employees who do not take any initiatives. Some quotes of MT members: 'I tend to have sleeping problems when my employees do not finish their assignment in time.' 'In case of problems I am the one who is responsible for making decisions', 'Clear instructions are the fastest way to keep things going'. Another person: 'I think it is important to stimulate a sense of responsibility.' *'What do you do to realize this?'* 'I divide clear tasks so that people know what they have to do. After that, I always ask them if they understand what they have to do.' *'And what is – in general – their answer?'* 'Yes, they do.' Another manager finds it important to ask his employees for input. *'Can you describe a case in which you asked your employees?'* 'Well, mostly there is not enough time for that.'

In the end, the conversation leads to the insight that managers keep a pattern alive that stifles the sense of responsibility and entrepreneurship. This pattern is illustrated in figure 2.4. Although most managers are aware of the need to stimulate a sense of responsibility, their behaviour plays a pivotal role in realizing opposite effects.

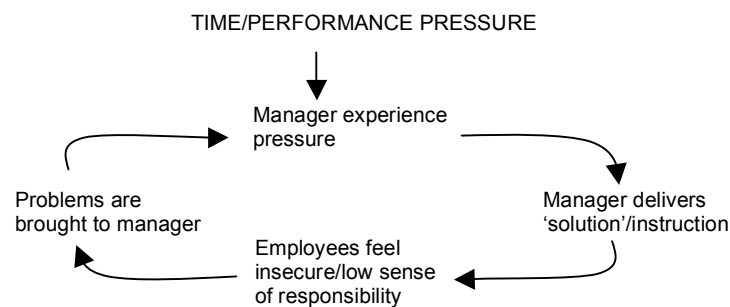
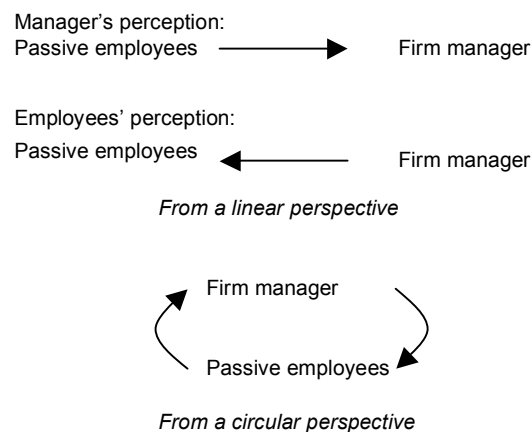


Figure 2.4 Manager stifles employees' entrepreneurship in a vicious circle

The example in box 3 illustrates the insight that management actions and strategies are governed by principles that strive for unilateral control, especially if managers experience pressure, threat or embarrassment. Managers tend to be unaware of these principles, the actions and strategies that are produced as a consequence, and the unintended effects of these actions. Argyris (1990) describes unintended effects like self-fulfilling prophecies and escalating errors. But if the same problems recur, there must be repetitive behaviours and patterns that contribute to the preservation of the current reality. And there must be limited learning. How can this be explained?

### *Repetitive behaviours and patterns*

Unilateral control tends to stimulate linear thinking, which preconceives a one-way causality between two actions (considering circumstances and others to be the cause of one's own actions). An example is the manager who says 'they are quite passive, so I must be firm now!' In his perception of the situation his own firmness is an obvious consequence of the passiveness of staff members. However, employees judge the same situation from another perspective and consider their passiveness to be a logical consequence of their boss' firmness. From a distance, both parties seem to be right. However, nothing will change as long as both 'parties' consider the situation as linear. De-blocking the recurrent pattern requires the parties to recognize the circular pattern. The difference is visible in figure 2.5.



*Figure 2.5 Linear and circular perspectives*

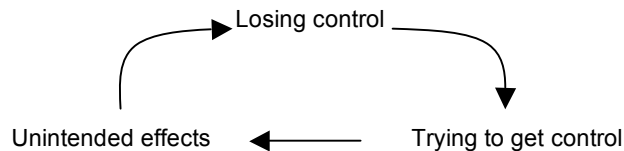
Circular patterns lead to self-fulfilling prophecies and recurrent problems. His belief that staff is passive makes the manager firmer and as a consequence staff becomes passive. That, in turn, confirms the manager's belief.

Senge (1990), McCaughan and Palmer (1994), and Campbell et al. (1994) refer to this circular perspective by calling it a 'system' (Senge, 1990, McCaughan and Palmer, 1994, Campbell et al., 1994). According to Senge, "the essence of the discipline of systems thinking lies in a shift of mind:

Seeing interrelationships rather than linear cause-effect chains, and seeing processes of change rather than snapshots" (p. 73).

Unilateral control is only effective in situations that are 'controllable'. As soon as a manager has to deal with other people, especially if they have deviant ideas, interests or beliefs, a unilateral control model seems to be no longer effective and will probably have unintended effects. And as long as managers distance themselves and blame, they do not involve their contribution to the recurrent problems, which reinforces the recurrent character. This leads to ongoing circular processes: the manager tries to tighten control, this leads to unintended effects (escalating error,

self-fulfilling prophecies), the manager perceives a loss of control and tries even harder to get control, etcetera (see figure 2.6).



*Figure 2.6 Enlarging control leads to losing control*

How is one to know whether a problem should be approached from a linear or a circular perspective? One major sign that shows one is facing a system (circular perspective), is if “doing the obvious thing does not produce the obvious, desired outcome” (Senge, 1990, p. 71). For example, the manager who decides to be firm because staff members are passive might discover that they will be even more passive after his firm intervention. His next step, from a linear perspective of the situation, is wondering how to break through their passiveness. By ‘distancing’ he neglects his own role and tends to be reactive, as ‘their passiveness’ is the problem and should be solved. This situation can be explained by the way leaders tend to perceive organization problems (section 2.4). Or, as Senge puts it, “true pro-activeness comes from seeing how we contribute to our own problems” (p. 17).

McCaughan and Palmer (1994) define a system as follows: “A system is a pattern of interaction, between persons or groups, which can be represented by one or more feedback loops – that is, by closed loops or sequences of interaction that link and integrate all the components of the system” (p. 12).

Their definition of systems thinking: “Systems thinking is a way of describing and explaining the patterns of behaviour that we encounter in the life of organizations: the regularities of individual behaviour, which we describe as a role, the characteristic ways of doing things in organizations which we refer to as their culture, the repeating patterns of sterile conflict or mistakes or absenteeism or failure to delegate, which we define as problems and try to solve” (p. 12).

Recently, Moeskops (2004) and Werkman (2006) contributed to the literature on systemic thinking. Both authors have identified characteristic circular patterns. Moeskops distinguishes three typical patterns.

- **Decisiveness:** leader is decisive, goal-oriented, well structured and transparent. In a negative cycle this style leads to a distance between leader and employees that, in turn, leads to lack of commitment and passiveness. The leader, in turn, enlarges distance.
- **Support:** leader mobilizes positive support inside and outside the organization. In a negative cycle negative forces are neglected. As a consequence, they go underground and resistance grows. The leader, who wants to score, neglects resistance and influence of negative forces.

- Interactive: leader involves employees actively and offers much space to bring in ideas. In a negative cycle the leader is not able to manage all these ideas and slows down. As a consequence, employees call for decisiveness. The leader, in turn, overcompensates with too much control.

It is interesting to see that although these patterns start differently, somewhere in the pattern the leader activates a unilateral control model, which leads to negative circularity. Even if one starts by creating participation, managers end up enlarging their control (e.g. because they experience different views as threatening).

Apparently, regardless of the primary intention, perceived threat activates a unilateral control model. The same conclusion is applicable to the circular patterns that have been identified by Werkman (2005). She describes 10 patterns.

1. Persevere: top-down direction from a negative perspective of employees' ability and willingness that, in turn, works out as a self-fulfilling prophecy.
2. Create interdependence: reactivity leads to more direction leads to reactivity.
3. Avoid criticism: leaders avoid interaction because they are afraid of employees' criticism. This, in turn, stimulates employees' criticism.
4. Fight uncertainty by informing and persuading: informing and persuading, which should lead to a reduction of uncertainty, create that very uncertainty.
5. Frustrate problem solving by centralisation: solutions are checked by top management; as a consequence employees feel less responsible to solve problems themselves and even more problems are forwarded to top management.
6. Create pressure by defending and isolating changes: isolated project groups work out change plans in order to communicate well-designed plans. Employees do not feel committed and project teams respond by committing top management who respond with persuasion. This, in turn leads to even less commitment.
7. Formalize: direction by new job descriptions, structures and procedures makes things unclear to employees; problems regarding cooperation and quality lead to even more direction by descriptions, structures and procedures.
8. Balance between directing and letting go: an interactive approach leads to employees who are in doubt; their lack of involvement leads to a directive approach that confirms their scepticism.
9. Realize self direction by direction: management stifles their own desire to organize self-direction by discussing employees' abilities time after time. Subsequently, they show a top-down approach. Employees, in turn, lose confidence in management and confirm assumptions about their abilities.
10. Avoid interaction: management ask feedback. However, they feel intimidated by feedback and increase direction. Employees, in turn, become reactive.

Again, regardless of whether leaders start with a directive or open approach, as soon as they experience threat, embarrassment, or loss of control they activate a unilateral control model and, as a consequence, a negative circular pattern.



### *Limited learning*

Recurrent problems, despite positive intentions, can be explained by circular patterns. How can one explain that managers (and employees) carry on contributing to the problems they face and, thus, maintain the current reality? The next example is illustrative.

#### **Box 4 Participative words, directive actions**

The Board has called a meeting in order to create clarity about a change initiative. At the opening of the meeting, they say: 'We know that in the past changes have been implemented top-down. This time we want you to participate.' Apparently, they know the risks of top-down implementation (espoused theory). However, the more they are confronted with deviant opinions and signals of resistance, the more they act top-down (governed by their theory-in-use). One of the employees asks some questions (with a disapproving tone of voice). The CEO blocks this interruption and gives the word to another party (Head of the HR department). While the latter presents his point of view, some employees send strong nonverbal signals that reflect dissatisfaction. When one of the employees tries to express his feelings, the CEO stops this intervention: 'The Board is in charge, now.' One of the attendees gives feedback to the board members: 'You say that you do not want to do the implementation top-down, however, your behaviour is not consistent with these words.' The CEO, who probably feels this reaction as threatening, rejects these words: 'You are wrong, we do want you to participate in the implementation. But we cannot accept this behaviour.' In an evaluation the members of the Board are asked how they have experienced the situation. 'They show a lot of resistance', is their answer, 'it is very hard to come any further.' Subsequently, board members are asked to review their own approach. 'We knew this was not going to be effective in the end, but still we did not try another strategy.' *'Why did you stick to your strategy, knowing it was not going to be effective?'* 'We did not want a mess by losing control.' *'And what was the consequence of your strategy?'* 'A huge mess...'.

Some observations can be derived from this case.

- Board members (and other participants) were fully aware of the disadvantages of implementing changes top-down. Although the board members did not want to implement top-down, they acted top-down.
- Board members and other participants create a circular process that makes themselves and the other parties ineffective.
- Regardless of their insight that the strategy is not going to be effective, they continue the strategy.
- Direct feedback on the board's strategy from one of the attendees does not help to change it. On the contrary, the feedback is rejected with the same unilateral control model.

This case illustrates the assumption that a consistent application of a unilateral control model can easily lead to a reduction of control and – from a system perspective – can start a continuous process of losing control, escalating error and conflicts. Compare Kamsteeg & Koot (2002), who state that the desire to control often leads to no control (p. 138).

These observations are in line with findings described by Drukker (1999). He is interested in the puzzle that if we see we produce unintended effects with our behaviour, we tend to activate the same actions. The problem is that we are not aware of the program that produces our actions and we are not aware of the fact that we are not aware. As a consequence, it is not us who control the program, but the program that controls us.

But if managers contribute to recurrent problems and escalating error, then why don't they change their behaviour? Why don't they seem to learn? According to Argyris (1990, 1999, 2004) unilateral control leads to defensiveness: "[...] whenever human beings are faced with any issue that contains significant embarrassment or threat, they act in ways that bypass, as best they can, the embarrassment or threat. In order for the bypass to work, it must be covered up." (1990, p. 25). After all, it wouldn't work if one said: 'This is a sensitive subject it's better we leave unaddressed, as it could be painful for you (or me)', or 'You ask my opinion; I could tell you the truth, but I'd better reassure you'.

As most individuals use these defensive actions, they become common and part of normal life within organizations. As a consequence, one develops so-called defensive routines. Argyris (1990): "Organizational defensive routines are actions or policies that prevent individuals or segments of the organizations from experiencing embarrassment or threat. Simultaneously, they prevent people from identifying and getting rid of the causes of the potential embarrassment or threat. Organizational defensive routines are antilearning, overprotective, and self-sealing" (p. 25).

Or, in other words, defensive routines are a consequence of unilateral control governing values and can be seen as actions, behaviour or policies that aim at bypassing situations that one cannot control, which undermines one's position (and keeps one from winning) and which could lead to negative feelings about oneself and/or others. In order to be effective, these bypasses, in turn, are covered up.

Some examples:

<i>If</i>	<i>then</i>
You have made a mistake	cover up your mistake and if needed, blame circumstances or someone else.
You see someone covering his mistake up	leave this unaddressed.
Your boss expects you to commit to his new change project	say that you do and hope that nothing will change really.

You see some employees only act as if they are committed	leave this unaddressed and say that you succeeded to get your employees' commitment.
Your employees don't bring their tasks regarding the change process into practice	don't ask if they are really committed (the answer would probably be 'yes' – whether true or not), but suggest putting a plate on the wall with the text 'an appointment is an appointment'.
Your boss suggests putting a plate on the wall with the text 'an appointment is an appointment'	confirm this is a good idea that will help you to remember.

Generally, we tend to be skilful in these actions. We think they help us to keep things under control. Argyris calls this 'skilled incompetence'. As they tend to be so common, these actions often come across as rational, obvious and logical. If we are part of the 'system', we often do not see how these actions contribute to recurrent problems. While our espoused theories tell us to be open and transparent and to reflect on our contribution to problems, our theories-in-use instruct us to keep things under control and avoid threat and embarrassment. This way, despite our spoken and written policies, we can contribute to recurrent problems without learning and open dialogue. Johnson (1987) calls this inclination to defend our way of thinking and acting in case of threat a political defence reaction.

What if one *does* see the defensive patterns and how oneself and others contribute to them? Then one has a difficult choice: not making them debatable leaves them to deteriorate the situation and makes one co-responsible, as one cannot say one did not know. Making them debatable is not without risk: it is not without reason that human beings contribute to these patterns and one will probably find out how tough these are. If one decides not to confront, one has to live with that situation. Argyris (1990) describes two possible coping strategies: either take some distance, accept that many persons are responsible and go on with your life, or (if you are too committed to take some distance), try to redefine the situation such that it is acceptable again. Here, there is a relation with Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory. Contributing to problems by covering up sensitive issues is not consistent with a self-picture that is characterized by being open and candid. This leads to cognitive dissonance, which is an unpleasant experience. In order to release the inconvenience, one strategy is to redefine the situation, e.g. by saying that confronting the situation will probably make things worse, someone else is actually more responsible, or changing circumstances will probably solve the problem. In Argyris' terms, these 'solutions' are only other and even more sophisticated forms of bypassing and covering up. He calls this fancy footwork (1990, p. 46), which helps individuals to deny inconsistencies and place responsibility on circumstances and other people. In effect, this keeps them from learning and reflection and supports maintaining the current situation.

Successful changing will be hard under these conditions; lack of (mutual) learning keeps the recurrent patterns alive and contributes to escalating error, self-fulfilling prophecies, frustration and cynicism. In the end, and unlike one's spoken desires, this way one effectively preserves the current reality.

A dominant unilateral control model seems to have a major impact on the way leaders tend to behave in interaction with other people. Some observations seem to be justified.

- Individuals tend to get control over (change) situations; if they are confronted with unintended effects they tend to repeat and reinforce their unilateral control strategy.
- Individuals (leaders and employees) tend to enforce (ineffective) circular processes, which cannot easily be stopped because of their perception of one-way causality between two actions.
- As individuals often seem not to be aware of their unilateral control model and this model is so strong, even direct feedback on the effects is often responded to by behaviour that is being produced by the same model.
- Even if leaders stress the importance of bottom-up involvement and empowerment (espoused theory), they tend to behave in a top-down way as soon as they are confronted with unexpected and threatening behaviour (theory-in-use).
- In case of threat or stress (e.g. feedback on 'control behaviour') one tends to tighten the strings.
- Learning is limited as a consequence of defensive routines that aim at reduction of embarrassment and threat.

Figure 2.7 summarizes the expressions of a unilateral control model regarding perception and behaviour.

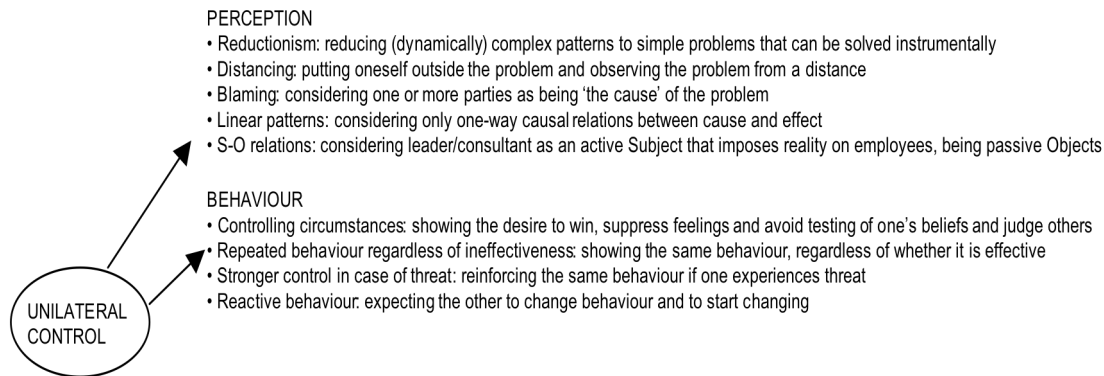


Figure 2.7 Expressions of unilateral control: perception and behaviour

#### Reflection on systems perspective

Further research on the definition of system thinking uncovers different approaches. Senge focuses on the system that keeps patterns alive. Nothing is only a cause or only an effect. In systems thinking everything is both cause *and* effect. "Nothing is ever influenced in one direction" (p. 75). Therefore, "see interrelationships rather than linear cause-effect chains and see change processes rather than snapshots" (p. 73). In his view individuals play a role in keeping a system alive by reacting to behaviour of others in the system. Senge: "In other words, the structure causes the behaviour" (p. 77). In the way he describes these systems and he draws pictures, he puts emphasis on 'something that exists as a structural pattern'. Basically, this approach is reflected in figure 2.8.

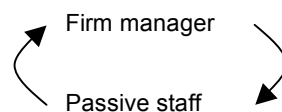
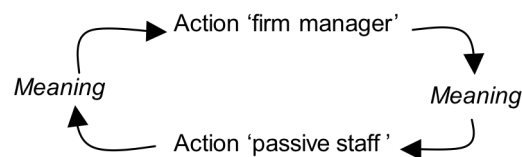


Figure 2.8 The system causes the behaviour

Senge acknowledges that problems are created by the way managers (and other actors) think: "This [seeing the systemic pattern – AA] can lead to solving a problem, but it will not change the thinking that produced the problem in the first place" (p. 95). Still, the way he describes systemic processes does not reflect a continuous process of meaning creation. In other words, he approaches systemic processes as relatively structural phenomena. As a consequence, his approach is vulnerable to reification, which means that an abstract phenomenon that can be approached from different

perspectives and is ever changing is defined as a concrete thing or object that does not change (see Van Dongen et al., 1996, p. 60-67). Or, in other words, reification refers to people's inclination to attribute characteristics of a concrete object or organism to abstract concepts. For example, Senge is vulnerable to reification when he writes: "to change the behaviour of the system, you must identify and change the limiting factor" (p. 101). In this example he suggests 'the system' can behave, as if it were a person. Again, this can be related to people's inclination to distance themselves from their environment. For example, 'the organization should create some conditions, before we can contribute to this change process', or 'we just don't have the right culture'. From this perspective, there is always the risk of an unreflective acceptance of a certain definition (see Van Dijk, 1989).

Senge pays little attention to what happens before an actor (the manager or staff members) takes an action. At this point he differs from the approach of system thinkers like McCaughan et al. (1994) and Campbell et al. (1994). The latter pay much attention to the role of meaning creation. An action does not have meaning in itself, but acquires meaning by the person who observes the action in a certain context. "The central assumption of systemic thinking is that human systems operate on the basis of the meaning that members ascribe to the activities around them" (p. 16). Figure 2.9 gains meaning this way.



*Figure 2.9 The interpretation causes the behaviour*

In this view, meaning leads to action leads to further meaning, etcetera. 'The system' cannot exist in this approach. Unlike Senge, whose 'pictures' suggest they are a reflection of 'reality', Campbell argues that 'reality' does not exist and is an ongoing process of negotiation and creation. McCaughan et al. (1994) refer to Senge with respect and a warning: "[...] he treats problems and solutions as though they were real, rather than being constructed by persons out of circumstances and their own desires" (p. 111). In this study reality is considered to be related to the actors and observers, who create this reality with their actions and interpretations. This does apply to the interventionist as well. For this reason, as will be discussed in section 6.4, the research design rests heavily upon action research that includes the role of the interventionist (and researcher).

## 2.6 Interventions in change processes (expression 3)

Senge (1990) argues that whenever a problem seems to be hard to solve despite numerous attempts and whenever the same patterns recur time after time, it seems to be likely that underlying balancing processes keep the organization from real change. Balancing processes are considered to be a source of stability and resistance. Corrective actions lead to the reduction of problems in the short run and lead to the reinforcement of problems in the longer run, just as the use of alcohol reduces stress in the short run, but keeps the person from paying attention to the fundamental problem and therefore leads to deterioration of the problem in the longer run. Visible problems, in this vision, are (only) symptoms of a more fundamental problem. Unless these fundamental problems are changed themselves, they will keep producing problems. However, from a unilateral control perspective it is neither easy nor attractive to work on these fundamental problems. Leaders seem to prefer selecting and implementing symptomatic solutions.

From a systemic view this process can be described as 'shifting the burden' (Senge, 1990), which might also have been called 'the symptomatic solution' (McCaughan et al., 1994). Figure 2.10 visualizes the 'shifting the burden' systemic pattern.

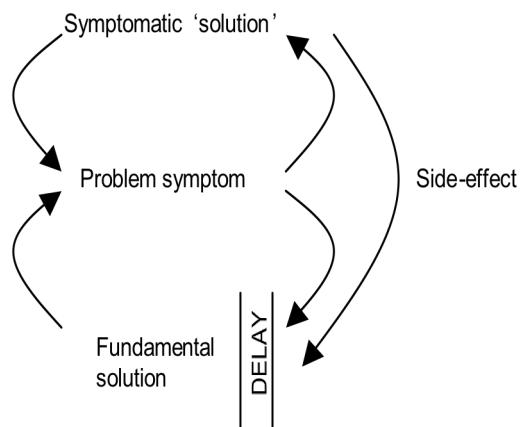


Figure 2.10 *Shifting the burden* (Senge, 1990, p. 380)

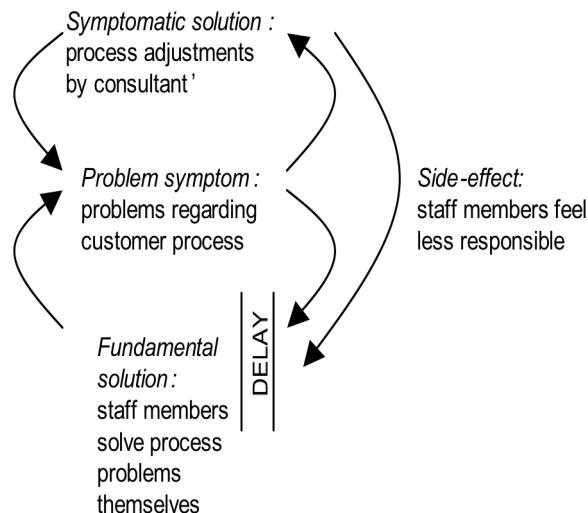
The 'shifting the burden' pattern should be read like the number 'eight': start in the centre and follow the arrow upwards, cross the centre again and follow the arrows downwards. "A short-term 'solution' is used to correct a problem, with seemingly positive immediate results. As this correction is used more and more, more fundamental long-term corrective measures are used less and less. Over time, the capabilities for the fundamental solution may atrophy or become disabled, leading to even greater reliance on the symptomatic solution" (p. 381). The fundamental

solution takes more time than the symptomatic solutions and is characterized by delay. In addition, there is a direct side effect: the symptomatic solution stifles a fundamental solution. The next example is illustrative.

#### **Box 5 Consultant is hired to speed things up**

Top management of a department in an international enterprise struggles with the customer orientation of their organization. The problem has already existed for years, despite several improvement projects. Major customers no longer accept the bad service and put pressure on the department: quick improvement is needed. An external consultant is hired in order to assess the processes and bring in recommendations. As commitment of staff members is considered to be important, they are actively involved in interviews and workshops. Improvements are implemented and customer reviews are more positive than they were ever before. However, after some months the scores tend to drop back to the old level. The quick fix is done. But the problem existed for a longer period. What produced the problem? Why didn't staff members solve these problems? (To what extent) do they feel responsible for implementing improvements? And if not, why not? What is the effect of this approach to their sense of responsibility? What would be the long-term revenues if staff members solved the problems themselves?

From a systemic approach, the situation in box 5 could be presented as in figure 2.11.



*Figure 2.11 Illustration of 'shifting the burden' system*

Process adjustments make the problems regarding customer processes less severe. The underlying problem seems to be that staff members do not solve process deficits themselves. Because symptoms are less severe after the consultant's interventions, there is less urgency to deal with this 'real problem'. As a consequence, after a while, this underlying problem produces the same symptoms regarding customer orientation and probably other subjects. This example illustrates a situation in which



one 'shifts the burden' to a solution that reduces the problems in the short run, but deteriorates the symptoms in the long run because the 'underlying problem' is covered up by management. Moreover, in this example the consultants facilitate this cover-up.

Why did top management choose this strategy? This question was asked during a meeting with the general director. 'I was fed up with them. We have tried to involve them several times without any success. We cannot make customers wait any longer.' *'What exactly did you try before?'* 'We organized several meetings and asked for input. Subsequently, we collected their ideas in an overview and reported these back to them. I stressed the importance of a personal sense of ownership. However, this only led to marginal improvements. They had their chance, but now I am going to speed things up.'

This example leads to a number of observations.

- The sense of responsibility of staff members is difficult to deal with from a unilateral control perspective. Top management do not make things debatable. On the contrary, they stress the importance of a sense of ownership and try to force staff members to take their responsibility.
- Top management do not involve their role in the problem and use a linear perspective. From a circular perspective they probably keep the problem alive by their own approach: the more persuasion, the less sense of personal responsibility.
- Because workshops were not successful, top management decided to speed things up by inviting an external expert in order to implement an instrumental solution. As a direct consequence of the intervention, the fundamental problem deteriorated, as staff members even felt less responsible after the consultant 'took responsibility' for their problems.
- Top management seem to be stimulated in their behaviour by the pressure they experience; customers are not satisfied. Short-term solutions seem to be the best option management can choose in order to avoid customers going to another supplier.

The last observations introduce the factor of 'time'. Working on the fundamental problem generally implicates a delay. In this example, development of a sense of responsibility leading to solutions by staff members will probably take more time than the process adjustments by the consultant. Besides, the fundamental solution is less controllable. This is not attractive from a unilateral control perspective. Especially if there is pressure (e.g. by clients, shareholders or higher management) it is much more attractive to choose a quick (symptomatic) solution. Generally, a manager will not serve his career with words like 'we are working on underlying fundamental processes in order to realize long-term improvement'. He is probably more successful with quotes like 'firm interventions', 'assessing performance with scorecards' and 'quick scans by consultants aiming at process improvements within a month'.

Management behaviour in this case could also be explained by defensive routines. In the example as presented, inquiring what keeps staff members from solving the problems could lead to awkward situations in terms of loss of control and negative feelings towards management. In order to keep control and prevent these feelings, one covers up (or bypasses) the fundamental problem by implementing process adjustments. This short-term strategy can be seen as a defensive routine of which management is probably not unaware. Figure 2.12 summarizes these insights.

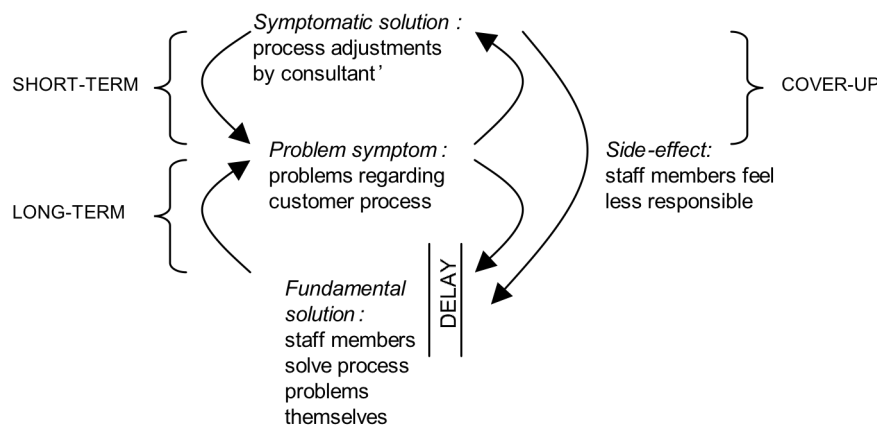


Figure 2.12 Symptomatic solution as cover-up of fundamental problem

The upper and lower cycle of Senge's 'shifting the burden' structure correspond with the distinction between single-loop learning and double-loop learning (Argyris and Schön, 1974; Argyris, 1990). Argyris (1990): "Single-loop learning solves the presenting problems. It does not solve the more basic problem of *why* these problems existed in the first place" (p. 92). If a mismatch or error arises, single-loop learning leads to a corrective action (the upper cycle in Senge's 'shifting the burden'). Recall the example in box 6: the process adjustments by the consultant are not suitable to correct the underlying problem that staff members don't take initiative to solve the problems. Working on this fundamental solution requires a change in the thinking or governing values behind the actions. In other words, this means one has to learn a new theory-in-use. This is double-loop learning.

Figure 2.13 depicts single-loop learning and double-loop learning. These concepts of single-and double-loop learning make clear that a unilateral control model does not help to work on fundamental solutions, as this requires a different theory-in-use.

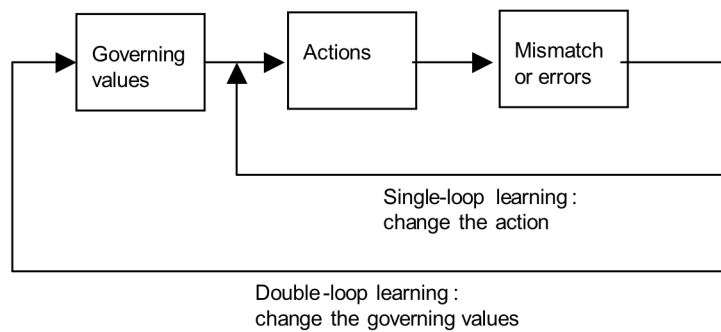


Figure 2.13 Single-loop learning and double-loop learning (Argyris, 1990)

Figure 2.14 incorporates the concepts of single-loop and double loop learning in Senge's 'shifting the burden' structure.

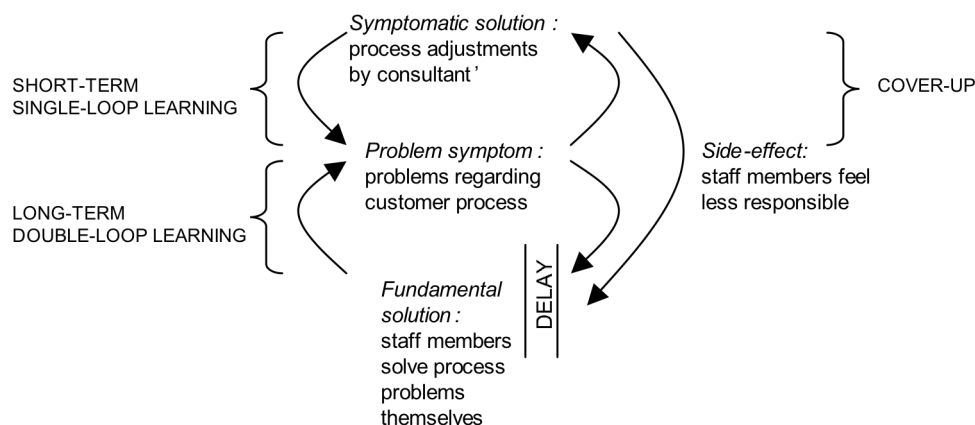


Figure 2.14 'Shifting the burden' incorporates single-loop learning and double-loop learning

As a consequence of defensive routines, one tends to detect and isolate problems that are controllable and 'solve' these problems by implementing impersonal instruments, changes in structures and systems. Management concepts like the Balanced Scorecard (Kaplan, 1996), Human Resource Scorecard (Walker & MacDonald, 2001), Value Based Management (Haspeslagh et al., 2001) and Business Process Reengineering (Hammer and Champy, 1993) are illustrative. The popularity of all kinds of scorecards and Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) shows the attractiveness of instruments. This, in itself, can contribute to organization effectiveness, as one needs management information. However, these instruments

can also be used to bypass more fundamental problems. Then, they become short-term symptomatic solutions (the 'upper cycle' in Senge's 'shifting the burden' model) that might create blindness to more complex patterns that influence performance in the longer run (the 'lower cycle'). This finding is in line with Weick (1996), who argues that people tend to stick to their tools, partly as these give an impression of control.

Nowadays, when business leaders experience a pressure on results, sources and time, a growing interest is visible in so-called 'quick scans'. A typical design of such a process consists of two elements. First, one conducts a quick assessment of the current situation and selects 'the problems', followed by recommended 'solutions' for these problems. Second, these solutions are implemented (top-down). Illustrative is the emphasis on 'quick' and 'scan'. This approach might be effective in the case of simple, routine and instrumental problems. However, underlying patterns that produce the problems will not be found this way. As a consequence, this method seems to be highly vulnerable to reductionism. An example of a dubious application is a quick scan of culture. Several models and instruments have been developed to assess organizational culture. For example, Quinn & Cameron (1999) present a clarifying classification of organizational culture. However, their suggested change approach has characteristics of a quick scan: participants are asked to evaluate items in the current situation and in the desired situation. Gaps between scores help to find areas of attention. Underlying problems that produce the symptoms will be difficult to find this way. The last phase in their approach is an implementation plan. The authors suggest to be prepared for resistance and recommend strategies for breaking through resistance. The survey and the recommended implementation plan fit in a unilateral control model: assess the situation, detect the problem, implement the solution; and if one does not want the solution, implement another solution for that (resistance) problem. Argyris (1990) questions the value of organization diagnoses through surveys: This diagnosis "bypasses the organizational defensive patterns and thereby drives them underground in the short run and reinforces them in the long run" (p. 84). Or, from a system perspective, the focus is on the upper circle of Senge's 'shifting the burden' pattern (quick fix, short-term, symptomatic) and draws the attention away from the lower circle (fundamental problem that produces the symptoms time after time). This could explain the implementation problems.

A dominant unilateral control model seems to have a major impact on leaders' intervention preferences. Some observations seem to be justified.

- Facing a problem, leaders tend to prefer quick and instrumental solutions to examining underlying problems that produce the symptoms. In the short run this leads to a reduction of problem symptoms. In the longer run this approach reinforces the underlying problem that produces the symptoms.
- From a unilateral control perspective, interventions regarding the underlying problem are less attractive, as these are less easy to plan and forecast, and there tends to be a delay between intervention and effect.

- As long as the underlying problem and one's own contribution to the dynamics are not being faced, this underlying problem keeps producing symptoms that stimulate leaders to implement quick symptomatic and instrumental solutions.

The main manifestations of a unilateral control model regarding perception, behaviour and preferred interventions are summarized in figure 2.15.

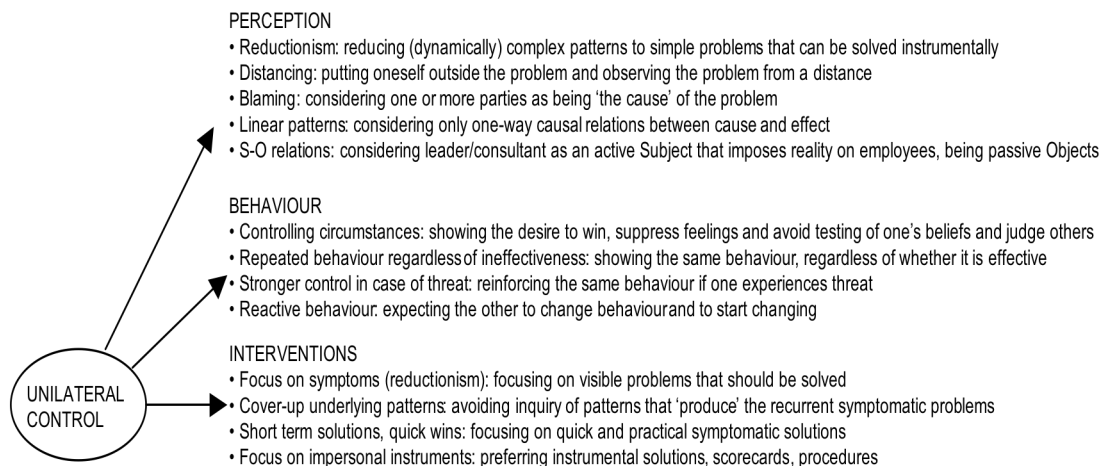


Figure 2.15 Expressions of unilateral control: perception, behaviour and interventions

## 2.7 Design of organization (expression 4)

One might expect that a unilateral control model stimulates leaders to organize in order to control their environment. This assumption is supported by Wierdsma (2004), who introduces the term 'positional organization': "traditional doctrine on organization and change places great reliance on rationality and external control by managers" (p. 228). The term 'positional organization' refers to the focus on ranking people in positions. In order to reduce variety as much as possible, organizations are designed as a hierarchical ranking of people based on the degree to which they have an overview of and insight into the organization. From this perspective "the viability of systems depends on

- Staff departments which generate sufficient knowledge of regularity to be able to achieve standardisation;
- Managers who are able to convert this regularity into concrete measures on the basis of their overview and insight;
- Employees who implement these measures in a loyal and disciplined way" (Wierdsma, 2004, p. 228).

According to Wierdsma, the underlying assumptions of the positional organization perspective are an "ends and means rationale, linear causality and the ability to

control behaviour externally” (p. 229). Swieringa and Jansen (2005) describe how the positional organization leads to the assumptions that change has to be initiated by the highest in rank and employees have to be motivated by the highest in rank, which leads to reactive employees and limits energy. These assumptions are in line with observations regarding the way leaders perceive organization problems (section 2.4).

The positional organization perspective is related to the ‘machine metaphor’ as described by Morgan (1986) and the machine bureaucracy as described by Mintzberg (1983). Typically, in this perspective the organization is perceived as a closed system, with sharp boundaries between the organization and its environment. Hosking (2004) puts it this way: “Much of Organization Theory has focused on organizations as the seemingly separate context for individual activities, groups, and inter-group relations [...], as entities that exist ‘in their own right’” (p. 260). This perspective is in line with the risk of reification (Van Dongen et al., 1996), which was referred to before, and typically fits in a unilateral control perspective. Just by putting boundaries between inside and outside and between layers and by creating regularity and stability ‘the’ organization seems to be manageable (controllable).

The sharp separation of things and people refers directly to the Subject-Object construction of relations. A dominant Subject-Object view has three implications (Hosking, 2004, p. 260):

First, it “constructs relationships as necessarily being between an active agent and an acted upon (passive) object”. For example, good leadership means that the leader knows what ‘the’ organization needs and is able to implement the necessary changes.

Second, it “explains actions, relationships, and outcomes through reference to the assumed characteristics of entities.”<sup>6</sup> For example, a good leader is expected to have a clear vision and effective organizations can be characterized as being flexible to adapt to changes in the environment.

Third, “the entity that is explicitly positioned [...] as the Subject is presumed to make social realities and relationships: the Subject is the one who acts to know and to influence ‘other’ as a knowable and formable Object.” For example, the leader knows the organization and its environment and is able to correct unbalance by proper changes. And he is the one who must design strategies to break through the resistance from the (unwilling) object.

The Subject-Object construction relates to a unilateral control perspective: the Subject is or must be able to act upon the Object (entities such as organization, employees, activities, culture and environment) in order to organize for stability. This way of perception is a source for blocking change processes in itself, as the Subject can only be effective if the Object is willing to be passive. At the same time passivity

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<sup>6</sup> The second implication is exactly the reason why this study does not focus on leadership traits, as if the leader were an isolated entity. Instead, this study tries to contribute to a better understanding of the leader in interaction with others.

is often perceived as unwillingness and resistance and as the very reason to use (top-down) strategies. The consequence is a circular pattern that frustrates change processes, as depicted in figure 2.16.

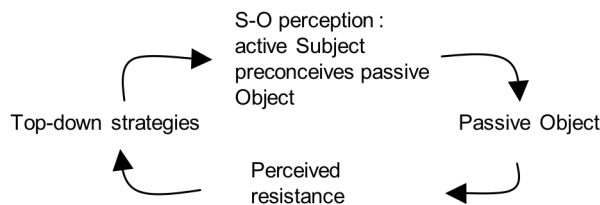
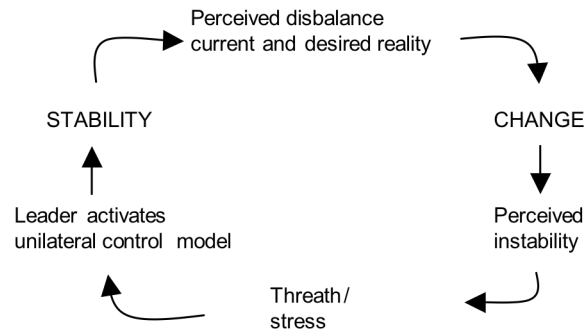


Figure 2.16 Subject-Object construction or relations leads to self-fulfilling prophecies

Focus on stability has direct consequences for the perceived relation between organization and change. An organization is considered to be a relatively stable entity, unless it is being changed for a period. In other words, organization and change are, in this perspective, two different and sharply separated entities. Organization focuses on stability, change focuses on the transformation from old stability to a new stability. As a consequence, from this perspective change is always episodic. Weick and Quinn (1999) use the term episodic change for changes that “tend to occur in distinct periods during which shifts are precipitated by external events such as technology change or internal events such as change in key personnel” (p. 363). This perception of organization depicts organizations as entities that converge and tighten during periods of relative stability, often at the expense of continued adaptation to changes in the environment. As soon as the tension between environment and organization is too high, this is the signal one should organize for a new episodic change period.

The sharp separation between organization and episodic change seems to contain a paradox that contributes to blocked change processes. Consider the next pattern. The manager perceives tension between environment and organization and starts an episodic change process (*‘we have to show innovation power’*). As an effect of the change process, the manager perceives instability (employees come up with new ideas and take initiatives independently). If the manager, stimulated by a unilateral control model, tends to organize for stability and regularity, he might perceive (a period of) change as a distortion of this stability that will, in turn, create threat. This experience stimulates the manager to activate a unilateral control model that strives for organizing for more control and stability (*‘I wish you to consult me before you put your ideas into practice’*, *‘plans should be submitted according to a default format’*). The manager tends to tighten control and contributes to stagnation of the change process (employees do not feel stimulated, they lose ‘fun’). In the longer run, this leads to perceived tension between environment and organization again. This circular pattern seems to block effective changing, as change leads to stability. As a

consequence, sharp separation of organization and change seems to be conflicting with effective changing. Figure 2.17 illustrates this pattern.



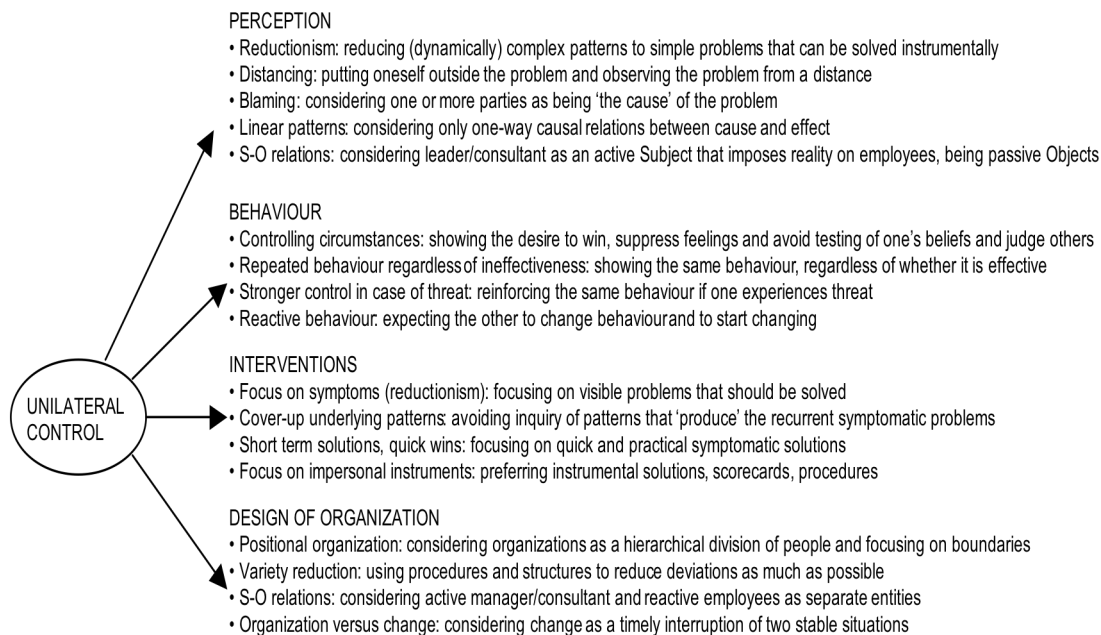
*Figure 2.17 Change leads to stability*

These insights seem to justify a number of assumptions regarding design of organization from a unilateral control perspective.

- Leaders tend to perceive and design their organizations as formal structures with a clear division of positions, in order to get an overview, reduce variety and create stability. In turn, they experience that they are in control.
- In order to be in control, one is vulnerable to a Subject-Object perspective, which means that the active Subject perceives the passive Object (like the organization, the structure and staff) as a separate entity that can be changed. This perspective will only work if the Object is indeed passive, which can easily be conceived as an expression of unwillingness or resistance. This, in turn, reinforces top-down control.
- From a unilateral control perspective, organization is being sharply separated from change: organization depicts stability while change is an unstable period that transforms the old stability to a new stability. Since a unilateral control perspective stimulates leaders to organize for stability, they might perceive change as a threatening distortion. Precisely this perception might reinforce unilateral control that organizes for stability. As a consequence, unilateral control creates a leadership paradox: change stimulates stability.

The main manifestations of a unilateral control perspective regarding perception, behaviour, interventions and design of organization are summarized in figure 2.18.





*Figure 2.18 Expressions of unilateral control: perception, behaviour, interventions and design of organization*

## 2.8 Change of organization (expression 5)

Several studies have presented classifications of change methods (e.g. De Caluwé & Vermaak, 2003; Ardon, 2002; Cummings & Worley, 2004). Generally, a contingency approach is suggested: the best change method reflects the specific characteristics of the situation.

Boonstra (2004) contrasts two approaches: planned change and Organization Development. These approaches highly resemble Beer and Nohria's (2000) Theory E and Theory O. Planned change projects have clear objectives, derived from market demands and economical considerations, and have well-elaborated plans that should lead to these objectives in a linear process. Focus is put on economic measures of performance. This approach has a strong top-down character. Change is planned as well as programmatic. Organization Development aims at enabling organizations to improve effectiveness (in relation to environment) and working life. The change process is based on collaboration of managers and employees and has an iterative character. Change is described as emergent, less planned and less programmatic.

Boonstra argues that "planned change seems suitable when the problem is known, not too complex, and a solution is within reach. [...] Organization Development

appears to be more suitable in the case of complex issues for which no evident solution is at hand” (p. 450). This is also a contingency approach.

What is the influence of a unilateral control model on the way leaders select their change approach? Earlier, it was argued that leaders seem to look at situations by distancing themselves from their environment, decomposing complex processes into simple problems and trying to find a right solution that can be implemented. In other words, a unilateral control model instructs managers to perceive situations such that a planned change approach often seems to be appropriate, regardless of whether issues are complex and solutions are within reach. One would expect this to lead to a bias in favour of the planned change approach. This assumption is supported by Werkman (2005), who found that managers act strongly according to planned change principles. This observation might lead to a circular pattern: the manager perceives the situation from a unilateral control perspective and finds a justification to apply a planned change method. In Argyris’ (1990, 2000, 2004) words this is a self-protective reasoning. If this method does not lead to the desired outcomes, this can be threatening or embarrassing for the manager. According to Argyris it is exactly these conditions that reinforce unilateral control.

A preference for planned change, regardless of the current reality, can easily contribute to blocked changing. It is not only structures or systems that one tends to implement top-down, but also behaviour and culture. By reducing these concepts to separate entities (see Hosking, 1994), such as competences and cultural values, one lays the foundation for top-down implementation. The next example is illustrative.

#### **Box 6 Top management stifle entrepreneurship by top-down communication**

Top management of an engineering company has developed a new strategy. The key word is ‘entrepreneurship’. In order to be successful, all professionals should show pro-activeness, personal responsibility and ownership. In order to realize this, top management and the HR department decide to design a workshop, aiming at developing entrepreneurial skills. The general director: “Every manager has to participate; this is of strategic importance for the company”. Top management calls in a consultancy firm to design and facilitate the workshops. The process starts with a kick-off meeting; all managers are invited. The general director presents the strategy and emphasizes the importance of a new entrepreneurial culture. All managers listen. Subsequently, the consultants describe the development process. All managers listen. Afterwards, top management and consultants agree that the atmosphere during the session had been constructive but passive and that there is a long way to go. No one confronts the top-down implementation approach and how this might contribute to managers’ passive and dependent conduct. No one suggests that the approach is completely in line with the current and undesired culture instead of a new and entrepreneurial culture.

Especially if the desired culture is characterized by terms like empowerment, entrepreneurship, ownership and accountability, a planned change approach can easily lead to inconsistency. Managers ask their consultants if they can do the

implementation process. Consultants, in turn, tend to confirm by emphasizing their experience with and responsibility for implementation, as if they can implement new insights, skills, approaches and values from the outside in. The word 'implementation' breathes associations like 'it is new', 'staff is incompetent and unknowing', 'it is driven in from the outside' and 'performance has not had the attention of staff members until now'. It is not surprising, from a systemic point of view, that staff might indeed behave this way as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Wierdsma (2004) uses the metaphor of a 'package tour': 'the tour management – the diagnosis team- encourages the travelling party to follow the planned activities so that the journey will be successful. Discussion about the desirability of chosen routes and excursions is interpreted as resistance" (p. 235). This approach to implementation is characteristic of a planned change approach and seems to be inextricably bound up with resistance and recurrent patterns if it is used for complex issues for which no evident solution is at hand.

This finding is in line with Wierdsma (2004), who argues that planned change is marked by two paradoxes. First, this approach creates resistance, which in turn is perceived as legitimating the approach. Second, strategy, structure and systems are stabilising factors. It is exactly these factors that are the starting point of numerous change projects. As a consequence, changing them creates uncertainty. Both paradoxes seem to activate circular patterns that block change.

The preceding discussion on the preference for planned change methods is confirmed by results of the Dutch national study on change management by Mastenbroek et al. (2004), which is also discussed in section 2.4. Respondents' change situations were divided over six categories, varying from mergers and take-overs, to introductions of new technology and changes aimed at behaviour, attitude and culture. The categories reflect a wide variety of subjects. Still, in almost every category the three most frequently mentioned 'blocking factors' in change processes are 'top management is unclear', 'employees show resistance' and 'management do not facilitate a learning process between organizational units'. Neither the subject of change nor the change method seems to relate to the factors that are perceived as blocking. This might support the vision that daily interactions (theory-in-use) take place regardless of the change method that is selected in the boardroom (espoused theory). The Dutch national study on change management focuses on blocking factors (or entities; see Hosking, 1994) rather than processes. Respondents select the factors they perceive as being the strongest in change processes within their own organization. By focusing on factors, there is a risk of reductionism, distancing and neglect of one's own role.

After all, regardless of the differences, planned change and Organization Development (OD) have some similarities. "Both approaches see organizations as entity, and more or less as a combination of people and resources to be optimized in a structure which is used to take decisions to achieve defined purposes" (Boonstra, 2004, p. 450). With this description it becomes clear that OD, although less than the

planned change approach, is a planned change process as well. Several authors consider OD as a more or less planned approach. Cummings (2004) writes "Organization Development is a system-wide process of applying behavioral-science knowledge to the planned change and development of the strategies, design components, and processes that enable organizations to be effective" (p. 25). And Schein (1988) argues "OD is typically defined as a planned organizationwide kind of program" (p. 3). Moreover, planned change and organization development have an episodic character and separate change from stability (although OD is less episodic than planned change).

These insights seem to justify a number of assumptions regarding the effect of a unilateral control model on the preferred change approach.

- In order to be in control, leaders prefer a planned change method, which can be characterized as a goal-oriented, step-by-step, rational and episodic approach with a strong focus on economical measures of performance.
- A planned change method is especially appropriate if the problem is known, relatively simple and a solution is within reach. However, this method is not appropriate for situations that are more complex, e.g. when the problem is in (social) patterns rather than isolated issues. These patterns cannot be controlled like isolated issues.
- From a unilateral control theory-in-use leaders tend to perceive most problems as relatively simple as they are vulnerable to reductionism, distancing, blaming and linear thinking. As a consequence, they might overlook the more complex patterns and select a planned change method mistakenly.
- The 'selection' of a change method can be considered as being espoused theory. Regardless of the selected change method, the leaders' perception and behaviour in interaction with other people is probably governed by a unilateral control model. This could be an explanation for the fact that, regardless of the change issue and change method, people tend to perceive the same blocking factors for successful change.
- Despite the differences, planned change and OD can be characterized as more or less episodic and planned. Stable organization and change are being separated. Changing is blocked and de-blocked by daily interactions that seem to be emergent and independent of the selected change approach.

Figure 2.19 summarizes the consequences of unilateral control for perception, interaction, intervention, design and change of organization.

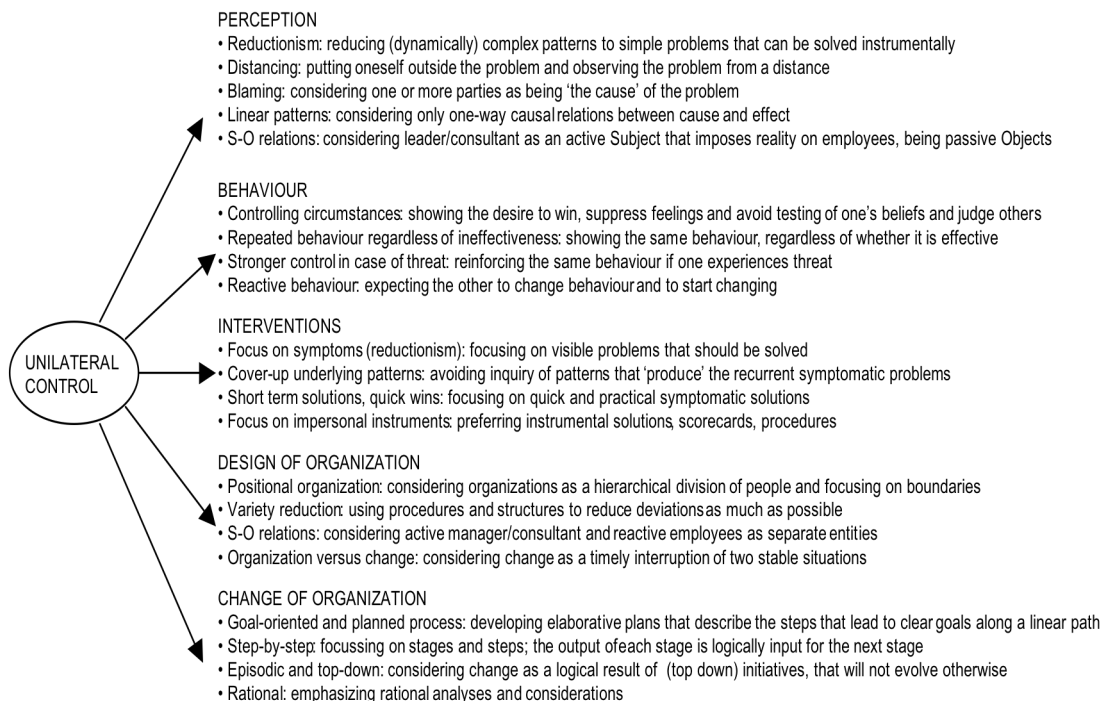


Figure 2.19 Expressions of unilateral control: perception, behaviour, interventions, design of organization and change of organization

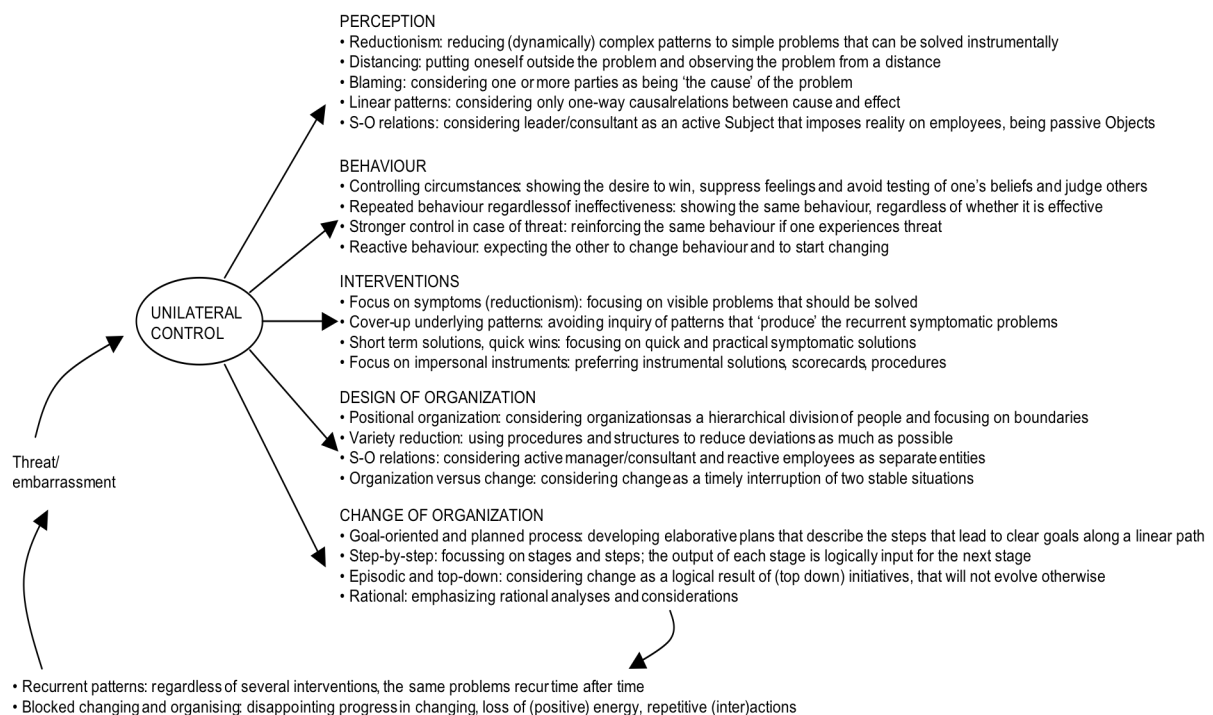
## 2.9 Expressions of unilateral control: a diagnostic model

Although managers tend to hold espoused theories that reflect values like internal commitment, ownership, entrepreneurship and personal responsibility, their perception, behaviour, interventions, design and change of organization tend to be governed by a unilateral control theory-in-use. This model refers to control, the desire to win, suppress feelings, to avoid testing one's own assumptions, to judge others and to be rational. This model is effective if the problem is known and relatively simple and a proper solution is within reach. However, these skills make managers incompetent to deal with complex situations. For that reason, Argyris talks about 'skilled incompetence' (1990, p. 12-24).

'Simple' change processes are not necessarily easy to deal with. Simple means 'instrumental', concerning structure and systems rather than performance, people, culture, behaviour or attitude. In this study, change processes are considered to be 'complex' in case of dynamic complexity, as opposed to detail complexity (Senge, 1990). The distinction between (dynamically) simple and complex situations seems to

relate to Edmondson and Smith's (2006) so-called 'cool topics' and 'hot topics'. Cool topics refer to task conflicts and "can be addressed by debating the facts, with little risk of giving rise to heated disagreement" (p. 7). Hot topics concern relationship conflicts and are characterized by differing values or interests, available facts cannot help to reduce uncertainties surrounding the topic and stakes are high. Although the authors limit their focus to management team conflicts, there is a strong resemblance to dynamically simple and complex situations.

A unilateral control model is not suitable for dynamically complex situations as a consequence of the restricting effects on the way managers perceive, behave, intervene, design and change organization. Figure 2.20 summarizes the expressions of unilateral control and the consequences for changing and is considered to be a diagnostic model. The five expressions lead to recurrent patterns and blocked changing and organizing. This leads to threat and/or embarrassment that, in turn, reinforce a unilateral control model.



**Figure 2.20** *Diagnostic model: circular relation between expressions of unilateral control, blocked changing and organizing and threat*

The problem is that the effects of unilateral control are normally not only undesired, but also unintended. One is often not aware of the effects of one's own behaviour. And as soon as one is confronted with these effects, for example by feedback, one usually perceives this as a threat. As a consequence, the unilateral control model is reinforced. Even if one perceives this as not effective, it appears not to be easy to replace this model by an alternative. This way, regardless of their spoken and written change ambitions, leaders unintentionally contribute to the preservation of the current reality, as opposed to change.

### *Effects of pressure*

Particularly if managers perceive pressure or a sense of urgency, they are stimulated to activate a unilateral control model that can lead to unintended effects and ineffective change processes (see Argyris, 1990, 2000, 2004).

This is an important insight, as the current economy represents numerous sources of pressure, such as shareholders, clients, customers and boards. Especially in a situation of an economic downturn, managers will experience extra pressure on their performance and their time. Under these conditions, it is hard for managers to come up with a message other than 'everything is under control' and 'we'll solve the problems as soon as possible'. Under these circumstances it is not likely that managers will say that they 'assume a recurrent pattern undermines successful changing in the longer run' and that they 'will take time to investigate these patterns and find alternatives'. As described before, interventions in interactive patterns are characterized by delay before they lead to visible results (Senge, 1990). This delay makes these interventions less attractive for managers who adhere to a unilateral control model.

This reasoning leads to the assumption that managers who are under pressure will tend to focus on problems that are dynamically simple and have a routine character. Under these circumstances, it seems to be hard if not impossible to organize for dynamically complex changing.

In case of dynamically simple (routine) situations, urgency justifies immediate pragmatic solutions. In case of dynamically complex situations, it depends: if the urgency is really high, a quick fix might be essential to 'save the situation'. Simultaneously, one might investigate the underlying problem and work on a fundamental solution. If the urgency is relatively low, it is the best moment to investigate the underlying problem.





### **3. Alternative guiding principles: de-blocking changing, organizing and learning**

*Manager: I would like you to contribute to this policy.*

*Employee: Would you like me to be intrinsically motivated or is this just something I have to do?*

*Manager: It is just something you have to do.*

*Employee: O.k., I will do it. But don't expect me to do it because I feel like it.*

*Manager: I understand and I am aware of that.*

#### **3.1 Introduction**

According to Argyris (1980), approximately three-quarters of all problems that emerge in organizations can be solved with a unilateral control model and have a relatively linear character: clear problems can be solved with obvious solutions. These situations have a relatively low dynamic complexity (Senge, 1990). Other situations require an alternative approach. This chapter contributes to a clearer distinction between situations that can be managed with a unilateral control model and situations that require alternative guiding principles. In the next section Argyris' Model II (mutual learning) is introduced, which he describes as the alternative for Model I (unilateral control). The subsequent section presents the concept of (continuous) changing, organizing and learning, which exist alongside episodic change. This chapter concludes with a critical reflection on Argyris' Model II.

#### **3.2 Introduction of mutual learning model**

If three-quarters of all organization problems can be solved with a unilateral control model, how can one know when to look for an alternative? Argyris argues that "Model I may be relevant for the more routine single-loop issues that do not threaten individuals, groups, intergroups, or organizations" (1983, p. 120). Situations that do not fit these conditions require an alternative.

As an alternative for Model I (unilateral control) Argyris introduces Model II, also referred to as the 'mutual learning model' (e.g. Schwartz, 2002; Noonan, 2007). While a unilateral control model aims at controlling situations by (re)defining actions in order to solve problems, the governing values of a mutual learning theory-in-use are valid information, informed and free choice and (personal) responsibility and commitment to effective implementation. Schwartz (2002) added a fourth governing value: compassion. These four governing values need some additional clarification. *Valid information* means that one shares all relevant information: concrete data (instead of abstractions), one's assumptions and feelings about an issue and one's reasoning that leads to one's conclusions. Besides, one tries to find out if one is

missing relevant information that others might have about the situation and about the way one contributes to the situation.

*Free and informed choice* refers to a choice that is based on valid information. One does not make a choice because one is manipulated by another person or one is defensive, but because one truly thinks this is the best option.

*Internal commitment* means that one feels personally responsible for the implementation of the choice. This means that one feels ownership and does not put things into practice because of unilateral control by another person (which would make one's actions dependent on the control of this person).

*Compassion* means that one has empathy for other persons and for oneself and still holds oneself and other persons accountable for action rather than unilaterally protecting others or oneself (Schwartz, 2002). Box 7 further illustrates these governing values of mutual learning.

### **Box 7 Stimulating entrepreneurship with mutual learning**

The general director of a middle-sized company has a conversation with his middle managers about the level of entrepreneurship. He has introduced this issue earlier by arguing that entrepreneurship must be enlarged. Since then, the general director has put the issue on the agenda time after time and introduced several improvement suggestions, but nothing has really changed. During a conversation with a coach, he becomes aware of the inconsistency between what he says and what he does: by his unilateral control (talking in abstractions, holding his conclusions as being true, persuading, instructing), he stifles his managers' entrepreneurship. Now he tries again:

"Managers or employees seldom surprise me with new initiatives, e.g. a new method or a new product (*concrete data*). Therefore I think they are not taking initiatives at all and only consolidate the current situation (*reasoning and assumptions*). That is what I call 'lack of entrepreneurship' and what worries me (*conclusion and feelings*). Am I missing something (*checking for additional information*)?"

I raised this issue several times. Still I don't hear you about more initiatives with your employees (*concrete data*). Therefore I think I am the only one who is worried about the situation (*reasoning and assumptions*). Might I be right (*checking for additional information*)? What do I do that might contribute to this situation (*information about how he might contribute himself*)? What are your observations?

To what extent do you share my findings? Do you believe we could learn and improve this situation? Please, do not keep me uninformed if you think we can't. I really want you to be honest with me (*inviting to share valid information*).

What would you suggest? How could you contribute? What could I do to help you? (*free and informed choice*)."

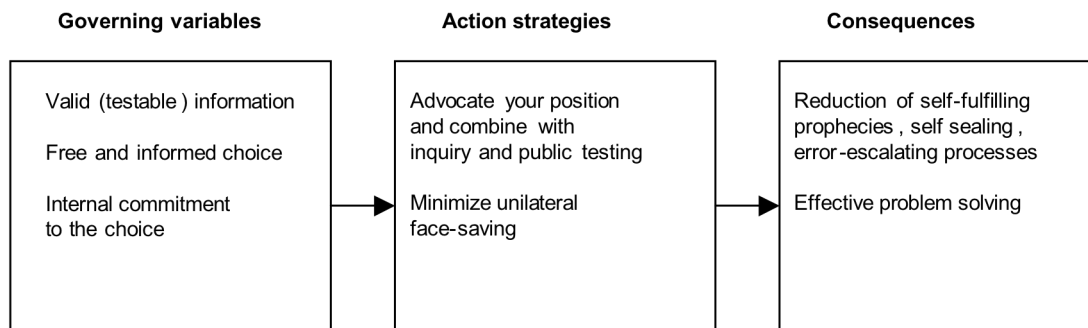
Valid information lays the foundation for free and informed choice and, subsequently, for internal commitment for the implementation. Managers can take this approach as 'soft' and 'lack of leadership'. This approach is especially effective, if commitment and ownership are needed in order to realize effective change.

Saying that one desires commitment and ownership (espoused theory) while acting in line with a unilateral control model (theory-in-use) leads to inconsistent and unreliable leadership. In order to be consistent, one could either say that one does not try to realize (full) commitment and show unilateral control, or say that one desires commitment and act in line with a mutual learning model. It is a free choice.

A unilateral control model (Model I) is based upon the assumption that other persons are not capable of dealing with the truth and are, thus, weak and vulnerable. For that reason one tends to save face by not sharing valid information (see 'the cheating game', figure 2.1). However, by acting this way one keeps oneself and other persons from learning.

Mutual learning (Model II) supports learning by advocating one's position and encouraging inquiry into it, and minimizing face saving. The assumption is that other persons have their own responsibility to deal with valid information and that one should give oneself and other persons the opportunity to learn. This can typically be considered as espoused theory.

Unlike Model I, Model II (figure 3.1) represents free choice for individuals instead of control or even intimidation. To make a good and free choice, one needs valid information, which includes information that may cause embarrassment or may be difficult to deal with. In order to get valid information, one should also be able and willing to test one's assumptions.



*Figure 3.1 Model II theory-in-use (source: Argyris, 2004, p. 393)*

Argyris emphasizes that Model II (mutual learning) governing values are not the opposite of Model I (unilateral control). Mutual learning does not mean that one focuses entirely on someone else's opinions, desires and interest. That wouldn't be mutual either. Mutual learning means a combination of advocacy of one's own position and inquiry into one's own position and someone else's position. This requires mutually sharing valid information that has led to one's position instead of keeping positions in order to win (Argyris, 1990, 2000, 2004; Noonan, 2007; Schwartz, 2004). Or, in other words, being right or wrong is less interesting. The

emphasis is on sharing valid information in order to find the most effective solutions and strategies. That is how one might break through the ongoing 'cheating game' (see figure 3.2).

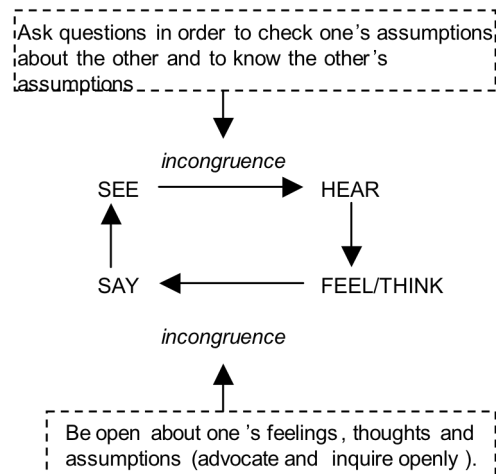


Figure 3.2 Mutual learning: breaking through the 'cheating game'

Argyris characterizes the differences between Model I and II by five social virtues (2004).

	<b>Model I Social Virtues</b>	<b>Model II Social Virtues</b>
<i>Help and Support</i>	Give approval and praise to others. Tell others what you believe will make them feel good about themselves. Reduce their feelings of hurt by telling them how much you care, and, if possible, agree with them that the others acted improperly.	Increase the others' capacity to confront their own ideas, to create a window into their own mind, and to face their unsurfaced assumptions, biases, and fears by acting in these ways toward other people.
<i>Respect for others</i>	Defer to other people and do not confront their reasoning or actions.	Attribute to other people a high capacity for self-reflection and self-examination without becoming so upset that they lose their effectiveness and their sense of self-responsibility and choice. Keep testing this attribution openly.
<i>Strength</i>	Advocate your position in order to win. Hold your own position in the face of advocacy. Feeling vulnerable is a sign of weakness.	Advocate your position and combine it with inquiry and self-reflection. Feeling vulnerable while encouraging inquiry is a sign of strength.

<i>Honesty</i>	Tell other people no lies or tell others all you think and feel.	Encourage yourself and other people to say what they know yet fear to say. Minimize what would otherwise be subject to distortion and cover-up of the distortion.
<i>Integrity</i>	Stick to your principles, values and beliefs.	Advocate your principles, values and beliefs in a way that invites inquiry into them and encourages other people to do the same.

*Table 3.1 Social virtues of Model I and Model II (Argyris, 2004, p. 398)*

*Direct observable data*

*Middle manager: I am afraid I already know how they will react to this new policy.*

*They will probably say 'Here we go again'.*

*Director: The problem is that it is very difficult to change in this organization. People just want to do their work. However, we cannot afford failure of this policy. Things really have to change. You have to act smartly.*

*Middle manager: Of course I have to. But I am dependent on the employees, right?*

*Director: Of course you are.*

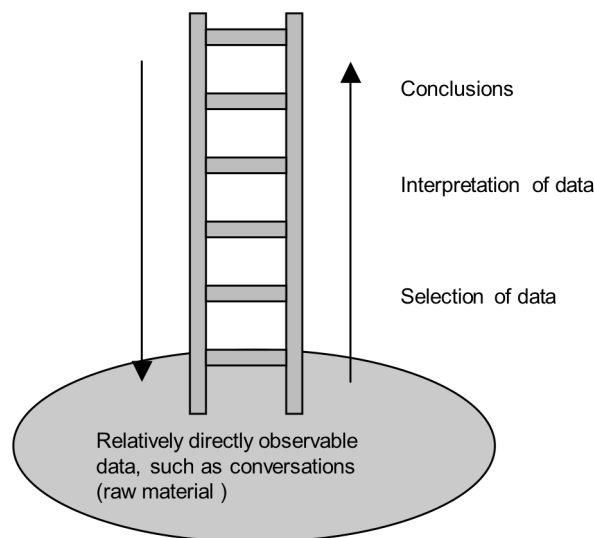
This conversation, derived directly from practice, strongly illustrates unilateral control. Some observations (see sections 2.2 and 2.4):

- Distancing: manager and director approach the situation as if they are not part of it.
- Blaming: employees are perceived to be the problem.
- Subject-Object thinking: management's policy is o.k., performance depends on employees' competence and loyalty.
- Face-saving of other: director does not confront middle manager's effectiveness and confirms that his success depends on employees; manager does not inquire into quotes like 'things have to change'.
- Face-saving of oneself: manager does not say he actually does not know how to deal with this situation smartly and covers his problem up.

All these observations help these individuals to keep things under control and keep them from learning and changing. While they talk about the change problems within the organization, they illustrate how they probably contribute to these problems. There is another characteristic of this conversation: director and manager talk on an abstract level. Their claims cannot be tested, which again keeps them from learning. How does the manager know that 'they' will say 'Here we go again'? Did he have such experiences before? What exactly was said, then? And how did he respond? And what was the effect of that response? (How) might he have contributed to their response? And how does the director know that 'People just want to do their work'?

From what data (observations, quotes) does he derive this conclusion? And what is the effect of this conclusion (or belief) on his actions? Claims like 'things really have to change' and 'you have to act smart' are just as abstract. Advice or expectations like these are of little value, as they sound obvious but are not actionable (Argyris, 1990).

The example is not unique. Generally, discussions in boardrooms tend to have an abstract character. A mutual learning model is based on directly observable data, minimizes defensiveness and requires advocacy to be supported by illustration, testing and inquiry into others' views (Argyris, 1982, Fig. 3). This means that a mutual learning model does not accept abstractions, but tries to find the directly observable data, or valid information, that these abstractions are based upon. Such learning is facilitated (see the questions related to the example) by advocacy and public testing and inquiry. In order to visualize the way one tends to infer interpretations and conclusions from (relatively) directly observable data and how one can move the other way round, Argyris introduced the 'ladder of inference' (e.g. 1983, 1990, 2000). Recently, Wouterson and Bouwman (2005) made this more accessible by using different terms.



*Figure 3.3 Ladder of inference (based upon Argyris, 2000)*

The mutual learning model requires valid information and thus instructs one to make discussions less abstract by descending the ladder of inference. Argyris puts this into practice by regularly asking 'How do you know that you are right?', 'Can you share an example that illustrates your point?'. Furthermore, he tends to use the very 'here-and-now' of the conversation to inquire how one contributes to one's own recurrent problems.

### 3.3 Changing, organizing and learning

A unilateral control model stimulates individuals to think in terms of episodic change, which is a period of (planned) instability between the current stable (positional) organization and the desired stable organization. As discussed before (section 2.8), regardless of the selected change approach, our perception, behaviours and interventions can still be governed by a unilateral control model. This, in turn, can lead to recurrent problems and blocked changing. There seem to be two – different – worlds:

1. the world of organization (strategy and structure) and change (method); this is what we tend to talk about;
2. the world of (continuous) changing and organizing, the daily interactions that can contribute to positive developments or recurrent problems.

Or, in other words, continuous changing and organizing is what happens (what we are doing) while we are talking about change (method) and organization (strategy and structure). In this light, culture might be best described as the way we are engaged in changing and organizing. Or, culture is what happens (what we are doing) while we are talking about culture diagnosis and cultural values.

These findings are in line with other authors (e.g. Van Dongen, 1996; Hosking, 2004; Weick & Quinn, 1999; Wierdsma, 2004), who suggest moving from structure to process, from organization to organizing and from change to changing. Wierdsma (2004) introduces an alternative for positional organization: transactional organization. While the positional organization perspective focuses on positions, the transactional organization perspective focuses on transactions in the chain of value addition. “In order to be viable, the organization must be capable of responding to the differing demands and requirements of customers and other stakeholders with regard to products, services, and information” (p. 230). The variety in demands and requirements cannot be answered by an organization perspective that strives for stability. Beer (1979), cited by Wierdsma (2004) puts it this way: “only variety beats variety” (p. 230).

Transactional organization differs from positional organization in several characteristics. Transactional organization functions “as a dynamic network of people connected by a network of mutually dependent activities and shared meanings” (p. 231). In their interactions people ‘create’ the organization, which can be seen as the sum of these interactions. The transactional organization perspective assumes that the world ‘becomes’ instead of ‘is’. As these activities and interactions go crosswise through all kind of boundaries (e.g. between individuals, functions, teams, departments, layers and environment), transactional organization replaces boundaries by interfaces. This concept corresponds with the boundaryless organization, as described by Ashkenas et al. (1998): “Specifically, behaviour patterns that are highly conditioned by boundaries between levels, functions, and other constructs will be replaced by patterns of free movement across those same

boundaries. No longer will organizations use boundaries to separate people, tasks, processes and places” (p. 2). The authors argue for free movement of ideas, information, talent rewards and actions where they are most needed. Subject-Object relations do not fit in transactional organization. The Subject does not look at the organization as a separate entity. In this perspective it is the Subject who has to create organization just by interacting with others. As a consequence, relations are much more equal. This perspective can better be characterized by Subject-Subject relations.

The assumptions underlying both perspectives are summarized in table 3.2.

Positional organization	Transactional organization
World which ‘is’	World which ‘becomes’
Subject-Object	Subject-subject
Stability	Dynamism
Positions	Transactions
Boundaries	Interfaces
Focus on constituent parts	Balance between parts and whole
Reduction of variety	Maintenance of variety

*Table 3.2 Underlying assumptions of positional and transactional organization (derived from Wierdsma, 2004, p. 239).*

While positional organization focuses on structure, transactional organization focuses on processes. Organization can be sharply separated from change; organizing cannot be separated from changing. Episodic change does not fit in this perspective. Weick & Quinn (1999) introduce ‘continuous change’, which is used “to group together organizational changes that tend to be ongoing, evolving and cumulative. A common presumption is that change is emergent, meaning that is ‘the realization of a new pattern of organizing in the absence of explicit a priori intentions’” (p. 373, partly quoted from Orlikowski, 1996, p. 65).

Continuous changing<sup>7</sup> becomes an alternative for both (positional) organization and episodic change, as there is no sharp separation between organizing and changing from this perspective. Besides, continuous changing cannot be separated from learning (Boonstra, 2004). As discussed before (section 2.5), a unilateral control model stifles learning and reinforces circular patterns. De-blocking changing and organizing preconceives learning.

Weick & Quinn (1999) argue that the concepts of episodic change and continuous changing reflect differences in the perspective of the observer. From a distance (the macro level of analysis), observers see repetitive action, routines and inertia that are occasionally interrupted by episodic changes. If observers view from closer in (the micro level of analysis), they see ongoing adaptation and adjustments. This distinction of episodic and macro level versus continuous and micro level seems to

<sup>7</sup> In order to emphasise the ongoing process and to distinguish from episodic change, ‘continuous changing’ seems to be more consistent than ‘continuous change’.



correspond to the 'different worlds' that are referred to at the start of this section. The world of organization (strategy and structure) and change (method) seems to relate to the macro level of analysis, while the world of (continuous) changing and organizing and daily interactions relates to the micro level of analysis.

The focus of this study is on the micro level of analysis that relates to continuous changing, organizing and learning. More specifically, the focus is on daily interactions between leaders, employees and their consultants and the way these interactions block or de-block ongoing changing, organizing and learning. These interactions (and interactive patterns) may emerge, regardless of specific change goals and selected change method. This focus corresponds with Weick and Quinn (1999), who argue that "change is not an on-off phenomenon nor is its effectiveness contingent on the degree to which it is planned. Furthermore, the trajectory of change is more often spiral or open-ended than linear. All of these insights are more likely to be kept in play if researchers focus on 'changing' rather than 'change'" (p. 381).

Managers who adhere to a unilateral control model might contribute to blocked changing, organizing and learning. While episodic change is driven by tensions between a changing environment and the organization structure, continuous changing is driven by organizational instability and alert reactions to daily contingencies (Boonstra, 2004). A condition for continuous changing is thus a personal sense of responsibility by organization members to take initiative for (small) improvements and leaders' trust in and appreciation of this sense of responsibility. These conditions, again, seem to relate in a circular way.

### **3.4 Reflection on Argyris' mutual learning model**

In spite of Argyris' impact on management thinking, some critical notes can be mentioned. Argyris' description of Model II (mutual learning) is radical; in effect, it is difficult to comply with this model. As a consequence, even his own ideas do not always pass the test. Van de Vliert (1977) has summarized five inconsistencies with respect to the governing values of Model II. First, Argyris argues that change is not a primary task of the interventionist. However, a shift from Model I to Model II is always a change process in itself. Second, free choice is difficult if one presents the situation as a choice between learning and not learning. Third, free choice for everyone is difficult to realize, because free choice for one individual in an organization often implicitly means absence of free choice for another individual. Fourth, Argyris assumes that free choices based on valid information lead to effective organizations. However, free choices do not need to be good choices. Fifth, although Argyris argues that an interventionist must carry out the primary tasks throughout the whole organization, Argyris seems to have a management bias "which is manifested in his preoccupation with 'top executives'" (p. 562).

Argyris pays special attention to double bind risks in Model I management behaviour, which refers to impossible messages that keep persons captured because they represent two incompatible assignments. Argyris' theory, however, is vulnerable to double bind in itself, by saying that one should always have free choices and one should create learning situations and behave autonomously. This seems to be a risk of radicalisation on a theoretical level.

On a practical level the governing values of Model II could be accused of being too optimistic. According to Argyris, managers (and individuals in general) are highly skilled in Model I and they are not aware of their skills. He even argues that Model I is neither region nor time-related. Drukker (1999) stresses the difficulties with training managers in Model II. Model I is considered to be deeply ingrained. Besides, working according to Model II in an environment where Model I is dominant requires courage. For that reason, Drukker calls Model II the model of courage. Argyris is not consistent about how easily managers learn Model II. In one publication he reports difficulties: "[...] people who want to learn theories-in-use that facilitate double-loop learning are unable to do so during the early phases of learning, even if economically autonomous and powerful, even if in an environment that is designed to bring about such learning" (1983, p. 119). Later, he claims that in his experience the majority of executives have had the capacity to learn Model II without too much difficulty. "It will take as much time to learn Model II as it takes to play a middling game of tennis" (1990, p. 95). Still later, Robert Kegan describes that "Argyris, however, has been candid in reporting that even highly advantaged, graduate-educated, organizationally high-ranking adults have a great deal of difficulty mastering – or simply cannot master - what it is he is teaching (source: personal communication)" (Kegan, 1994, p. 321). These findings seem to support the assumption that a model shift is difficult to realize. The fact that one tends to act the easy (Model I) way might be an explanation of disappointing effectiveness of change processes. This is in line with Senge (1990), who argues that "systemic insights never find their way into operating policies" (p. 174). His explanation is the persistence of our mental models: "deeply held internal images of how the world works, images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting" (p. 174).

A last remark that can be made concerns the individual psychological and more specifically, the cognitive bias of Argyris' approach (De Man, 2003, p. 13). According to De Man, Argyris pays relatively little attention to emotions and reflexive behaviour. De Man argues that behaviour is mainly automatic and is not directed by a theory. However, this remark seems to be applicable only to Model II. Argyris stresses the fact that management behaviour is normally and automatically guided by Model I. One tends to be aware of neither the guiding principles, nor the way these lead automatically to certain behaviour, and the way this behaviour leads to unintended results. Unlike Model I, Model II assumes a conscious process. The governing values of Model II assume that the 'design' of individual behaviour is based upon valid information and informed choice.

## 4. Role of the interventionist

*Consultant: Before the meeting started, you told me you wanted all managers to be intrinsically committed. How do you evaluate the management meeting?*

*Director: Positive. All managers said they are committed to the change project. That is important to me.*

*Consultant: In the first instance, John said he did not believe this was going to work.*

*Director: But I succeeded to convince him, didn't I?*

*Consultant: Do you think he is intrinsically committed?*

*Director: Well, he said he is committed, didn't he?*

*Consultant: Help me to understand you. Does that mean that you don't want your managers to be intrinsically committed, but you want them to say that they are committed?*

*Director: Well, eh, well, actually I think it is important that they are intrinsically committed. I need them for an effective implementation, right?*

*Consultant: Then how do you know that you can evaluate the management meeting positively?*

### 4.1 Introduction

The role of consultants has been mentioned several times. There is quite some evidence that a majority of consultants tends to hold the same unilateral control model as their clients (Argyris, 2000). Taking a role of 'partner-in-business', consultants can support their clients in creating processes that reinforce circular processes and stifle learning.

This chapter describes the role of consultants. The next section illustrates how different approaches relate to unilateral control. Subsequently, a classification of interventions is presented, followed by the scope of interventions in this study. The following section describes interventions that contribute to de-block changing, organizing and learning. Here, interventions (the 'what') are distinguished from the process of intervening ('the how').

### 4.2 Unilateral control by consultants

Drukker and Verhaaren (2002) see two possible approaches by consultants in interactions with clients.

1. *Management Serving*. This approach refers to an acceptance of the problem definition and change method. The consultant's role is 'only' to serve management by conducting the activities that have been outsourced by the principal. This approach is effective if the problem is known and relatively simple and a proper solution is within reach and is especially suited to outsourcing situations for capacity reasons. This role

is considered to be identical to a 'partner-in-business' model: the consultant stands next to the manager and supports him to bring his strategies into practice.

2. *Professional Independent Consulting*. This approach is suitable if the problem is complex and/or the approach is new. The client's assumptions and perspectives cannot be accepted as being 'the truth' and might even contribute to the perceived problems. When 'the problem' is presented, there is a risk of reification (Van Dongen, 1996). This means that the client considers an abstract phenomenon that can be approached from different perspectives always to be a concrete thing or object that does not change. Under these circumstances the consultant has to challenge the problem definition and assumptions.

Several authors argue that most consultants have a strong bias to a Management Serving model (Argyris, 2000; Noonan, 2007; Drukker & Verhaaren, 2002; Verhaaren, 2004; Strikwerda, 2004). Consultants seem to be as vulnerable as managers to a unilateral control model. Drukker & Verhaaren describe how client and consultant tend to reinforce each other in using this model. A client who invites a consultant for a reason other than for capacity reasons will often experience the situation as more or less uncomfortable. This experience stimulates the client to activate a unilateral control model; he will tend to control the situation, suppress emotions, act rationally and show dominant behaviour. This behaviour stimulates the consultant to show the same model: 'I will show that I am fully equipped to handle this situation effectively'.

Besides this reinforcement by the client, the consultant might experience other factors that activate a unilateral control model. Just like the client, the consultant might very well experience the urge

- for quick visible success (quick wins are more probably noticed as being a success by the consultant than delayed effects);
- to present himself as someone who is able to manage the situation;
- of commercial pressure (if a potential principal asks for a practical solution for a defined problem, critical questions about assumptions or deviant views might be experienced as being undesirable).

These factors stimulate consultants to present themselves as 'partners-in-business' and able to 'solve the problems as being presented by the client'. This perspective seems to be vulnerable to single-loop solutions and to cover-up of underlying problems that produce the symptoms. In non-routine and dynamically complex situations, the consultant might contribute to maintaining the current situation. The difference between cover-up of the underlying problem and inquiring into the underlying problem can be subtle, as illustrated in box 8.

### Box 8 Why do you want me to give my opinion?

A consultant was invited to facilitate a two-day session on changing for the general director and management team of a knowledge institute. In one session the participants discussed the effectiveness of their team. The consultant listened and had no active role in the discussion. In his perception the discussion had an abstract, rational and safe character and seemed to be free of any obligations. Personal contribution of individual team members was not the subject of discussion, although body language and tone of voice showed some disapproval between individuals. He intervened: *'You appear to be very skilled in discussing at an abstract level with much freedom of obligations.'* The most active participant reacted: *'Apparently you have an opinion about our communication and team culture. I am very interested in your analysis.'* In a first reaction the consultant tended to present his analysis. Such an action would justify his position and be a great opportunity to show his added value. However, by presenting his analysis he would probably have reinforced the ineffective pattern: one would have reviewed the 'interesting' analysis and discussed to what extent it reflected the real situation. Still, it would have been the message of an outsider and as a consequence no one would have felt personally responsible for that vision. As an alternative, the consultant reacted with a question:

*'Why do you want me to give my opinion?'*

The participant: *'Because you are an outsider and you might see things we are not aware of.'*

Consultant: *'What kind of things do you mean?'*

Participant (a bit irritated): *'Well, for example the way we deal with each other's beliefs.'*

Consultant: *'Why do you want me to give my opinion?'*

The participant turned to his colleagues again and said (still irritated): *'Well apparently he does not want to share his opinion, so I will do it. I really don't like the way we discuss things. I do not feel that you take me seriously. My point of view is ignored time after time. Besides, we talk about every kind of subject except for personal ones. I am not willing to go on like this.'*

For the consultant this conversation meant resisting the pressure that was put on him by the participants. They were highly skilled in their abstract discussions. With these defensive routines they succeeded to avoid personal responsibility and blocked changing. The participant even tried to involve the consultant in these routines and was probably not aware of this strategy. They were, as Argyris calls it, skilled incompetent. At the same time the consultant felt the pressure that he created himself: he was able to present an analysis and was willing to show how skilled he was to handle the situation. But still, he was convinced that not presenting his analysis would help the team break through the pattern he observed. Although the consultant succeeded not to please the client and undermine learning, he did not share his reasoning openly. This way, his intervention had still a unilateral character.

This finding is in line with Campbell et al. (1994, p. 87), who argue that it can be easy for a consultant to offer an opinion, however the real answer often comes from members of the organization. After all, consultants seem to reinforce managers in

activating a unilateral control model easily. They are vulnerable to the same behaviour and tend to activate the same patterns.

In order to focus on his role and in line with Argyris and others, from here 'the consultant' will be called the 'interventionist'.

#### **4.3 Interventions in continuous changing**

This study focuses on continuous changing as opposed to episodic change. Continuous changing becomes visible at a micro level of analysis. Weick and Quinn (1999) describe the consequences of this focus for the development of an intervention theory and the role of the change agent and explore the contrasts between episodic change and continuous changing (table 4.1).

This study on daily interactions between leader, employees and interventionist relates to continuous changing. The study is characterized by a micro level perspective as well as a long-term emphasis.

Weick and Quinn (1999) refer to Inkpen and Crossan (1995) when they argue that continuous change can be triggered by a dissonance between beliefs and actions. They could have referred to Argyris here as well. While a central idea of episodic change is to detect inertia and replace or substitute the cause, continuous change aims rather at understanding how ongoing changing and learning is being blocked and how one could unblock changing and learning. Typical characteristics of continuous changing that relate directly to the contents of this study are recurrent interactions, response repertoires, emergent patterns, and learning.

From the perspective of continuous changing, an intervention theory relates to the order 'freeze, rebalance, unfreeze'. Weick and Quinn elaborate on the meaning of these terms. To freeze continuous changing is to make sequences visible and to show patterns in what is happening. It is not surprising that they refer to Argyris (1990). Rebalancing is explained as reinterpreting, relabelling and resequencing the patterns so that they unfold with fewer blockages. Unfreezing means resuming improvisation, translation and learning in ways that are now more mindful in their patterns, more resilient to anomalies and more flexible in their execution. Improvisation refers to ongoing variations which take place at a micro level: changing emerges because people do new things, in new ways, in interactions with new people, without a top-down initiative that urges them to do so. Translation refers to the free movement of ideas that bypass the apparatus of planned change and which may be turned into new actions at new places. Learning is considered here to be 'a change in an organization's response repertoire' (Weick and Quinn, 1999; Sitkin et al., 1998). This study aims particularly at developing insight into how to unblock learning, rather than improvisation and translation.

	<b>Episodic change</b>	<b>Continuous changing</b>
<i>Analytic framework</i>	<p>Perspective: macro, distant, global</p> <p>Emphasis: short-run adaptation</p> <p>Key concepts: inertia, deep structure of interrelated parts, triggering, replacement and substitution, discontinuity, revolution</p>	<p>Perspective: micro, close, local</p> <p>Emphasis: long-term adaptability</p> <p>Key concepts: recurrent interactions, shifting task authority, response repertoires, emergent patterns, improvisation, translation, learning</p>
<i>Intervention theory</i>	<p>The necessary change is created by intention. Change is Lewinian: inertial, linear, progressive, goal-seeking, motivated by disequilibrium, and requires outsider intervention</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unfreeze: disconfirmation of expectations, learning anxiety, provision of psychological safety</li> <li>2. Transition: cognitive restructuring, semantic redefinition, conceptual enlargement, new standards of judgement</li> <li>3. Refreeze: create supportive social norms, make change congruent with personality</li> </ol>	<p>The change is a redirection of what is already under way. Change is Confucian: cyclical, professional, without an end state, equilibrium-seeking, eternal</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Freeze: make sequences visible and show patterns through maps, schemas and stories</li> <li>2. Rebalance: reinterpret, relabel, resequence the patterns to reduce blocks, use logic of attraction</li> <li>3. Unfreeze: resume improvisation, translation and learning in ways that are more mindful</li> </ol>
<i>Role of change agent</i>	<p>Role: prime mover who creates change</p> <p>Process: focuses on inertia and seeks points of central leverage</p> <p>Changes meaning systems: speaks differently, communicates alternative schema, reinterprets revolutionary triggers, influences punctuation, builds coordination and commitment</p>	<p>Role: sense maker who redirects change</p> <p>Process: recognizes, makes salient, and reframes current patterns</p> <p>Shows how intentional change can be made on the margins. Alters meaning by new language, enriched dialogue, and new identity. Unblocks improvisation, translation, and learning.</p>

**Table 4.1**      *Comparison of episodic change and continuous changing (based on Weick and Quinn, 1999, p. 366)*

According to Weick and Quinn (1999) contributing to de-blocking changing, organizing and learning means being sensitive to discourse. They refer to Barrett et al. (1995) and Dixon (1997), who claim that the most powerful change interventions occur at the level of everyday conversation. These claims are in line with this study that focuses at daily interactions, mainly expressed in conversations.

#### 4.4 Interventions that contribute to de-block changing, organizing and learning

##### *Interventions and the process of intervening*

In order to develop an intervention perspective, a distinction can be made between *interventions* and *the process of intervening*. Interventions refer to approaches and methods that help to analyse and share circularity, organizational patterns and behaviour. The process of intervening refers to how to interact with the client system in such a way that the interventionist actually helps de-block changing, organizing and learning. The contrast between interventions and the process of intervening is compatible with the contrast between change methods and the way leaders perceive, behave and intervene in action. Regardless of the selected intervention methods, the interventionist can behave defensively and be ineffective in the end. While selected interventions can be espoused theory, the process of intervening is governed by one's theory-in-use. Both perspectives are elaborated below.

##### *Interventions<sup>8</sup>*

Cummings and Worley (2004) define an intervention as “a set of sequenced planned actions or events intended to help an organization increase its effectiveness. Interventions purposely disrupt the status quo; they are deliberate attempts to change an organization or subunit toward a different and more effective state” (p. 143). This definition discloses a direct relation with episodic change and the order ‘unfreeze-transition-refreeze’. Argyris’ (1973) definition has a more neutral character: “To intervene is to enter into an ongoing system of relationship, to come between or among persons, groups or objects for the purpose of helping them” (p. 15). In this definition just entering in itself can already be an intervention. According to McCaughan & Palmer (1994), an intervention perspective has two overarching purposes: “to enable the consultant (and the manager seeking advice) to arrive at hypotheses about why the situation is the way it is and to lead the manager (and the consultant) to see the problem situation from new perspectives, and reframe the goings-on they regard as problematical” (p. 32-33).

Several authors describe interventions aiming at de-blocking changing as a consequence of circularity and defensiveness.

Argyris (1990, p. 95) describes four phases that support the capacity to learn in case of blocked changing:

1. Map out how the organization presently deals with problems that are embarrassing and threatening.
2. Help individual players diagnose to what extent each contributes to creating and maintaining the map.

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<sup>8</sup> The word ‘interventions’ reflects a Subject-Object relation in itself. A consistent alternative would be ‘interactions’. In this study ‘interventions’ refer to interactions by an interventionist.



3. Re-educate the players to take model II from an espoused theory to a theory-in-use (start with the top).
4. Repeat the learning experience to solve new problems as they arise.

Argyris (1984, 1990) argues that one should start with the top. This is confirmed by Weick & Quinn (2004), who argue that “most top managers assume that change is something that someone with authority does to someone who does not have authority”. However, to engage the logic of attraction (instead of power), leaders must first make deep changes in themselves. “When deep personal change occurs, leaders then behave differently toward their direct reports, and the new behaviours from followers” (p. 190).

Moeskops (2004), who bases her work on system dynamics, describes three intervention stages that aim at making systemic patterns transparent and debatable.

1. Constructing systemic hypotheses

As systemic patterns are generally hardly recognisable for participants, a third party supports them by analysing and sharing systemic hypotheses.

2. Getting acceptance of systemic hypotheses

Acceptance of systemic hypotheses by participants helps them to create new meaning and often leads to de-blocking changing.

3. Offering concrete recommendations to break through systemic patterns

If insight into systemic hypotheses does not lead to new energy and behaviour, a third party could help by offering concrete recommendations.

McCaughan and Palmer (1994, p. 36-47) focus on asking the right questions and introduce systemic questioning. They suggest approaching systemic patterns with questions from different directions and describe five strategies:

- Establishing circuitry, in order to raise awareness of feedback processes and circular patterns;
- Establishing patterns, in order to find out how people relate to each other in terms of power and relationships;
- Exploring meaning, in order to open up beliefs and meanings that people subscribe to actions and situations;
- Exploring covert rules, in order to get insight into ‘unwritten’ rules;
- Exploring time dimension, in order to explore how the meaning that one ascribes to a situation relates to past or imagined future contexts.

Senge (1990) argues that in most ‘shifting the burden’ structures, there are two possible areas of leverage:

1. Weaken the symptomatic structure and
2. Strengthen the fundamental solution.

He suggests doing this by diminishing the emotional threat that prompts the defensive response in the first place and learning how to deal with defensive routines when they arise. Senge: “to retain their power, defensive routines must remain

undiscussable. Teams stay stuck in their defensive routines only when they pretend that they don't have any defensive routines, that everything is all right, and that they can say 'anything'" (p. 255).

A common thread in the contribution of these authors is their focus on the perspective of a third party. It is not surprising, since it is difficult to get insight into one's own contribution to blocked changing. Unilateral control normally leads to interactions that seem to be obvious in the first place, even for a third party.

Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory might be of great use in helping individuals changing their behavioural patterns that block change processes. To use the power of this theory, feedback should disclose dissonance between cognitions that are relevant to the individual (or team). Two types of dissonance could be visible in blocked change processes.

1. *Dissonance between espoused theory and theory-in-use.* For example, a leader says that he expects employees to come up with ideas. However, as soon as he is confronted with deviant ideas or criticism, he tends to reject these signals. What he says (and wants to do) on the one hand, and what he really does in action on the other hand are dissonant.

2. *Dissonance between assumed effects and observed effects.* For example, a leader assumes that he creates a safer climate in the team by avoiding personal feedback. However, one tends to feel unsafe because one thinks that the boss is not satisfied and this is not debatable.

According to the cognitive dissonance theory, individuals don't feel comfortable with dissonance and will try to reduce or eliminate dissonance. By sharing dissonance with a person, he might choose one of two options in order to reduce or eliminate dissonance: either he changes his assumptions or he changes his attitude and/or behaviour. In the first example (regarding the leader who rejects ideas), he could either be open about his desire to control and tell why and when he tends to tighten the rules, or try to inquire into employees' concerns. In the second example (regarding the leader who wishes a safer climate), the leader could either accept that he does not create a safer climate or try to be open and take time for discussing performance and mutual inquiry.

The preceding interrelated insights can be summarized in an approach, which is described below.

1. Map out how the organization presently keeps itself from changing; develop hypotheses.
2. Help the leader diagnose to what extent he contributes to creating and maintaining the patterns and give insight into the effect of his actions by
  - diminishing the emotional threat by creating an open climate
  - asking questions to help the leader to get insight into his own role
  - sharing insight into dissonance between beliefs (I want to contribute to change) and actions (I contribute to blocked changing)

- sharing feedback on the consequences of the leader's actions/behaviour
  - sharing insight into defensiveness
  - sharing insight into circular processes/producing patterns (concerning leader, employees and consultant)
  - sharing insight into underlying problems that produce the symptoms.
3. Help the leader to make defensiveness debatable without producing more defensiveness, by self-disclosure and by inquiring into the causes of one's own defensiveness (mutual learning model).
  4. Help the leader and other persons to make defensive routines and circularity debatable and develop strategies to pro-actively contribute to changing by mutual inquiry and dialogue.

These 'phases' suggest a planned and linear approach. However, it is rather an overview of activities to be explored. Although there seems to be a 'logical order', it is quite probable that this order cannot always be followed 'in action'.

#### *The process of intervening*

The interventions as described above aim at gaining insight and helping leaders to become aware of their governing values, their behaviours and effects. However, what about the behaviour of the interventionist? There seems to be a similarity with leaders who either contribute to or block changing with daily interactions, regardless of the selected change method. Here, regardless of the selected intervention methods and techniques, the interventionist contributes to (de)blocking changing, organizing and learning in daily interactions. After all, he might be as vulnerable to a unilateral control model as his client, is a part of the system from the moment he enters the door and might show behaviour that bypasses or even activates defensive routines. As a consequence, he might contribute to the problems that the client experiences. This can only be observed in action. Action leads to observable data from which the theories-in-use can be inferred (see Argyris, 1983, 1990, and see further, chapter 6 'Research Methodology').

The interventions as described before regularly refer to feedback, inquiry and dialogue. What exactly do these words mean for the interventionist who wants to contribute to de-blocking changing, organizing and learning? As a starting point, the interventionist's interactions (intervening) should meet the conditions of a mutual learning theory-in-use. Subsequently, consequences for feedback, inquiry and dialogue are relevant to be covered. Since a unilateral control model is an automatically operating program and the alternative is so hard to realize, slowing down the process will be the last issue that will be addressed.

### **Mutual learning model**

If interventionists are willing to help others to understand how one contributes to the problems one faces, and help others to learn alternatives in line with a mutual learning model, they should be able to approach the conditions of a mutual learning theory-in-use themselves.

There is no reason to believe that all the insights that have been described before regarding a unilateral control model and its consequences for changing and organizing cannot be translated to interventionists. In other words, the most important interventions are the interactions with the client system. These interactions should be in line with the governing values of a mutual learning theory-in-use: organize for valid information, leave room for informed and free choice and stimulate personal responsibility and commitment to effective implementation.

*Organize for valid information.* In order to see and understand how he might contribute to recurrent patterns and blocked changing, the interventionist needs to advocate his position and combine it with inquiry and self-reflection. In addition, he has to encourage himself and clients to say what they know yet fear to say. By doing so, he can help others to increase their capacity to confront their own ideas and their role in recurrent patterns. The interventionist trusts his clients have a high capacity for self-reflection and self-examination without becoming so upset or defensive that they lose their effectiveness and their sense of self-responsibility and choice (derived from social virtues as described by Argyris, 1990, 2004).

*Leave room for informed and free choice.* Free choice implies voluntary rather than automatic, and proactive as opposed to reactive (Argyris, 1973). Clients might wish to turn over their free choice to the interventionist. By accepting, the latter would accept the client would lose his free choice and act dependently. Argyris (1973) argues that the interventionist has to resist this pressure, as otherwise the client as well as the interventionist will lose free choice<sup>9</sup>. After all, the latter would be controlled by the client's anxieties. Free choice is essential to be able to feel internally committed. And thus free choice is especially important for those helping activities where the process of help is as important as the actual help. Argyris makes the comparison with a doctor-patient relationship. If the doctor has to surgically treat a bullet wound, free choice for the patient about the method is not needed. However, if the patient has an alcohol problem or high blood pressure, it is important that the patient is fully involved to make an informed (based on valid information) and free choice about the desired course of action (Argyris, 1973). Otherwise, he will not feel internally committed and will probably not succeed in realizing his goals.

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<sup>9</sup> Sharing valid information seems to require the interventionist to be open about this belief, as this will contribute to learning. After all, not accepting to take over the free choice from the client without explaining still has characteristics of unilateral control ('I won't take the free choice from you and will not give you binding advice, as I think that is not good for your internal commitment. But I will not say that to you.') and will probably lead to the client being frustrated. Argyris does not make mention of this.

*Stimulate personal responsibility and commitment to effective implementation.*

Putting a chosen course of action into practice requires the client to feel internally committed. In addition, this way the client will not feel dependent on the interventionist. Actually, the foundation for personal responsibility, ownership and commitment is laid by valid information and free choice.

### **Feedback**

If the interventionist perceives patterns, behaviours or defensive routines that contribute to problems, (how) can he give feedback to the actors? Some authors call for caution, because giving feedback about these routines would easily activate them and make people defensive.

Moeskops emphasizes the risk of resistance when feeding back systemic hypotheses, especially if the pattern includes the role of specific persons. Therefore, third parties should be cautious and consider not sharing systemic hypotheses (immediately). McCaughan and Palmer (1994, p. 71 - 77) describe three ways of dealing with systemic hypotheses:

1. Addressing the client system
2. Addressing the client
3. Addressing oneself

Addressing the client system seems to have the highest impact, however, might easily lead to resistance and lack of understanding. Sitting side by side with the client is less stressful. If the client takes time out to analyse his own situation, one might even decide to address hypotheses only to oneself.

However, the call for caution might be an expression of unilateral control: do not confront persons' reasoning or actions, since they are not able to manage. This is a way of bypassing their defensiveness. This critical note is in line with Argyris, when he says: "But if the source of the defensive feelings were that they would have to examine their automatic dependency/distancing activities, then perhaps the defensive feelings should not be bypassed" (1990, p.127). According to Senge, the challenge is to confront defensiveness without producing more defensiveness, by self-disclosure and by inquiring into the causes of one's own defensiveness (1990, p. 255).

### **Inquiry and dialogue**

William Isaacs (1999) published an interesting book, called 'Dialogue – and the art of thinking together'. This work contributes to the debate on how to overcome organizational defensiveness.

The way Isaacs describes the art of Dialogue highly resembles the characteristics of a mutual learning model. Dialogue, as he defines it, "is a conversation with a center, not sides (p. 19). An analysis of the word 'dialogue' leads to two meanings. First, dialogue is a flow of meaning. 'Logos' can be translated as 'relationship' as well. This makes dialogue "a conversation in which people think together in relationship" (p.

19). "Thinking together implies that you no longer take your own position as final. You relax your grip on certainty and listen to the possibilities that result simply from being in a relationship with others – possibilities that might not otherwise have occurred" (p. 19).

Isaacs presents a number of insights that can be helpful in finding out what interactions help to de-block changing, organizing and learning. He describes behaviours that relate to unilateral control or mutual learning and links these behaviours to discussion versus dialogue.

In line with the contents of this study, Isaacs describes how people tend to defend their views and sustain their positions. Besides, he states that we often do things we do not intend and do not always see the forces that are operational below the surface of our conversations. "As individuals, this leads people to misread both what others are doing and the impact that they themselves are likely to have on others. In groups and organizations, it leads people continuously to find that efforts to make change are neutralized by other, well-intentioned individuals who have very different goals and ways of seeing the world" (p. 30). People are not aware, because they are focused on their vision and defending their position. The danger is that we construct assumptions about others and situations and finally translate them into beliefs that we adopt. "These beliefs tend to remain relatively stable and hard to change. We can easily become locked into a way of thinking that is hard to change" (p. 97). As we found earlier, this situation leads to circular patterns.

In addition, Isaacs describes how people act in ways that are problematic. With a case study he illustrates how people judge and do not admit to it, how they cover up and act like they are not; how they push for their point of view but resist others to do the same; and how they attribute to others that they would not be interested or open to tackling the 'real' difficulties and so do not raise them (p. 32). These insights are in line with and a further confirmation of a unilateral control model.

The challenge is to find out how to break through one's fixed beliefs and communicative patterns that are meant to defend these beliefs. In Isaacs' words, this means to develop from discussion, which is defensive, to dialogue. Unlike discussion, dialogue seeks to open possibilities and see new options. Discussion seeks closure and completion. "Dialogue is about evoking insight, which is a way of reordering our knowledge – particularly the taken-for-granted assumptions that people bring to the table" (p. 45). While discussion aims at solving a problem, dialogue is seen as dissolving a problem by being open to new insights and definitions. This line of thinking is compatible with Van Dijk (1989). Fixed beliefs that reconfirm themselves and lead to circularity fit his notion of reification. In his view, overcoming reifications requires variety (other beliefs and insights). The duality of solving and dissolving, as described by Isaacs, also fits the distinction between single-loop and double-loop learning (Argyris, 1990), as discussed in section 2.6.

According to Isaacs, individuals have two fundamental choice points: the first one is between defend and suspend. And if one chooses to be defensive, one can subsequently choose one of two options: create either productive defensiveness or unproductive defensiveness. Figure 4.1 shows these choices.

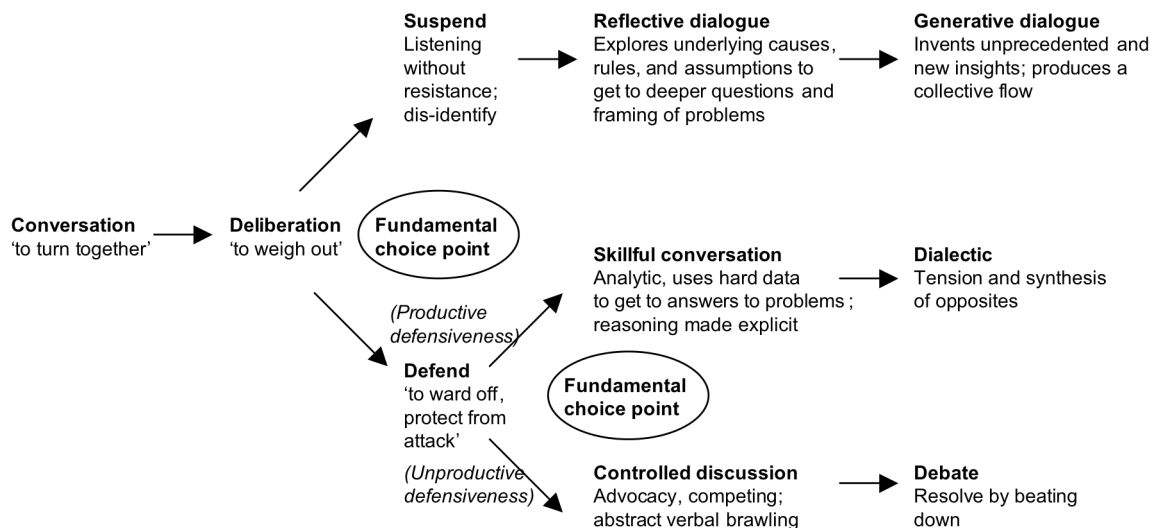


Fig 4.1 Fundamental choices (Isaacs, 1999)

Isaacs presupposes the opportunity to make conscious choices. As we have learned earlier, by and large, individuals tend to hold a unilateral control theory-in-use, *and are not aware of it*. Making conscious choices is already in conflict with a unilateral control model and is a first step to overcoming defensiveness. This finding is in line with Schein (1993), who argues that dialogue does not primarily focus our attention to listening to the other, but on getting in touch with (particularly our own) underlying assumptions that automatically determine when we choose to speak and what we choose to say.

Interventions by a third party may help to make people aware of their thinking and behaviour. According to Isaacs (who refers to Galwey, 1997), "[...] awareness is curative. As people become more conscious of the ways in which they unintentionally undermine themselves, they begin to make changes to reduce these difficulties" (p. 188).

By describing the alternative, dialogue, interestingly enough Isaacs refers to Argyris: "At the core of producing a set of actions that can truly bring about change is what Argyris calls 'balancing advocacy and inquiry'" (p. 188). Advocacy refers to speaking openly what one thinks, speaking for a point of view. Inquiry means looking into what one does not yet know, what one does not yet understand or seeking to discover what other people see and understand that may be in conflict with one's point of view. Inquiry refers to asking questions that "seek to understand the rules that govern why people do what they do as much as to challenge what they do" (p. 188).

Balancing advocacy and inquiry requires learning how to make explicit the thinking that leads one to say what one says and ask the questions that help others to do the same (compare overcoming the 'cheating game', as described in section 3.2). Some additional characteristics of inquiry and reflective dialogue can be derived from Isaacs. First, people stop talking for others, or for the group. They speak for themselves (advocacy). Second, by reflective dialogue people are willing to explore their assumptions. As a consequence, they can be surprised that they are forced to slow down and think. Third, new meaning may unfold from different directions at once.

Intervening by the interventionist means helping others to become aware of their own fixed beliefs and unconscious behaviours, to advocate their own insights and inquire in order to find alternatives. In order to be consistent and to avoid a Subject-Object relationship, one has to be able to balance advocacy and inquiry (reflective dialogue) oneself.

### **Slowing down**

A unilateral control model is a highly automatic and deeply embedded theory-in-use. Because the vast majority of people is so competent in the skills that are required in this model, people are able to communicate and behave 'without thinking'. This is helpful in relatively simple situations. However, in case of situations that are dynamically complex, embarrassing or threatening, this model is no longer appropriate. This means that people cannot depend on their automatic programs anymore. Especially in non-routine change situations and if change processes fail time after time, there is a need to 'slow down' 'automatic' behaviour and strategies that are based on unilateral control and investigate alternatives that are in line with mutual learning.

Slowing down might be difficult in everyday practice. Reflective dialogue is not a usual strategy when people have to run a business. It might be in conflict with the decisive leaders one often calls for and with the partner-in-business the interventionist is expected to be.

These findings argue for an intervention perspective that not only involves a description of interventions, but also a vision on the process of intervening.



## PART II EMPIRICAL STUDY



## 5. Research questions

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter is the start of the empirical study. In the next section the central concepts in the theoretical exploration are summarized, since they play an important role in the research questions. The subsequent section introduces the research questions of the empirical study. The questions are related to the diagnostic model that was introduced in section 2.9 (figure 2.20).

### 5.2 Central concepts

In this section the central concepts in this study are summarized.

In change projects most attention is paid to the approach and method: what steps and interventions lead from the current to the desired situation (see Werkman, 2005). In practice, blocked change processes often have their roots in *daily interactions* that emerge regardless of the selected change approach (Argyris, 1990, 2000, 2004; Weick and Quin, 1999). The focus of this study is on daily interactions between leaders, employees and consultants and how these interactions relate to the (de)blocking of change processes. This study particularly addresses change processes that are tough, when problems recur time after time, when obvious interventions produce nonobvious consequences. Senge (1990) calls these situations dynamically complex. Therefore, the concept *dynamically complex change processes* has been introduced. This study builds on the scientific traditions of organizational learning and systems thinking. In these traditions, the concept of *unilateral control* plays an important role in the explanation of how daily interactions contribute to blocked change. According to some authors (e.g. Argyris, 1990, 2004; Senge, 1990; Boonstra, 2004; Campbell et al., 1994; McCaughan & Palmer, 1994; Putnam, 1999; Georgesen & Harris, 1998; Noonan, 2007; Schwarz, 2002), leaders have a strong inclination to activate a unilateral control model, particularly under circumstances that create pressure, threat and/or embarrassment. This model instructs them to impose their beliefs, opinions and change ambitions unilaterally upon others. As the theoretical exploration illustrates, expressions of unilateral control relate to leaders' perception of organization problems, behaviours, interventions, and design and change of organization.

When leaders and their consultants talk about change approaches and methods, they tend to focus on episodic change: change is separated from organization and considered to be a timely period of change in between two stable organizations. Weick & Quinn (1999) introduce 'continuous change', which is used "to group together organizational changes that tend to be ongoing, evolving and cumulative.

A common presumption is that change is emergent, meaning that is ‘the realization of a new pattern of organizing in the absence of explicit a priori intentions’” (p. 373). In order to relate to the ongoing process in daily interactions, this study uses the (active) term *continuous changing*. Unlike (episodic) change and organization, changing cannot be separated from organizing and learning (Boonstra, 2004). By studying daily interactions, this study focuses on the continuous process of *changing, organizing and learning*.

Interactions becoming tough, problems recurring time after time, and obvious interventions that produce nonobvious consequences are expressions of a *blocked* process of changing, organizing and learning. The assumption is that under these circumstances *circular patterns* evolve: certain behaviour of one party leads to specific behaviour of another party that, in turn, reinforces the behaviour of the first party. Nothing is only a cause or only an effect. In systems thinking everything is both cause *and* effect (Senge, 1990). As long as one does not consider one’s own contribution, circular patterns lead to ongoing recurrent problems. Considering one’s own role preconceives the ability and willingness to learn and to be open about error. Unilateral control, however, leads to *defensive routines* that aim at covering error up. Defensive routines are considered to be actions that prevent individuals or segments of the organizations from experiencing embarrassment or threat. This makes defensive routines anti-learning (Argyris, 1990). Defensive routines thus contribute to ongoing ineffective patterns and growing error.

As unilateral control seems to lead to blocked changing, organizing and learning, Argyris has introduced an alternative model: *mutual learning*. While unilateral control instructs leaders to persuade or even intimidate others to comply and – thus – stifles internal commitment, the governing values of a mutual learning theory-in-use aim at real commitment, because one makes free choices based upon valid information (Argyris, 1990, 2000, 2004; Schwartz, 2002; Noonan, 2007). An assumption is that *interventions* can contribute to de-blocking changing, organizing and learning. Interventions can be both (designed) methods and interactions by a third party (an interventionist). The focus in this study is on the interactions, or the ‘process of intervening’.

### 5.3 Research questions

The theoretical exploration leads to three research questions that will be studied empirically. The research questions are depicted in figure 5.1.

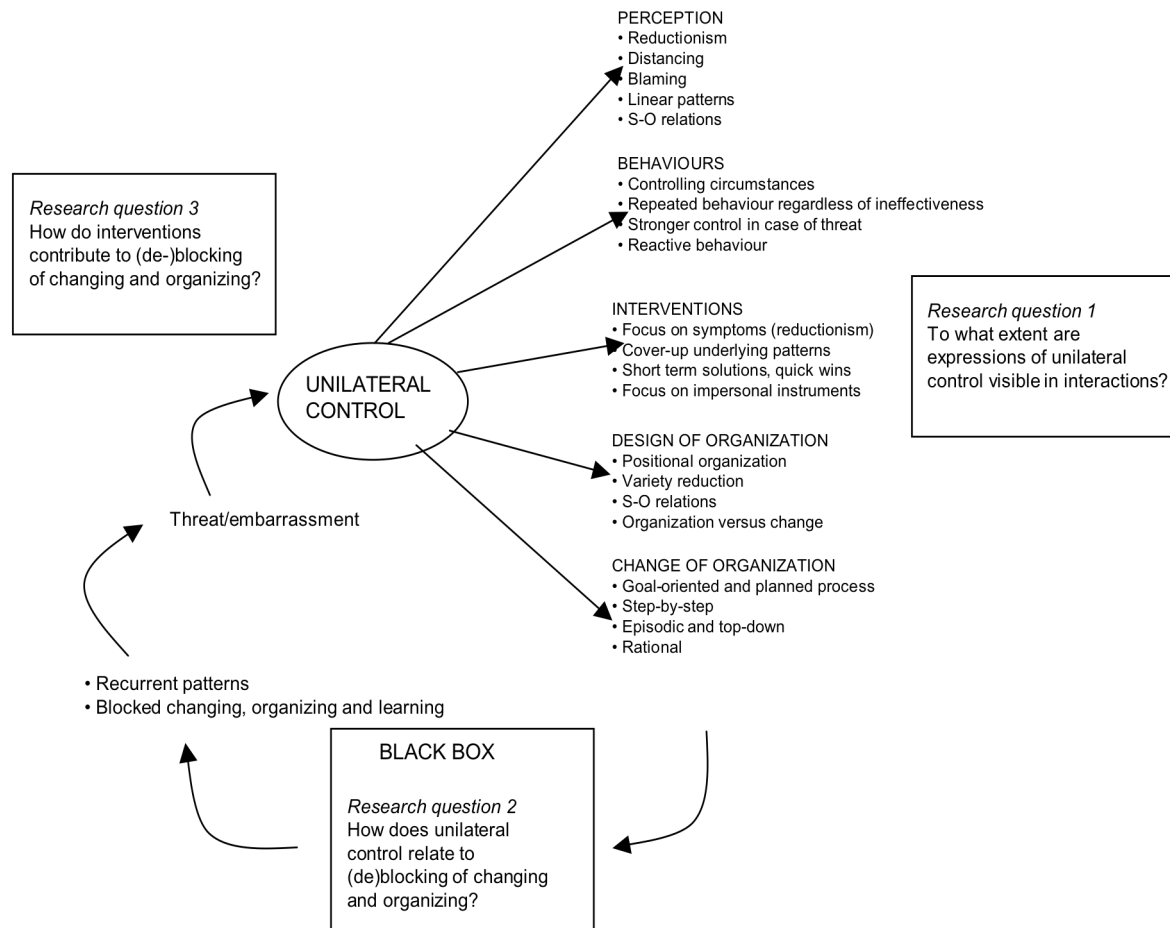


Figure 5.1 Research questions related to theory

#### Research question 1:

*To what extent are the expressions of unilateral control visible in interactions?*

The aim is to develop and validate a diagnostic model that helps to recognize and understand expressions of a unilateral control model in daily interactions of leaders.

In order to be able to observe the phenomena as described, theoretical notions should be formulated unambiguously, regardless of whether the research is quantitative or qualitative (Van der Zwaan, 1990). In table 5.1 the expressions of a unilateral control model are translated in tentative operational descriptions.

Alternatives in order to de-block changing, organizing and learning are summarized as well. The descriptions are based upon the theoretical exploration. The most important sources are mentioned in the table. The descriptions will be further explored in the empirical study. In table 5.1 the operational translations as well as the alternatives have been encoded. These codes will be used in the empirical study.

<i>Consequences of unilateral control that tend to block change processes</i>	<i>Operational translation</i>	<i>Alternatives in order to de-block change processes (D)</i>
PERCEPTION (P)		
• Reductionism (Van Dongen et al., 1996)	Reducing complex patterns to simple and manageable categories of incidents and problems – P reduction	Trying to understand the dynamically complex patterns - P dynamic (D)
• Distancing (Argyris, 1990; De Man, 2003)	Putting oneself outside 'the problem' and observing 'the problem' from a distance – P distancing	Involving one's own contribution to recurrent problems and patterns– P own (D)
• Blaming (Argyris, 1990; Senge, 1990)	Considering one or more parties as being 'the cause' of the problem – P blaming	Considering mutual influences between parties – P mutual (D)
• Linear patterns (Campbell et al., 1994; McCaughan and Palmer, 1994; Senge, 1990)	Considering only one-way causal relationships between cause and effect – P linear	Considering circular patterns: each party or element is both cause and effect – P circular (D)
• Subject-Object Hosking, 2004	Considering leader as an active Subject that imposes reality on employees, being passive Objects – P Subject-Object	Considering leader and employees as well-thinking individuals who can make well-informed choices and take responsibility – P Subject-Subject (D)
BEHAVIOUR (B)		
• Controlling circumstances (Argyris, 1990, 2000, 2004; Schwarz, 2002; Noonan, 2007)	Showing the desire to win, suppress feelings, to avoid testing one's own assumptions, to judge others, to be rational and to avoid situations that are considered to be difficult to control or have uncertain outcomes – B control	Aiming at valid information (which includes information that may cause embarrassment or may be difficult to deal with), informed and free choice, and personal responsibility and commitment to effective implementation – B valid (D)
• Repeated behaviour regardless of ineffectiveness (Argyris, 1990, 2000,	Showing the same behaviour time after time, regardless of whether it is effective – B repeat	Reflecting on one's own effectiveness and exploring alternatives – B reflection (D)

<p>2004; Drukker, 1999)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stronger control in case of threat (Argyris, 1990, 2000, 2004; Drukker, 1999)</li> <li>• Reactive behaviour (Argyris, 1990, 2000, 2004; Senge, 1990)</li> </ul>	<p>Showing even more controlling behaviour if one experiences threat from the environment (e.g. feedback, time pressure, pressure on results, pressure from shareholders or clients) – B control ↑</p> <p>Expecting solutions to start outside oneself (by others) - B reactive</p>	<p>Testing one's assumptions; learning by advocating one's own position and encouraging inquiry into it, and minimizing face saving – B inquiry (D)</p> <p>Taking initiative to open inquiry and change one's behaviour proactively – B proactive (D)</p>
<p>INTERVENTIONS (I)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on symptoms (reductionism) (Senge, 1990; Van Dongen et al., 1996; Argyris, 1990, 2000, 2004)</li> <li>• Cover up underlying patterns (Senge, 1990; Argyris, 1990, 2000, 2004)</li> <li>• Short-term solutions, quick wins (Senge, 1990; Argyris, 1990, 2000, 2004)</li> <li>• Focus on impersonal instruments (Senge, 1990; Argyris, 1990, 2000, 2004; Isaacs, 1999; Schein 1993)</li> </ul>	<p>Focusing on the visible problems that should be solved – I symptoms</p> <p>Avoiding inquiry into more fundamental problems/patterns that 'produce' the recurrent symptomatic problems – I cover-up</p> <p>Focusing on quick and practical symptomatic solutions (pragmatic short-term perspective) – I short-term</p> <p>Preferring instrumental ways of 'solving or controlling the problem', e.g. instruments, techniques, tips 'n tricks, scorecards, and procedures – I instruments</p>	<p>Distinguishing problem symptoms from underlying fundamental problems/patterns that 'produce' symptoms – I patterns (D)</p> <p>Inquiring into underlying problems/patterns and defensive routines that aim at covering up these patterns, including one's own defensive routines – I inquiry (D)</p> <p>Focusing on approaches to de-block change processes in the longer run (fundamental long-term perspective) – I long-term (D)</p> <p>Focusing on learning by reflection, inquiry and dialogue – I reflection (D)</p>
<p>DESIGN OF ORGANIZATION (O)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positional organization (Wierdsma, 2004)</li> </ul>	<p>Considering organization as a hierarchical division of people based on the degree to which they have an overview of and</p>	<p>Considering organizing as a process of ongoing transactions, relationships and meaning creation; focus on processes and</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variety reduction (Wierdsma, 2004)</li> <li>• Subject-Object relations (Hosking, 2004)</li> <li>• Organization and change separated entities (Hosking, 2004; Weick and Quinn, 1999)</li> </ul>	<p>insight into the organization; focusing on structure and boundaries – O positional</p> <p>Using procedures and structures to reduce deviations as much as possible – O variety reduction</p> <p>Considering active leader and reactive employees as sharply separated entities – O Subject-Object</p> <p>Considering organization as a stable condition and change as an episodic period in between an old stability and a new and desired stability – O episodic</p>	<p>interfaces (transitional) – O transitional (D)</p> <p>Accepting several perspectives and meanings – O variety (D)</p> <p>Considering Subject-Subject relations, based on equality: each party is part of the 'system' and plays his role in the process of changing, organizing and learning – O subject-subject (D)</p> <p>Considering organizing and changing as interlocked processes that cannot be sharply separated – O continuous (D)</p>
<p>CHANGE OF ORGANIZATION (C)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goal-oriented and planned process (Boonstra, 2004; Werkman, 2006)</li> <li>• Step-by-step (Boonstra, 2004; Werkman, 2006)</li> <li>• Episodic and top-down (Weick and Quinn, 1999; Boonstra, 2004)</li> <li>• Rational (Weick and Quinn, 1999; Boonstra, 2004)</li> </ul>	<p>Developing elaborative plans that describe the steps that lead to clear goals along a linear path - C planned</p> <p>Focusing on stages and steps; the output of each stage is logically input for the next stage – C step-by-step</p> <p>Considering change as a logical result of (top-down) initiatives, that will not evolve otherwise – C top-down</p> <p>Emphasizing rational analyses and considerations – C rational</p>	<p>Process-oriented, focusing on value and effects of daily interactions – C process (D)</p> <p>Focusing on daily interactions between leader, employees (and consultants) – C interactions (D)</p> <p>Considering human beings as being able to change continually and improve autonomously, without any force by others – C autonomous (D)</p> <p>Emphasising emergent processes of changing, organizing and learning – C interactions (D)</p>

*Table 5.1 Operational definitions*



*Research question 2:*

*How does unilateral control relate to (de-)blocking of changing, organizing and learning?*

The conceptual model presumes a relation between the expressions of unilateral control and blocked changing, organizing and learning. This relation, however, is considered to be a black box, as there is little evidence-based information available about this relation<sup>10</sup>.

The aim is to get evidence-based insight into the consequences of unilateral control on changing, organizing and learning.

Based on the theoretical exploration, this research question can be translated into four specific questions:

- How do expressions of unilateral control contribute to recurrent problems?
- What circular patterns are visible?
- What defensive routines are visible?
- How do leaders de-block changing, organizing and learning?

*Research question 3:*

*How do interventions contribute to (de-)blocking changing, organizing and learning?*

The aim of this research question is to develop an intervention perspective that contributes to de-blocking changing, organizing and learning. This intervention perspective has to offer practitioners insights they can actually apply in their practice (see also chapter 6 'Research methodology').

This research question not only addresses interventions (the 'what'), but also the process of intervening (the 'how'), as discussed in section 4.4.

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<sup>10</sup> Compare Latour (1987), who introduced the concept of 'black box', which is a metaphor borrowed from cybernetics denoting a piece of machinery that 'runs by itself'. This means, when a series of instructions are too complicated to be repeated time after time, a black box is drawn around it, meaning it to function only by giving it 'input' and 'output' data.



## **6. Research methodology**

### **6.1 Introduction**

Denise Rousseau (2006) published an article titled 'Is there such a thing as 'evidence-based management'?' In this article she calls for a better translation of research evidence into practices that solve organizational problems. In her opinion, the gap between research and practice is large. She feels managers rely largely on personal experience and bad advice from business books or consultants based on weak evidence.

The challenge of this study is contributing to bridge this gap. The next section addresses the scope of this study and describes how the research method aims at the development of a practice theory. The subsequent section describes methodological considerations and addresses in particular the conditions that have to be met in order to be consistent with the contents of this study. The last section presents the research design, combining longitudinal case studies and action research.

### **6.2 Scope of this study**

Rousseau's observation about the gap between research and practice is applicable to the subject of this study. Numerous insights have been developed on a unilateral control model, blocked changing and organizing, defensive routines and recurrent patterns. Nevertheless, few of these insights are a foundation for management decision-making and management behaviour. It is not the lack of concepts that seems to be the problem. Rather, it seems to be the lack of clear and specific illustrations of how these concepts work out exactly in action. Added value is not in developing new concepts. Instead, it is in the way these (abstract) concepts are being consumed and translated (Latour, 1987).

This study aims at contributing to reduce the gap between research and practice through explicit and specific illustrations of how changing, organizing and learning are being blocked by a unilateral control model and how de-blocking can be realized. This methodology is in line with Argyris, who suggested already in 1983 that "we must go beyond beliefs, values and attitudes (that is, beyond espoused theories) to collect relatively directly observable data from which to infer the theories-in-use" (p. 119). This study also fits Latour's (1987) methodological dictum that science and technology must be studied 'in action' or 'in the making'.

In the end, this study leads to a diagnosis and intervention theory that can be indicated as a practice theory. This is considered to be a system of logically interrelated and not conflicting opinions and concepts regarding a professional area,

which are formulated in such a way that they offer insights for one or more professional groups which they can actually apply in their practice (Marx, 1975; Mastenbroek, 1991).

### 6.3 Methodological considerations

Conducting research can be perceived as an intervention in itself and contributes to change processes (Bouwen, 1994). As a consequence, the contents and assumptions in this study have direct effects on the research design. In order to be consistent, in the empirical study two major issues have to be addressed.

*1. Focus on processes of changing, organizing and learning rather than separate instances or elements.* As described in the theoretical exploration, a part of the problems to be studied is an inclination to reduce complex processes to controllable problems that can be solved in a linear way. In order to be consistent, this should be avoided in this study. The research approach should give insight into interactions rather than instances and dynamically complex situations rather than simple or routine situations. As a consequence, the research design has to support data collection during a longer period. Besides, a proper design contributes to insight into dynamically complex patterns.

*2. Inconsistency between espoused theory and theory-in-use.* The theoretical exploration refers to the risk of inconsistency between what leaders think or say and what they really do in action. It is exactly this inconsistency that is part of the problems to be studied. Valuable insights into processes require a research design that reveals theories-in-use. In an interview or questionnaire participants might easily show their espoused theories. This is confirmed by Werkman (2005), who has used these methods in order to describe circular patterns. The challenge is to design a research process that helps to get insight into what one really does in action. It is important to put an emphasis on the “spontaneous, tacit theories-in-use ... especially whenever feelings of embarrassment or threat come into play” (Argyris & Schön, 1991, p. 86). Eden (1994) even argues that when subjects do not have to commit to real actions, any data that are gained are considered to be unreliable. All information might be espoused and inconsistent with real behaviour.

These conditions lead to some methodological considerations. In order to maximize external validity, referring to the extent to which findings can be generalized (Yin, 1994), a quantitative research approach would be preferable. Surveys, for example, can demonstrate the link between data and outcomes transparently (Eden & Huxham, 1996). Although research in a positivistic tradition has clear advantages, there seems to be some relation with a unilateral control model that would challenge consistency of this study. Typical characteristics that seem to be applicable to this kind of research are:

- *Distancing* (Argyris, 1990). The researcher considers him- or herself as being outside the area that is being studied. This way, the possible influence of the researcher on the observed phenomena is neglected.
- *Subject-Object construct of relations* (Hoskings, 2004). The researcher is conceived to be the active and knowing Subject, who conducts a research to understand the passive and unknowing Object in order to determine what should be done upon the Object to be effective.
- *Entities and instances* (Hoskings, 2004). Focus is on separated entities (factors and features) that are relatively stable rather than on interlocked systems and on instances (moments) rather than on processes.
- *Linear relations* (Senge, 1990; McCaughan and Palmer, 1994). Often, the attention is paid to linear relations between entities rather than to ongoing circular patterns.
- *Reductionism* (Van Dongen et al., 1996). If complex patterns are reduced to entities and instances, the outcomes will not offer insight into the (dynamically complex) processes.

Taking these characteristics into consideration, positivistic research seems to be less suitable for understanding areas with a dynamic complexity, as opposed to situations with a high detail complexity (Senge, 1990). Positivistic research seems to be highly suitable for 'what' questions, while the challenge of this study is to address 'how' and 'why' questions (see Yin, 1989).

Table 6.1 summarizes the characteristics of a positivistic research design with the challenges of research in dynamically complex situations.

<b>Positivistic research</b>	<b>Research in dynamically complex situations</b>
Dynamically simple, detailed complex	Dynamically complex
Unilateral control	Mutual learning
Distancing	Involving one's own role in research processes
Subject-Object	Subject-Subject
Isolated/separated entities (factors, problems)	Underlying patterns that produce problems
Linear	Circular
Single-loop	Double-loop
Structure	Process

*Table 6.1 Positivistic research in relation to research in dynamically complex situations*

This discussion relates to the comparison of reductionism and holism (Eikelenboom, 2005). The reductionist approach is based on a positivist epistemology: reality can be reduced to parts (factors, problems). Studying and understanding these parts give insight into the whole (Harkema, 2004). This approach stands opposed to the holistic approach. Holism is based on a post-positivist epistemology. Some characteristics of this approach (based on Eikelenboom, 2005):

- Subject-Object relations as problematic
- Based on complexity science

- Relations are considered to be non-linear
- Simulations and qualitative research methods as alternative for positivist-quantitative methods.

All in all, in this study the conditions in the right column of table 6.1 are perceived as challenges. In sections 11.6 and 11.7 the empirical study is methodologically evaluated.

## 6.4 Research design

The preceding discussion leads to a qualitative research design that should support data collection during a longer period, insight into dynamically complex patterns, insight into what managers really do in action (research questions 1 and 2) and what interventionists do in interaction with managers (research question 3).

Neither experiments nor simulations meet all these conditions, since they do not support insight into daily interactions during a longer period. A multiple longitudinal case study design (Van der Zwaan, 1990) can meet these conditions. Several authors have stated that case studies, if conducted appropriately, lead to sound scientific research (Yin, 1994; Eisenhardt, 1989; Van der Zwaan, 1990). A major advantage of case studies is the opportunity for thorough and in-depth analysis that is especially of value in complex situations. When the phenomena that are being studied cannot be isolated and the behaviour cannot be controlled in a direct, precise and systematic way, a case study is more appropriate than an experiment (Yin, 1994). In longitudinal case studies processes are studied during a longer period (Van der Zwaan, 1990).

Within case studies, several research methods are available to collect data. A common approach to study interactions is non-participative or participative observation (Moug, 2007). These methods do not meet the conditions of this study, since they do not particularly involve the active role of the interventionist in the patterns that evolve. A more suitable approach for studying the interactions of managers and interventionist is action research (Eden & Huxham, 1996). Action research supports the study of theories-in-use. Unlike participative observation, in action research the role of the active observer is being observed as well. "Action research involves the researcher in working with members of an organization over a matter which is of genuine concern to them and in which there is an intent by the organization members to take action based on the intervention" (Eden & Huxham, 1996, p. 527).

A specific action research approach is Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Zandee & Cooperrider, 2007; Ludema & Fry, 2007). According to the authors who introduced this approach (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987), Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is based upon four principles: research into the social (innovation) potential of organizational life should begin with appreciation, should be applicable, should be provocative (in the sense that it should contribute to improvement), and should be collaborative. The authors argue that “a unilateral approach to the study of social innovation (bringing something new into the social world) is a direct negation of the phenomenon itself” (p. 154). This argument matches the contents of this study precisely. Recent contributions about AI illustrate some additional characteristics that are highly relevant to this study. First, AI is not about implementing a change, but it is about the process of changing (Ludema & Fry, 2007; Bushe & Coetzer, 1995). Second, AI replaces intervention by inquiry: learning, discovering and sharing information (Ludema & Fry, 2007). Third, AI is considered to leverage the generative capacity of dialogue (Gergen et al., 2004). Fourth, AI reflects a strong commitment to learning as a way to change or develop (Ludema & Fry, 2007; Bushe & Khamisa, 2005). If one considers these characteristics of AI, this form of action research seems to be consistent with the contents of this study and, therefore, appropriate as a research method. However, one major characteristic of AI does not fit the research questions of this study. AI focuses on the ‘positive core’ of organizations: “its greatest strengths, assets, capacities, capabilities, values, traditions, practices, accomplishments, and so on” (Ludema & Fry, 2007, p. 293). The focus of this study, however, is not the positive core of organizations. Instead, this study aims first of all at understanding how leaders unintendedly contribute to blocked changing, organising and learning. Insight into their contribution to recurrent problems should, subsequently, contribute to develop alternative behaviour. This focus is in line with Fineman (2006), who argues that ‘in exclusively favoring positive narratives, appreciative inquiry fails to value the opportunities for positive change that are possible from negative experiences, such as embarrassing events, periods of anger, anxiety, fear, or shame’ (p. 275, quoted by Zandee & Cooperrider, 2007). Although some characteristics of AI are highly relevant to this study and in line with general characteristics of action research (Eden & Huxham, 1996), this ‘appreciative’ aspect of AI makes this specific approach not suitable for this study.

Still, action research in general meets the conditions of this study. Action research acknowledges that the researcher is visible and is expected to have an impact on the experiment (Eden & Huxham, 1996). Just by working with the participants the researcher is able to get insight into their behaviours in action, from which their theories-in-use can be inferred (Argyris, 1990). With this approach it is possible to observe processes over a period. This is especially interesting because of the delay that characterises fundamental change processes (Senge, 1990). In order to come close to a Subject-Subject relation, it is important to work together and reduce the distance as much as possible. In this study learning by reflection has played a pivotal role. At this point, the study meets a major characteristic of action science, as described by Argyris. “Action scientists assume that learning is the first and

overarching objective for the researcher, the clients and the system in which they are embedded” (Argyris, 1983, p. 16). This makes this study a learning study for the researcher as well, as the approach incorporates the (effectiveness of the) interventionist’s role.

As to research question 3, design-based research should be considered as well (Van Aken, 2004b). Van Aken, (2004a) describes this method as a specific way of conducting action research. Design-based research aims at solving the rigor-relevance dilemma (Andriessen, 2004): “Management theory is either scientifically proven, but then too reductionistic and hence too broad or too trivial to be of much practical relevance, or relevant to practice, but then lacking sufficient rigorous justification” (Van Aken, 2004b, p. 221). Design-based research combines solving field problems with developing general knowledge regarding the relation between an intervention and a desired outcome (Van Aken, 2004b, p. 221). This means that the research process supports the development of scientific knowledge through solving problems in practice (Stam, 2007). This characteristic, which also applies to action research in general, is highly relevant to this study. The problem-solving process consists of four phases (Stam, 2007; Van Strien, 1997): defining the problem, planning the intervention, applying the intervention and evaluating the intervention. This planned and relatively linear process does not support a proper study of research question 3. This study not only addresses interventions, but also the process of intervening that involves expressions of unilateral control and defensive patterns. These patterns cannot be planned, but evolve in action. This study does not emphasize planned interventions, which can easily be espoused theory, but focuses on interventionists’ real interactions, which are based on their theories-in-use. As a consequence, design-based research seems to be less appropriate to this study.

Altogether, this study follows a research design that combines multiple longitudinal case studies (Van der Zwaan, 1990) and action research (Eden & Huxham, 1996).

#### *Methodological conditions*

The methodology in this study combines multiple (longitudinal) case studies and action research. A methodologically robust design thus meets the conditions of case study research as well as action research.

Yin (1994) mentions four criteria that have to be met in order to produce sound case study research.

1. Construct validity, referring to correct operational measures for the theoretical concept being studied.
2. Internal validity, referring to the robustness of assumed causal relationships, whereby certain conditions are shown to lead to other conditions, as distinguished from spurious relationships.
3. External validity, referring to the extent to which findings can be generalized.



4. Reliability, referring to the condition that the study can be repeated with the same outcomes.

Construct validity, according to Yin, can be realized by three techniques, which have guided this study. First, different sources have been used to develop concepts in the theoretical exploration. Subsequently these concepts have been translated to operational definitions. Second, much attention has been paid to a logical 'chain of evidence'. All outcomes of each case refer in a transparent way to observations. Furthermore, each case description contains a number of reflections that describe temporary conclusions. Third, during the course of each case temporary findings have been shared with actors. This technique is inextricably bound up with action research.

In order to enlarge internal validity Yin, again, describes three techniques. With 'pattern matching' empirical findings are compared with the assumptions that were based on the theoretical exploration. The use of multiple cases means outcomes can be both similar and conflicting. 'Explanation building' is applied by checking the findings of case 1, as well as case 2, in subsequent cases. The technique of 'time-series' is applied by following specific observations during a longer period. This technique, again, characterizes action research.

External validity, in this study, concerns analytical generalisation (as opposed to statistical generalisation). Multiple case studies offer the opportunity of literal replication, in which several case studies lead to the same conclusions. In this study, three separate cases with different contexts and histories have been studied.

The outcomes of each case have been compared with the other cases and with the theory. Multiple case studies are also appropriate for theoretical replication (different outcomes that can be explained by the theoretical model).

As analysis in the case studies is based on observations, conversations and interventions in a certain context, atmosphere and process, repeatability is relatively low. This might have consequences for reliability. However, through a thorough description of the course of the study, one could replicate a similar study in a different environment.

This study needs to meet conditions for proper action research as well. A major concern of action research is the external validity, which refers to representativeness or generalisability (Kerlinger & Lee, 1999). Eden & Huxham (1996) have some remarks on this assumed constraint. First, action research gives insight into the theories-in-use of participants, which enlarges reliability of results. Second, to enlarge external validity, one should pay attention to the role and context of the case that is being studied. Third, one should triangulate. "Triangulation of research data refers to the method of checking their validity by approaching the research question from as many different angles as possible and employing redundancy in data collection" (Denzin, 1989, quoted by Eden & Huxham (1996), p. 536). According to Denzin, this is an argument for using several approaches where each approach acts as a cross-check on others.

Regarding the reliability of action research, Eden & Huxham (1996) argue that when subjects do not have to commit to real action that has an impact on their own future, any data gained from them will probably be unreliable.

Eden & Huxham (1996) describe fifteen characteristics of action research (see table 6.2). They consider the characteristics one to ten as reflecting internal validity and 12 to 15 as reflecting external validity.

These characteristics have been input for the design of the study and offer the opportunity for afterward checks and criticism of this research. Although this research method highly qualifies the aims of this study, Eden & Huxham (1996) argue that the standards as described in table 6.2 are hard to achieve. In addition, they argue that “what is important is having a sense of the standards that make for good action research and evaluating the research in relation to them” (p. 538-539).

#### *Data collection: moving moments*

In the empirical study, data have been collected in three cases. The case studies incorporate different research methods, aiming at triangulation (Eden & Huxham, 1996):

- observations of managers and their staff members in meetings
- interventions and observations of consequences
- narratives analysis based on individual sessions and group meetings
- diagramming of circular patterns
- analysis of communication documents (emails, minutes of meetings and memos).

The emphasis has been on narratives and interactions, as these are considered to be most reliable to infer theories-in-use from. Communication documents could represent espoused theories.

In this study, the concept of *moving moments* is introduced. This concept refers to important and distinctive moments that illustrate how changing is being blocked or supported. In order to recognize these moments, the process of ongoing interactions has to be slowed down (compare a movie that is a series of successive moments) until the slowly moving moments are perceived.

Literal transcripts have been the basis of data analysis. The transcripts have been made without a tape-recorder. The assumption is that this may inhibit discussion. Schein subscribes to this assumption, while Argyris is a regular user of tape-recordings (see Edmondson, 1996). Group meetings have been literally noted by the interventionist and/or an assistant. Individual meetings have been partly literally noted by an assistant, combined with personal notes by the interventionist. For about a half of the individual meetings the transcripts were made by the interventionist immediately after the sessions and based on his elaborative personal notes. In order to reduce the risk of a bias as much as possible, the clients have read the transcripts.

### **The fifteen characteristics of action research**

1. Action research demands an integral involvement by the researcher in an intent to change the organization. This intent may not succeed - no change may take place as a result of the intervention - and the change may not be as intended.
2. Action research must have some implications beyond those required for action or generation of knowledge in the domain of the project. It must be possible to envisage talking about the theories developed in relation to other situations. Thus it must be clear that the results could inform other contexts, at least in the sense of suggesting areas for consideration.
3. As well as being usable in everyday life, action research demands valuing theory, with theory elaboration and development as an explicit concern of the research process.
4. If the generality drawn out of the action research is to be expressed through the design of tools, techniques, models and method then this, alone, is not enough. The basis for their design must be explicit and shown to be related to the theories which inform the design and which, in turn, are supported or developed through action research.
5. Action research will be concerned with a system of emergent theory, in which the theory develops from a synthesis of that which emerges from the data and that which emerges from the use in practice of the body of theory, which informed the intervention and research intent.
6. Theory building, as a result of action research, will be incremental, moving through a cycle of developing theory to action to reflection to developing theory, from the particular to the general in small steps.
7. What is important for action research is not a (false) dichotomy between prescription and description, but a recognition that description will be prescription, even if implicitly so. Thus presenters of action research should be clear about what they expect the consumer to take from it and present it with a form and style appropriate to this aim.
8. For high quality action research a high degree of systematic method and orderliness is required in reflecting about, and holding on to, the research data and the emergent theoretical outcomes of each episode or cycle of involvement in the organization.
9. For action research, the processes of exploration of the data - rather than collection of the data - in the detecting of emergent theories and development of existing theories must either be replicable or, at least, capable of being explained to others.
10. The full process of action research involves a series of interconnected cycles, where writing about research outcomes at the latter stages of an action research project is an important aspect of theory exploration and development, combining the processes of explicating pre-understanding and methodical reflection to explore and develop theory formally.
11. Adhering to characteristics 1 to 10 is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the validity of action research.
12. It is difficult to justify the use of action research when the same aims can be satisfied using approaches (such as controlled experimentation or surveys) that can demonstrate the link between data and outcomes more transparently. Thus in action research, the reflection and data collection process - and hence the emergent theories - are most valuably focused on the aspects that cannot be captured by other approaches.
13. In action research, the opportunities for triangulation that do not offer themselves with other methods should be exploited fully and reported. They should be used as a dialectical device which powerfully facilitates the incremental development of theory.
14. The history and context for the intervention must be taken as critical to the interpretation of the likely range of validity and applicability of the results of action research.
15. Action research requires that the theory development which is of general value is disseminated in such a way as to be of interest to an audience wider than those integrally involved with the action and/or with the research.

**Table 6.2**      *Characteristics of action research (Eden & Huxham, 1996)*

In order to structure the data analyses, a ‘three-column method’ has been used (not to be confused with Argyris’ two-column method). In the left column, illustrative narratives have been noted (compare Argyris’ ‘directly observable data’). The middle column contains codes that are related to the diagnostic model (see table 5.1): perception, behaviour, interventions, design and change of organization that (de-)block changing, organizing and learning. The right column depicts interpretations and reflections. This column also includes reflections upon the interventionist’s role (*italic*). The three-column method is illustrated below.

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Interpretations and analyses in the right column are a combination of

- Narrative analysis (Boje, 2001)
- Consequences in terms of circular patterns and defensive routines
- Interventionist's interventions (interactions) and consequences
- Additional observations, reflections and questions.

The researcher applied the encoding (middle column) afterwards. This means that the diagnosis model (figure 2.20) has not been tested in action, but afterwards in a subjective-interpretative process. The coding has not been shared with the parties, as it is considered to have limited relevance to them. Although the analyses (right column) do also have a subjective-interpretative character, mostly they have been shared in order to contribute to learning.

In order to structure the large amount of observations, the conceptual framework and research questions that have been developed in the theoretical exploration play a guiding role. This is in line with Miles and Huberman (1994): "that's why we think conceptual frameworks and research questions are the best defence against overload. [...] Data collection is inescapably a selective process, that you cannot and do not 'get it all' even though you might think you can and are" (p. 55-56). Another way to bring order is the use of coding. The (blocking) expressions of unilateral control, as well as de-blocking alternatives have been encoded (see chapter 5, table 5.1). Miles and Huberman (1994) distinguish three types of codes: descriptive codes simply describe observations, interpretive codes incorporate interpretations, while pattern codes are even more inferential and explanatory. The emphasis of this study is on interpretive coding of the role of leaders and managers, which subsequently leads to (de-)blocking changing, organizing and learning.

The process from observations to conclusions has been structured in order to enlarge the chain of evidence (Yin, 1994) and follows Argyris' ladder of inference (1990). Each step from directly observable data to conclusions is publicly testable and/or the testability is testable (e.g. if the reasoning by the researcher is not open, this cannot be covered up).

- Directly observable data are openly shared (left column).
- Interpretations and analyses of data are based on literal quotes and, thus, are testable (middle column, right column).
- In the course of each case study, these interpretations and analyses are summarized in reflections. In these reflections, the interventionist's reasoning is open to inquiry.
- At the end of each case study, these reflections are related to the research questions in a within-case analysis.
- The findings of the individual cases are subjected to a cross-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989; Miles and Huberman, 1994).

In order to enhance reliability of the outcomes, the outcomes of each case have been shared with the clients, who got the opportunity to give their opinion<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, reflections and observations have been shared with a team of colleagues, in order to create recognition and common interpretation. Finally, the outcomes of each case have been shared with an informed expert in order to check if he draws the same conclusions as the researcher. The informed expert is familiar with the theory, the application of the theory and action research. Since he is not involved in the cases, he can judge without interest.

### *Cases (moving moments)*

In this study, action research is conducted through three separate cases that are combined consultancy and research projects (moving moments 1, 2 and 3). The consultancy context offers the opportunity to meet a major condition of action research: "Action research involves the researcher in working with members of an organization over a matter which is of genuine concern to them and in which there is an intent by the organization members to take action based on the intervention" (Eden & Huxham, 1996, p. 527). However, it is important to distinguish between consultancy and scientific research, as the latter has specific characteristics to be met (Eden & Huxham (1996). The role of the interventionist has been a part of the study and is regularly reflected on.

Because consultancy projects are characterized by a certain goal and a certain period, they have a character of episodic change. This study, however, does not focus on the episodic change. Instead, it focuses on daily interactions that contribute to or block changing, organizing and learning (in the course of the episodic change period). For that reason, the case descriptions do not follow stages or steps. Rather, the researchers follow the process during approximately one year.

The three cases have different contexts and histories: profit and non-profit, business-to-business and business-to-consumer, 75 – 800 employees. This variety contributes to the external validity of the outcomes, if the results of the three cases are consistent (Eisenhardt, 1989). Regarding the number of cases, Eisenhardt (1989) argues that one can stop adding cases as soon as theoretical saturation has been reached. The point has been reached when additional learning is minimal because the researchers observe the same phenomena as before. In this study, theoretical saturation is considered to be reached with three cases.

### *Structure of case-descriptions*

The cases have been divided into two parts. The cases in chapters 7, 8 and 9 describe a selection of illustrative narratives as well as (theoretical) reflections. Each case finishes with a within-case analysis that is related to the research questions. A

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<sup>11</sup> One manager requested to adjust one of his quotes slightly, which has been done without consequences for the intention.

broader selection of narratives is described in appendices 1 and 2.<sup>12</sup> These narratives have numbers (for example, the narratives of case 1 have numbers from 1.1 to 1.17). The reflections in the next chapters refer to these numbers. This is clearly visualized. For example:

<b>Reflection 3</b> ( <i>narratives 1.2 – 1.7</i> )
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This way, one can read the case descriptions in the next chapters and, if desired, read the corresponding narratives in the appendices for deeper understanding. In order to study the most elaborative set of data and analysis, one reads the narratives in the appendices and the corresponding reflections in the next chapters. The references to these reflections are visualized in the appendices, for example:



*Reflection 1*

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<sup>12</sup> The appendix of case 3 is not public for reasons of privacy.





## 7. Moving moments 1

### 7.1 Type of organization

This organization focuses on development, implementation and maintenance of information technology systems. Staff consists of approximately 150 professionals. It is under pressure as a consequence of several developments. First, the company is developing a completely new information system that has to support the primary processes of a major client. This is a large project in which a majority of the employees are involved. Deadlines are ambitious and hard. The client applies a great deal of pressure on quality and deadlines. Second, the company has to prove that it can deliver on a competitive level. Some clients tend to hire other suppliers. This puts pressure on quality and costs. This case study describes a change process focusing on the internal communication and management style in this company. The case study starts when an employee satisfaction survey leads to the insight that employees do not feel safe within the organization.

### 7.2 Context of the change process

In 2003 an employee satisfaction survey was conducted. The outcomes of this survey led to the conclusion that many employees were not satisfied about internal communication. As a response, top management asked the internal communication department to initiate some actions. Contents and quality of the (information on) intranet were evaluated, which led to some improvements regarding contents and quality of the (information on) intranet and written information.

In addition, the internal communication department was asked to organize a number of group interviews in order to find out what problems they perceived. The outcomes partly referred to communication methods (communication plans, written communication, intranet and meetings) and led to a number of improvement issues, focusing on means like intranet, information sessions and (lunch) meetings. The main problems as experienced by employees, however, focused on communication between management and employees. The conclusions, as formulated by the internal communication department, are presented below.

#### **Conclusions regarding communication between management and employees**

##### **Vertical communication**

- Exchange of information is inadequate, as a consequence of
  - little information from second line management
  - not keeping appointments
  - information from first and second line management does not correspond to employees' experiences
  - lack of openness

- Management do not communicate a common vision
- Difficulties in approaching managers

#### **Fear**

- Employees are afraid to criticize
- Employees feel anxious about approaching managers
- Employees feel managers have little loyalty towards them
- Employees sometimes feel they are ignored

The director wished to work with a consultant, who was able to introduce an approach that was less instrumental.

### **7.3 Moving moments**

#### **Period 1: start of the study**

##### *First session between director and consultant (interventionist)*

In the first session the director describes the current situation: the signals about dissatisfactory communication recur time after time and seem to increase despite several initiatives like more information by intranet, by paper and in (large) information sessions. Generally, the outcomes of the survey have not been discussed with employees yet. The director wants the interventionist to mingle with employees and talk with them. He has positive experience with this approach. The director behaves firmly and self-consciously and leaves little room for the interventionist to bring in ideas. Director and interventionist agree upon a second meeting. The latter will prepare an approach. After the second meeting the director will decide upon a 'go' or 'no go'.

#### **Reflection 1**

The information that is being shared in the first meeting leads to the observation that communication problems seem to recur time after time, despite several (instrumental) initiatives.

Based on the available information, some expressions of a unilateral control model seem to be visible.

- Distancing: director expects the interventionist to mingle with employees and communicate with them; employees are being interviewed by an adviser of the internal communication department; management have not yet discussed the outcomes of the survey (such as fear) with employees in personal communication, nor have they inquired how they might contribute to the communication problems.
- Reductionism: director seems to focus on the employees' role.
- Blaming: director seems to focus on the employees' role.

- Reactive behaviour: solutions are expected to start from the employees.
- Focus on symptoms (reductionism) and impersonal instruments: employees bring in their dissatisfaction about the communication; management, in return, decide to deliver more information by intranet, paper and information meetings.
- Cover up underlying patterns: managers have not personally inquired into why their employees do not feel secure.

The recurrence of the problems in the longer run, despite several initiatives, seems to disclose a dynamically complex situation. “When obvious interventions produce nonobvious consequences, there is dynamic complexity” (Senge, 1990, p. 71). Apparently, the initiatives do not improve the communication in the longer run. They might even contribute to the deterioration of the situation by tempering the attention to the problems and stifling personal responsibility of management *and* employees. Based on the first information, the pattern seems to be as depicted in figure 7.1, which represents Senge’s ‘shifting the burden’ structure: one ‘deals’ with communication problems between management and employees through instruments and interventions by third parties (upper loop). These interventions can be perceived as symptomatic solutions that can reduce the problem symptoms in the short run. As long as the underlying problem (e.g. employees experience ‘fear’ in interaction with managers) is covered up and a fundamental solution is not developed, the problem symptoms will recur in the longer run.

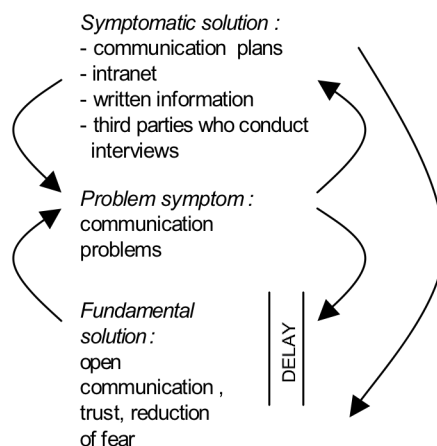


Figure 7.1 Unilateral control in relation to the ‘shifting the burden’ structure

The first impressions lead to an approach that is shared with the director (for a more elaborative description that includes considerations, see box 1.1 in appendix 1):

- Start with top management: discuss approach *and* consequences for their own role (compare Argyris (1984, 1990, 2000), who argues that one should start with the top).
- Follow the ‘cascade’: director and management team, management team members with their teams, etcetera. This approach enables direct communication between managers and their employees and gives the opportunity to organize

reflection and learning about the way one contributes to the communication problems.

- Each department gets a team coach, who supports reflection and learning.
- Each manager develops a suitable approach for his/her department in consultation with the team coach, in order to feel responsible for the change process in his/her own department.
- Before and after each session the manager has a feedback session with the team coach about the communication patterns and his contribution. The underlying belief is that the team coach can ask questions and give feedback in order to enable reflection and learning.
- Regular progress meetings with director, individual managers and management teams contribute to keeping things result-oriented.
- Evaluation after a few months.

#### *Presentation to the management team*

In a second session with the director the interventionist shares his ideas regarding the approach. The director has a firm reaction: he believes in this approach. He invites the interventionist to present this approach to the management team.

In this meeting the interventionist emphasizes that communication improvement requires managers to involve their own role and to take responsibility for their own department. Immediately, the director stresses his support for this approach and his eagerness to improve communication this way. Subsequently, the HR manager emphasizes that in his vision this is the right approach. All managers say they find this change approach attractive and commit to it. The director concludes that they will start the process.

#### **Reflection 2**

The director seems to leave little room for his managers to question the approach. His vision (and decision) is clear. In this situation, the unilateral control behaviour of the leader seems to be very effective to avoid testing his assumptions and to avoid situations that might be difficult to control or lead to uncertain assumptions. However, how valid is these managers' commitment? To what extent do managers feel freedom to question ideas in order to have an open discussion? And to what extent is this situation representative of the fear that employees experience? A temporary assumption is that managers say that they comply with the approach, regardless of whether they really do.

#### **Period 2: further investigation of director and management team**

##### *Meeting with director and HR manager*

In a meeting, director, HR manager and interventionist elaborate on the process, partly as a preparation of a special two-hour meeting with the management team. Below, a characteristic phrase is quoted.

<p>Dir: I want no planned communication and no instruments. That is exactly what we have done in the past. I perceive this process as an adventure. At certain moments you and your colleagues will be suddenly there during meetings and say that you are only there to listen a while. People may be confused. That's okay. Let us see what happens.</p>	<p>C process (D)</p>	<p>Director does not want a planned and instrumental process. Is this espoused theory or theory-in-use?</p>
<p>HR: But shan't we bring in more structure?</p>	<p>C planned C step-by-step</p>	
<p>Dir: Let's watch out for another instrumental approach. Let's just start an open process.</p>	<p>C process (D)</p>	<p>Dir behaves inconsistent: he says he wants an open approach, while he imposes his opinion upon the HR manager.</p>
<p>[.....]</p>		

HR: But shan't we bring in more structure?

Director does not want a planned and instrumental process. Is this espoused theory or theory-in-use?

Dir: Let's watch out for another instrumental approach. Let's just start an open process.

Dir behaves inconsistent: he says he wants an open approach, while he imposes his opinion upon the HR manager.

[...]

### Session with management team

<p>P: Some people are afraid to approach W (director).</p> <p>Dir (joking): Well, I don't know what they are afraid of... Besides, I wonder if it's that bad. ... (all laugh, subsequently the subject is changed)</p> <p>[.....]</p> <p>H: And we have to let them know that we are open to all subjects they wish to share with us. By the way, we have to be open to each other within the management team as well.</p> <p>M (laughing): Fortunately this is the case in this team.</p> <p>Dir: By the way, we should not give employees the impression that – after all – we agree with their complaints about us. During this process you have to be aware of that. Who is next?</p> <p>[.....]</p> <p>Int: The last team to address is this management team; I suggest I will personally keep in touch with the director and will regularly join management team sessions.</p>	<p>B control I cover-up</p> <p>P own role (D)</p> <p>B control I cover-up</p> <p>P distance P blame P linear B control B reactive</p>	<p>Although director desired an open process/adventure, he activates a unilateral control model as soon he is confronted with an embarrassing situation. Director keeps situation controllable by making embarrassing situation undebatable. Two defensive routines (or strategies) are visible:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Joke strategy: in case of embarrassment, make a joke and change subject.</li> <li>- Reduction strategy: in case of embarrassment, reduce the problem until it is controllable again ('it isn't that bad').</li> </ul> <p>Threat is blocked by joke strategy -&gt; sensitive issues is being made undebatable.</p> <p>Strong unilateral control perspective.</p>
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Dir (joking): Well, I don't know what they are afraid of... Besides, I wonder if it's that bad. ... (all laugh, subsequently the subject is changed)

B control  
I cover-up

Although director desired an open process/adventure, he activates a unilateral control model as soon he is confronted with an embarrassing situation. Director keeps situation controllable by making embarrassing situation undebatable. Two defensive routines (or strategies) are visible:

- Joke strategy: in case of embarrassment, make a joke and change subject.

- Reduction strategy: in case of embarrassment, reduce the problem until it is controllable again ('it isn't that bad').

[...]

H: And we have to let them know that we are open to all subjects they wish to share with us. By the way, we have to be open to each other within the management team as well.

P own role (D)

M (laughing): Fortunately this is the case in this team.

B control  
I cover-up

Threat is blocked by joke strategy -> sensitive issues is being made undebatable.

Dir: By the way, we should not give employees the impression that – after all – we agree with their complaints about us. During this process you have to be aware of that. Who is next?

- P distance
- P blame
- P linear
- B control
- B reactive

Strong unilateral control perspective.

$$\left[ \begin{array}{c} \vdots \\ \vdots \end{array} \right]$$

Int: The last team to address is this management team; I suggest I will personally keep in touch with the director and will regularly join management team sessions.

<p>Dir: Is that necessary? Let's check. Who thinks this team is not safe?</p> <p>Silence .....</p> <p>H: I feel quite safe here. I can say anything I want. (some managers confirm nonverbally)</p> <p>Silence ....</p>		<p>The director gives a mixed message (Argyris): precisely if one did not feel safe, one would probably not be open about it. As a consequence, it is difficult to gather valid information (mutual learning model) with this question. One might easily activate a defensive routine (denial strategy) and – in line with Argyris– will not be open about it.</p> <p>“To retain their power, defensive routines must remain undiscussable. Teams stay stuck in their defensive routines only when they pretend that they don't have any defensive routines, that everything is all right, and that they can say ‘anything’” (Senge, p. 255).</p>
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### *Progress meeting with director and HR manager; first feedback on patterns*

In a meeting, director, HR manager and two interventionists discuss progress regarding the process in the departments. In this meeting the interventionists confront the director for the first time with hypotheses regarding his role in interaction with his management team. A main challenge is to make defensiveness debatable without producing more defensiveness.

<p>Int: We doubt how open people can be. We see some patterns that keep team members from being open. It appeared to us that you can say fairly hard things to each other. However, each time this happens someone makes a joke, releases tension and changes the subject. Difficult or personal issues remain undebatable this way and -contrary to the desired effect- an unsafe climate is created. Let's call this a joke strategy. Another strategy with the same effect is the reduction strategy: you tend to make problems smaller if the situation might become difficult or embarrassing.</p> <p>HR to dir (joking): Then you must not make any jokes about my roots anymore (both laugh).</p> <p>Int: This is what we mean ....</p> <p>Dir: Now you are exaggerating. It is not that bad.</p>	<p>B control↑ B repeat</p>	<p>Sharing observations regarding defensiveness activates exactly the same defensiveness: joke and reduction strategy.</p> <p>The interventionist decides to reflect on this inclination the first time, however does not the second time. His assumption is that this would put too much pressure on the director and lead to stronger defensiveness. The desire to get (immediate) compliance by the director would reflect a unilateral control model.</p>
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### *Session with management team*

In a session with the management team, one of the subjects concerns ‘progress of communication improvement’. The first subject on the agenda concerns procurement of photocopiers (low dynamical complexity). This part of the meeting is effective. Subsequently, each manager is asked to present the situation in his/her department.

Some managers present positive stories. Others, especially the director, ask some questions. Then it is V's turn, the manager who had let an interventionist know that he does not like the approach. The director tries to persuade him to comply with the approach.

<p>V: I have had a meeting with P (one of the interventionists) and the approach in my department will differ from the other departments. I want my employees to be trained in communicative skills.</p> <p>Dir: How are you going to learn yourself; by feedback?</p> <p>V: No, I do not want to involve feedback in our approach.</p> <p>Dir: Why not?</p> <p>V: Well, next Monday I will discuss the approach with my employees.</p> <p>Dir: P (interventionist) will join the session and he will observe. You can't deny observations, can you? If he is there, he will have some observations. And the agreement is that these will be fed back.</p> <p>V (quietly): Whose agreement ....</p> <p>Dir: Just let it happen ...</p> <p>V: But what if my employees are not open to it?</p> <p>Dir: Well, there you have a strong observation, haven't you?</p> <p>E (other manager): Why are you pushing so hard?</p> <p>Dir: These guys are professionals. You can only learn from them, can't you?</p> <p>V: Okay, I am with you ...</p> <p>[.....]</p> <p>Another manager's turn.</p> <p>K: Tomorrow I will have a meeting with A (another interventionist). I don't think these communication problems play a role in our department. We're a small team and the atmosphere is okay.</p> <p>H (another manager): Well K, I want to be open with you. This week two employees of yours visited me. They said they do not feel comfortable with you at all. Thus, there is more than you know.</p> <p>Silence .....</p> <p>H: You seem to say things in a way that they feel</p>	<p>B control↑ B repeat</p> <p>B control↑ B repeat</p> <p>B control↑ B repeat</p> <p>B control↑ B repeat</p> <p>B control↑ B repeat</p> <p>B control↑ B repeat</p>	<p>V informs that he does not comply with 'the method' (a deviant opinion).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p>Growing control by director</p> <p>While manager V informs that he has another opinion, the director's control grows stronger and stronger. He goes on until V complies.</p> <p>Direct feedback to director (apparently she feels safe enough to act this way).</p> <p>The unilateral control model leads to a short-term solution: the manager saying that he complies (compliance strategy). However, this does not seem to be valid information and will probably not help in the longer run.</p>
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### Reflection 3

(narratives 1.2 – 1.7)

#### Unilateral control in simple and complex situations

In most meetings in this case, two types of situations can be distinguished.

1. Simple situations (low dynamic complexity: focus on content, relatively routine, neutral)

In these situations a unilateral control model seems to be effective. The problem is clear, as well as the required solution. The problem is instrumental/technical and refers to content. These situations can have a high detail complexity. However, they have a low dynamic complexity (Senge, 1990). Obvious solutions lead to obvious effects. This situation is depicted in figure 7.2.

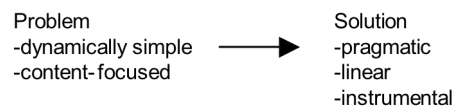


Figure 7.2 Dynamically simple situation

2. Complex situations (high dynamic complexity: threatening, conflicting opinions, personal issues)

In these situations unilateral control is no longer effective. In Senge's 'shifting the burden' structure, a unilateral control model consistently activates the upper circle (symptomatic and short-term solutions) and defensive routines, and blocks inquiry into the lower circle (fundamental and long-term solutions), as depicted in figure 7.3.

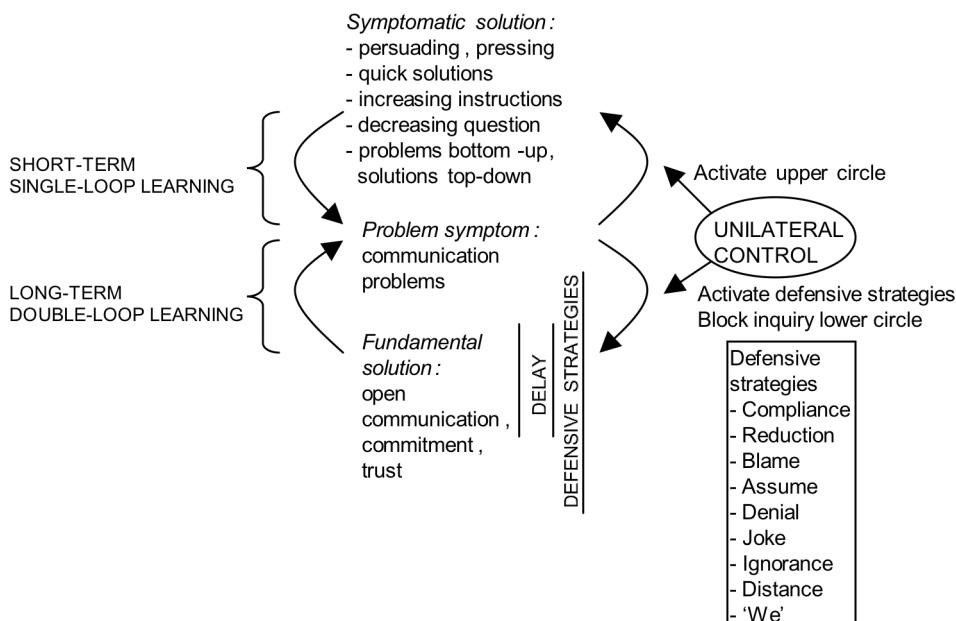


Figure 7.3 Dynamically complex situation: unilateral control in relation to 'shifting the burden' structure

### *Defensive strategies block changing and learning*

The lower circle (inquiry into underlying patterns) is not only blocked because of delay (Senge), but also because of defensive routines by leader and managers aiming at making sensitive issues undiscussable. Here, we call these routines defensive strategies, referring to specific and recognisable expressions of defensiveness. The following defensive strategies can be identified in this case:

- Joke strategy: in case of embarrassment, make a joke and change subject.
- Reduction strategy: in case of embarrassment, reduce the problem until it is controllable again.
- Denial strategy: in case of embarrassment or threat, deny the problem.
- Compliance strategy: in case of threat, say that you comply (regardless of whether you really do).
- Ignorance strategy: act as if it is interesting, but ignore the information that is difficult to deal with.
- Distance strategy: in case of embarrassment or threat, change the subject to other parties or general observations (employees, middle management, 'the organization').
- Blame strategy: in case of embarrassment or threat, blame others.
- 'We' strategy: in case of threat, talk about 'our responsibility' and 'we should pay attention to the problems' (as a consequence, nobody has to feel personally responsible).
- Assume strategy: hold strong assumptions about others and situations without testing them.

### *Consequences for change process: effective in maintaining the current situation*

The control model seems to have a number of consequences for the effectiveness of the change process.

- The defensive strategies by managers (especially compliance strategy and denial strategy) might lead to invalid information regarding their opinions, feelings and commitment. This will easily lead to problems in the process. A 'yes' to the question of whether managers are committed is only of value if one could say 'no' as well.
- Difficult issues that block effective change remain undebatable. Although these managers might want to change, they block the change process effectively and maintain the current situation (skilled incompetence, Argyris).
- A focus on the upper circle leads to reactive behaviour by managers. This pattern is repeated deeper in the organization: the more one pushes, the fewer initiatives from organization members. This, in turn, activates a unilateral control model.

In the meantime the director seems to be taking some first steps to reflect on his role in the process. This might lead to positive consequences in the longer run.

### *Session with director – preparation of management team meeting*

The director and an interventionist prepare the next management team meeting. During this session the director talks about his new insights and behavioural consequences.

<p>Int: What did you do with the feedback?</p> <p>Dir: The feedback gave me deep insight into my role. Since then I am learning by experimentation. Last week someone approached me to talk about some problems in project Y. Normally I would have tried to persuade him, but this time I have said almost nothing. I have only listened to his concerns. I have made no promises either. And still he left my room quite satisfied. Actually I haven't done anything (laughing ....). Tomorrow I have a meeting with all members of department Z. Without a doubt, they expect I will increase the pressure. However, I won't do that. I will sit down and listen to them. I will try to empathize with them. And ask questions like 'how do you experience the situation?', 'what consequences do you perceive?' and 'what is the relation with our approach?'</p>	<p>P own role (D) P mutual (D) B reflection (D)</p>	<p>Director is able to ask questions (single loop learning); it sounds quite natural, as if he has activated another program (double loop learning).</p> <p>Surprisingly, he seems to perceive these situations as relatively simple and he behaves relaxed.</p>
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Subsequently, the director shares with the interventionist that he will announce the dismissal of one of his managers during the forthcoming management team session. Director and interventionist agree that this might have a direct influence on perceived communication and safety. They decide they will ask managers whether they are in the mood to discuss these themes during that session.

### *Session with management team*

The interventionists enter the meeting during a short break, just after the announcement that manager X will (have to) leave the organization.

<p>When the interventionists enter, the climate seems to be very good: jokes, laughter and a lot of talking.</p> <p>Dir starts the next subject: Communication and safety is a sensitive subject, as we have just announced that manager X will have to leave. Lately other managers left this team as well. Do you think this is the right moment to discuss this subject now?</p> <p>V: I am flabbergasted. I have never felt unsafe in this team. What do you mean?</p> <p>Dir repeats his message.</p>	<p>I inquiry (D)</p>	<p>This might be very well an expression of the joke strategy: as long as we laugh, there is no problem.</p> <p>Director tries to activate and inquire into the lower circle, but is being 'pushed back'. Managers are very good at these routines: even if the director tries to leave the unilateral control model, managers immediately fall back on their routines. This response stifles the director's attempts and pushes him back in his 'well known' role. As a consequence, it is hard for the director to change the patterns (he may succeed with a delay).</p> <p>Managers activate several defensive strategies: - denial strategy: we have no problems with</p>
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<p>E: Why do you want to discuss safety? Don't you feel safe?</p> <p>Director looks at interventionist and asks for help nonverbally.</p> <p>Int repeats the same message.</p> <p>H: I don't feel unsafe at all. However, I recognize a feeling of fear amongst employees. For example, an employee who said: 'Well, this remark may be not good for my career, but I would like to say ....'. But I have never had this feeling.</p> <p>During this discussion nobody looks at manager X, who is still present at the meeting.</p> <p>A manager describes what makes good communication (in general) and another manager describes a meeting deeper in the organization. A third manager argues that second line management and employees should be trained to deal effectively with change processes.</p>		<p>safety</p> <p><i>Interventionist goes on with the same strategy that apparently activates defensiveness. An alternative: making the process debatable.</i></p> <p>- denial strategy: "To retain their power, defensive routines must remain undiscussable.</p> <p>- ignorance strategy: we act as if she and her problem are not there just by ignoring her. And we keep saying that this team is very safe.</p> <p>- distance strategy: we talk about other parties and general observations</p>
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### *Session with management team*

In the period that follows, the interventionists have several moments of hesitation: will the director and managers succeed to de-block the process? Their routines seem to be deeply ingrained and difficult to change. The next session illustrates some initiatives by managers to make defensive strategies and circularity debatable.

<p>A: In my perception employees have less fear to bring things in. Besides, they really appreciate that W. (the director) behaves more vulnerable. Some second line managers find it a bit soft and would still prefer some concrete instruments to improve communication. That is really a problem for me.</p> <p>H makes a joke: Isn't that a great experience for you; employees who find you soft?</p> <p>A: Gentlemen, we're changing the subject by making jokes.</p> <p>H: You are right. (other managers confirm nonverbally)</p> <p>[....]</p> <p>A: I think a problem is second line management. They must be the bridge to the rest of the organization and we have quite a problem there.</p>	<p>I inquiry (D) I long term (D) I reflection (D)</p>	<p>Joke strategy.</p> <p>Joke strategy being addressed.</p>
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<p>Dir: Let's not focus on other parties. Let's start with our own role.</p> <p>[ .....]</p> <p>During the meeting there is a discussion about the next staff information session. Normally, during these sessions the director and/or management team members talk about recent developments, while employees listen. One is aware of the disadvantage: 'the more we direct, the more reactive they will be'. A small committee is being formed in order to develop ways to break through this cycle.</p> <p>End of the session: interventionists feed back their observations of this session.</p>	<p>I inquiry (D) I long term (D) I reflection (D)</p> <p>P circular (D) P own role (D) P mutual (D)</p>	<p>Blame/distance strategy is addressed.</p> <p>This discussion shows that one's awareness of circularity and their own roles is growing.</p> <p>In the current situation, employees show an 'undergo- strategy': in case of threat, just undergo the intervention (passively) and do not make the producing patterns debatable.</p>
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#### Reflection 4

(narratives 1.8 – 1.10)

##### *Positive developments*

Some improvements are visible in the process. Some observations, as derived from the last management team meeting:

- Some defensive strategies are being addressed by managers (*'Gentlemen, we're changing the subject by making jokes'*).
- Attention to management team's role (*'Let's not focus on other parties. Let's start with our own role'*).
- Awareness of circularity: what we see in our employees is a consequence of what we do (*'The more we direct, the more reactive they will be'*).
- Direct feedback to director (*'W, you are just too impatient'*).

##### *Self-disclosure and feedback by the interventionist*

The interventions until now focus on feedback to the management team as a group and on the director personally. Some temporary conclusions regarding interventions:

- The main change in the director's attitude and behaviour followed after the interventionist shared his own personal experience: 'I do not feel comfortable during our conversations'. From that moment the director tends to reflect on his own role more and more. Self-disclosure by the interventionist seems to contribute to self-disclosure by the director. This change seems to have a positive effect on the team.
- A major question regarding interventions has been how to feed back defensive routines without activating them. Now, after a period, people seem to be aware of the patterns that keep them from change and people even put the insights into practice at a certain level. This brings up the question to what extent it is necessary to avoid activating defensive routines. This might be a typical 'upper circle' view: it has to be effective immediately. The lower circle, on the contrary, is characterized by delay. The interventions are typically focused on activating the lower cycle. In short, activation of defensive routines may not be a problem, as long as the interventions contribute to improvement in the longer run.

- Perhaps one even has to 'break through' the defensive routines and one should not try to bypass them.

#### *Unilateral control restricts interventionists' effectiveness*

In situations they perceive as threatening (situations in which their role and added value is at stake), the interventionists tend to activate a unilateral control theory-in-use. Some illustrative expressions of unilateral control:

- Proving one has 'everything under control' and showing one's added value by (immediate) answers, analysis and solutions. The underlying reasoning is that the client hires someone who is professional and is able to present a thorough analysis every moment the client asks. From a mutual learning perspective this reasoning is highly discussable.
- Confirming managers who say that 'we are improving' and suppressing hesitations about their real intentions or asking questions about their intentions, without being open about one's own hesitations. This behaviour stems from the assumption that the interventionist has to be sure about managers' intentions, before he could confront these. However, from a mutual learning perspective this is not relevant: the interventionist shares his observations, his interpretations and conclusions openly and tests for different views (see Argyris, 1990; Schwarz, 2002).
- Confronting defensiveness in terms of 'wrong' and persuading one has to show different behaviour. By doing so, the interventionist establishes a Subject-Object definition of relations. As a consequence, just like the relation between manager and employees, they stimulate managers to act dependently on the interventionist.

By doing this, the interventionists make defensiveness undebatable, create dependency and keep themselves and others from learning, changing and organizing.

### **Period 3: observations deeper in the organization**

#### *Sessions with second line management*

The interventionists join several sessions deeper in the organization. The vast majority of these sessions is characterized by exactly the same patterns as observed in the management team. In a session with a second line management team, managers share negative perceptions of their employees, such as

*'They are reactive and seldom bring in ideas.'*

*'They often complain about lots of things. I expect them to suggest solutions.'*

*'They are frustrated. They have the feeling they are overruled by the management team'* (= first line management team).

Managers, however, seem to reinforce this behaviour in a circular way:

*'If they don't come up with ideas themselves, I tell them what to do.'*

*'They often come with small issues to my desk. Sometimes it is unbelievable. Mostly I give them a solution.'*

*'Sometimes I ask them to bring in ideas themselves, but they seldom come up with ideas.'*

### *Sessions with employees*

The interventionists join some sessions with employees about the conclusions of the group interviews regarding communication between management and employees.

Some findings:

- The attitude of the employees does not fit in a normal curve. Many employees are quite negative and some are neutral.
- Their dissatisfaction focuses on first line management, including the director. Most employees are fairly neutral regarding their own (second line) manager.
- Main concerns:
  - top-down communication about major projects that they participate in; their opinion is not asked for;
  - management act at a distance: they don't visit us to hear the problems and don't pay attention to employees' ideas.
- If confronted with hypotheses on circularity, most of them are prepared to see their own responsibility. However, 'management should start changing'.
- Several employees are anxious to be visible. 'First see changes in management behaviour, then be more positive and take initiatives ourselves.'
- Employees focus on what managers do (theory-in-use), not what they say (espoused theory).

After repetitive feedback and discussion of the circular patterns, some positive developments are visible, for example when a first line manager has a discussion with a large group of employees at the end of a project session. He has observed the process and he tries to break through the routines. After a brief presentation one employee (the one who always does) wants to ask a question. The first line manager: *"P, I see you want to ask a question. That is what I expected, because that is the pattern we always follow: I tell you my vision and you ask a critical question. Often you have an opinion about the subject yourself. In turn, I pretend that I know the answer and share another story with you. Then, after the session, you will evaluate my answer. You may disagree, but won't share your disagreement with me. I often don't know the answer, but I won't share that with you. That is a strange game, isn't it? Let's play a different game. If you have a question and I don't know the answer, I will return the question and ask your opinion. All right?"*

The employee is confused and inquires if he is still allowed to ask a question. The first line manager 'allows' him to ask his question and, in turn, asks the employee to share his opinion. The employee presents his (fairly critical) opinion. The manager does not respond or defend, but he asks other employees for their opinion. Some employees (more than ever before) share their opinions and actively join the conversation.

This manager's approach contributes to insight into circularity and blocking patterns. As a consequence, employees are involved more actively. Still, it is uncertain to what extent they have a free choice. The manager imposes his analysis and does not check whether employees recognize this analysis.

### *Staff information meeting*

During a management team meeting, the program of the next quarterly staff information meeting is being discussed. The program has been prepared by HR and consists of seven speakers on different subjects. In this program, all speakers are first-line managers. In the last part of the program, employees have the opportunity to ask questions, but no time has been scheduled for that part. When the interventionist asks why no time for questions has been scheduled, the answer is that 'normally they don't ask any questions'. During this session the awareness grows that this program confirms existing patterns: managers talk and are active, while employees listen and are passive. A small group is formed to prepare a program that de-blocks existing patterns.

The director opens the session with a presentation on the communication improvement process. He shares a personal story about his concerns, what happens in the management team and what he has already learned about himself. He also shares his insights into circularity: 'We keep a tight grip on each other, e.g.

- management direct, employees listen ('watch this meeting')
  - management instruct, employees keep their ideas to themselves
  - 'this meeting is illustrative: first line management prepare and have foreknowledge; second line management and employees wait and see. That is what we stimulate.'
- He also shares personal expectations, recent positive examples and a suggestion for the future: let employees and managers prepare these sessions together.

During the session the director succeeds in creating a good atmosphere. Employees seem to be surprised by the personal and vulnerable story of the director and respond positively. Many stay for a drink.

### **Reflection 5**

*(narratives 1.11 – 1.14)*

*Managers are pushed back into 'old' behaviour by the environment they have created*  
The observations show that expressions of unilateral control and circular patterns are repeated/copied deeper in the organization.

Management try to break through ingrained patterns with several initiatives. This changing, however, is easily blocked:

- They have difficulty to be consistent; managers easily fall back into a unilateral control model.
- It appears to be difficult to show a mutual learning model; even meta-communication about 'the way we communicate' tends to be control-driven. By imposing ideas about the communication patterns, managers create a threat and activate defensive routines.
- If managers try to break through circular patterns, they are pushed back by the environment they have created with unilateral control. For example, the manager decides to stop 'giving the right answer' as this creates dependent and reactive employee behaviour.



When he asks the employee for his opinion, the latter is 'saved' by a colleague who asks the manager for his opinion. The latter, subsequently, shares his opinion.

Managers show best de-blocking interventions if the pressure is low. The lower the pressure, the easier change processes can be de-blocked.

#### *Interventionists are fixed in circular patterns*

Regardless of some positive observations, interventionists are not sure about the change process. The director in particular seems to be working on his behaviour and approach. However, interventionists still suspect that some managers play the game and act as if they want to work on it.

Interventionists seem to contribute to a blocked change process by some circular patterns as well:

- Interventionist active (takes initiative), participants passive.
- Interventionist shares feedback, participants wait and see ('that is an interesting analysis!!').
- Interventionist participates, manager directs difficult issues to interventionist.
- Interventionist talks with employees about their role, manager feels less responsible.
- Interventionist observes and shares feedback, participants keep their feedback for themselves.

Furthermore, the interventionists are confronted with some dilemmas.

#### *Asking questions versus feeding back*

If managers are invited to tell about their experiences, they tend to be skilled in covering up their defensiveness and tend to share espoused theories. Through feedback the same defensive strategies tend to be activated.

#### *Active versus passive*

Interventions (questions or feedback) contribute to reflection. However, each intervention is a sign of activity and can lead to passive/dependent participants.

#### *Close versus distance*

In order to de-block changing, self-disclosure by the interventionist appears to be effective. Self-disclosure supposes a close relationship with participants. However, neutral observation of the process requires a distance: the closer the relationship, the more difficult it is to see circularity and defensive strategies (as one tends to be highly skilled in covering up these patterns).

### Overall feedback by interventionist

The interventionist is invited to present an overall analysis to the management team (appendix 1 includes the slides that the interventionist presents). A part of the dialogue that follows is described below.

<p>Interventionist finishes his presentation with the question 'Do you personally really want to invest any further in this process?' and sits down.</p> <p>Silence</p> <p>M: Yes, I agree with your analysis.</p> <p>H: Yes, I hear your analysis. However, I don't know what I must do with this safety in the management team. I don't know what to do differently (looks at interventionist).</p> <p>Int: H, I don't say you have to do anything. The question is: do you accept the situation as it is? I could imagine if you said 'yes'. As a consequence, you might just have to accept people might not feel safe. But that's quite common in many organizations.</p> <p>H: But this safety in the management team; what do you expect me to do? I am one of the managers who tends to say that we can say anything here and that I feel safe. Partly because I don't feel like saying that it is unsafe. Should I, time after time, say 'I don't feel safe'? Then we do not make any progress, do we? (exaggerates in order to make it funny – some laugh).</p> <p>Int: You respond as if you think this is not realistic. At the same time you expect managers and employees deeper in the organization to have an open dialogue about these subjects. That does not sound consistent. Based on your experience in the management team, you might decide to stop expecting others to discuss this theme. Please do not do this because you have to. W, you would really help the process if managers have some room to say they do not want to do this. I know this might be difficult for you, as you find this very important (director seems to be slightly uncomfortable with the situation).</p> <p>H: That is not what I want. I am really trying to find out what I should do differently in order to make a difference. Could you advise me what I should do?</p> <p>Int: Not immediately. If it were so simple, you would already have done so. You're very smart. However, I am quite willing to assist you in discovering ways to improve.</p> <p>Dir: I have learned quite a lot since we started this process. I really try to do things differently.</p>		<p><i>Interventionist confronts inconsistency in current situation (valid information), invites them to make a free choice (each option is fine, as long as it is consistent) and to take responsibility. He releases pressure by saying that accepting unsafety and fear is fine. By doing so, he stimulates managers to adhere to a mutual learning model.</i></p> <p>Joke strategy</p> <p><i>Again, interventionist confronts inconsistency in current situation (valid information), invites them to make a free choice (each option is fine, as long as it is consistent) and to take responsibility. He releases pressure by creating room to say 'no'. By this intervention he stimulates managers to adhere to a mutual learning model.</i></p> <p>(from this moment the pressure is reduced; persons are more open about their hesitations)</p> <p>He seems to make a conscious decision. Subsequently, he asks the interventionist for an instant answer.</p> <p><i>For the interventionist it is very attractive to give a piece of advice and show added value (in the short run). By doing so, he would have established an S-O relationship that leads to dependency. Here, the int aims at establishing an S-S relationship that supports exploring and mutual learning.</i></p>
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<p>Int: I recognize and appreciate the way you are developing. There are already interesting experiments (int. describes situation when H succeeded to contribute to mutual learning in his team). H, this is part of an answer to your question what to do. (H. looks satisfied.)</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>M: Well, I see that changing the atmosphere in this organization really requires us to change. The question is, do we really want to change and are we able to change. After all, we are a certain type of managers: result-driven, slightly dominant, more attention to contents than people. We should take more time for our people. Do we want that?</p> <p>Int: That is the question. But please do not try to answer that question under pressure. Pressure does not help you now. The benefit of this discussion is that we have never had a dialogue this way. Personally, and about the role you want to play.</p>	<p>P dynamical (D) P own role (D) B valid (D) B proactive (D)</p>	<p><i>Interventionist keeps them from answering M's question immediately. His assumption is that pressure might activate defensiveness again (e.g. a 'compliance strategy'). Afterwards, the question would have deserved an answer.</i></p>
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## Reflection 6

(narrative 1.15)

### *Preparation supports interventions that enable mutual learning*

This session with the management team (including the slides in appendix 1) was well prepared. Good preparation makes it easier to choose consciously, avoid automatic unilateral control behaviour and adhere to a mutual learning model theory-in-use. The session illustrates some clear mutual learning interventions that seem to stifle defensiveness and de-block changing and learning.

The interventionist's underlying intentions were to share valid information, check for different views, invite the managers to make a free choice and help them to feel intrinsically responsible.

- Confront inconsistency neutrally (*'What you say and what you do is inconsistent'*), present possible consistent choices equally (*'You might decide you are satisfied with the results until now and accept some people do not feel safe; if you do not accept this, you will need to inquire into defensive strategies; each option is fine'*) and invite to make conscious and free choices so that one can feel responsible. This way, managers are helped to be consistent and to reduce defensiveness.
- Invite openly to share valid information and leave room for free choice, e.g. by asking the highest in rank whether one is allowed to say 'no' to a proposal (a 'yes' might only be valid information if a 'no' is allowed as well).
- Relieve pressure that might activate defensiveness by creating room for free choice, reduce time pressure and quick-fixes.

- Accept defensiveness as a natural response to something that makes one defensive. Confront defensiveness neutrally and stimulate inquiry. The interventionist might even ‘forecast’ defensiveness (*‘You will probably feel defensive strategies being activated while I talk about them. That is a part of these strategies, so don’t worry. Try to listen and understand what I say and what you feel’*).

#### Period 4: later developments

Some months later there were some visible developments that pointed at a delayed effect of de-blocked changing, organizing and learning. The examples as described below are illustrative.

##### *Meeting first and second line management*

In October 2005, a meeting is organized on future developments in strategy and organization design. In the past, the director usually had a brief discussion with the management team on these subjects. Typical quotes were ‘I think this is all clear, isn’t it?’, without much room for a reaction. As a consequence, he got no valid information.

Some observations during this session:

- The director asks questions, line managers answer. The latter grow more and more active, while the director really listens.
- The director is open (self-disclosure): *‘I thought it was all logical and clear. Now I see your opinions differ from mine. Apparently, it was my logic and clearness.’*
- A first line manager (to the director): *‘The opinions of my second line managers appeared to differ from yours. I considered stopping them, but I didn’t. After all, we try to share valid information.’* The director agrees.
- The director finishes by asking how managers have experienced the session and if they would like to work this way in the future. Their reaction is positive and they bring in ideas for the future.

##### *Session with first line manager and his second line managers*

In a session with one of the first line managers and his management team the effectiveness of the team and each team manager is discussed through mutual feedback. Team members are invited to select three elements that strongly characterize the team. One of the elements is ‘harmony’ that may lead to ‘caution’. The interventionist describes possible consequences of this characteristic for the improvement process by sharing his personal experience during a progress meeting with this team one week before.

Int: We discussed progress during that meeting. All said the process is valuable. Still, the dialogue consistently related to general themes like ‘the management team’, ‘the organization’ and information processes. It seemed to be very hard

This example is in line with Argyris (1990), who argues that one tends to cover up defensive routines (‘the process is valuable’) and cover up the cover-up (‘this was a valuable discussion about a valuable process’).

<p>to discuss the effectiveness of team members, regardless of several attempts by me. At the end of this meeting the first line manager asked each of you to evaluate the meeting. All managers said that they really found the discussion valuable. The interventionist was thanked for his valuable contribution and the meeting was finished. However, I left the meeting with an odd feeling: what you had said contradicted strongly to what I had felt. My feeling said that you liked neither the process nor the discussion during that meeting. And my assumption was that you experienced the whole process as a top-down initiative and that the safest way to behave was acting as if you found it valuable and keep the discussion on the surface. After my departure I was confused by the situation."</p> <p>Silence ...</p> <p>B: To be honest, your assumption is right. I felt a strong top-down pressure that forced me to comply.</p> <p>Other managers agree.</p> <p>H (first line mgr): I am glad you are so candid. I had the same feeling as the interventionist. However I did not know how to deal with the situation.</p> <p>Int: Great you can be so open. The problem is that you have been inconsistent. You said you wanted to contribute to an improvement process, but you blocked effective changing and organizing by sharing invalid information. Unlike before, now you are sharing valid information.</p>	<p>B valid (D) B reflection (D) B inquiry (D)</p> <p>P own role (D) B valid (D) B reflection (D)</p>	<p><i>The interventionist advocates his assumptions by sharing them openly. He confronts inconsistency not in terms of 'right or wrong'. Instead, he brings in his assumptions and feelings neutrally and leaves room for inquiry. As a consequence, people respond very openly about their defensiveness.</i></p> <p><i>Interventionist confronts inconsistency and emphasizes the effectiveness of sharing valid information.</i></p>
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All seem to feel uncomfortable with the situation and agree that this is not the way to be effective as a team. They agree that they will be more open about feelings and thoughts in the future. Some later signals point at genuine changes. During the same session people are open by giving mutual feedback regarding personal contributions to the team, the department and the improvement process. In addition, they start informal meetings with employees to share ideas concerning current themes in the department. Managers share some circular patterns with employees and invite employees to be open.

### *Why stop here?*

The end of this case is chosen relatively randomly, as the case description does not focus on an episodic change but on the ongoing daily interactions that contribute to blocked or de-blocked changing, organizing and learning. The moment of stopping this case corresponds to the period the interventionist is involved in the organization and the results that are being accomplished.

## 7.4 Analysis of moving moments 1

In this section the findings of case 1 are summarized and interpreted. The analysis follows the structure of the research questions.

### Point of departure and results

The case starts with communication problems between management and employees, leading to employees' fear and negative working climate. Management have already taken several initiatives, however without improvement of the situation. The recurrence of the problems in the longer run seem to disclose a dynamically complex situation. This situation directly relates to the subject of this study.

At the end of this case director and (some) managers illustrate that they can bring some insights into practice, e.g. by confronting circularity and defensiveness and develop approaches that break through circularity. This way they directly contribute to the quality of changing and organizing. The employee satisfaction survey demonstrates higher scores on the quality of communication after the period that is described.

#### *Research question 1:*

*To what extent are the expressions of unilateral control visible in interactions?*

In this case numerous observations have been made regarding Perceiving (reductionism, distancing, blaming, linear perception and S-O relations), Behaving (controlling circumstances, repeated behaviour, stronger control in case of threat and reactive behaviour) and Intervening (focus on symptoms, cover-up underlying patterns, quick wins and focus on impersonal instruments)<sup>13</sup>. The 'diagnostic model' helps to recognize situations that are influenced by unilateral control.

There are no observations regarding Design of organization (positional organization, variety reduction, S-O relations and organization/change as separated entities). Regarding Change of organization (goal-oriented and planned process, step-by-step, episodic and top-down, rational), there are few observations of de-blocking expressions (D) in the start of the case, when the director talks about his desired open process without instrumental methods and the HR managers pleads for a clear structure and well-defined steps. Design and change of organization (as defined here) seem to be of a different order than the other expressions, as the former are vulnerable to espoused theory. In talking and on paper one can easily describe a certain way of design and change of organization, however in action one actually blocks or de-blocks changing by the way one perceives, behaves and intervenes: the director in this case says that he desires an open process/adventure (espoused

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<sup>13</sup> For numbers of observations, see appendix 4 'Cross-case analysis'.

theory). However, he activates a unilateral control model as soon as he is confronted with deviant opinions *in action* (theory-in-use).

*Research question 2*

*How does unilateral control relate to (de-)blocking of changing, organizing and learning?*

This research question aims at gaining insight into the 'black box' between unilateral control and changing and organizing. Research question 2 has been specified into four questions. The findings are summarized under these specific questions.

*How do expressions of unilateral control contribute to recurrent problems?*

This case starts with the analysis that the same communication problems recur time after time and the situation even seems to deteriorate, despite a number of initiatives. These initiatives appear to have a relatively instrumental and linear character: communication plans, intranet and written information. The underlying assumption is: as long as we give them more information, they will experience an improvement of communication. However, the situation does not improve, which seems to disclose a dynamically complex situation. "When obvious interventions produces nonobvious consequences, there is dynamic complexity" (Senge, 1990, p. 71). The initiatives might even contribute to the deterioration of the situation by tempering the attention to the problems and stifling personal responsibility of management and employees. Further research uncovers that employees have fear to criticize, feel anxious to approach managers, feel little loyalty of managers and feel they are ignored. Although they are familiar with this information, no manager have made this discussable with employees.

A relatively large part of this case focuses on the management team and the role of managers towards the second level. The directly observable data during management team meetings, conversations with the director and meetings between managers and their employees give insight into the patterns that block changing and learning.

Typical in this case is the strong unilateral control by the director during the first sessions. Although his spoken desire to organize an open process (espoused theory), he consistently persuades his managers to comply with the change approach (theory-in-use). Taking Senge's 'shifting the burden system' as a starting point, this unilateral control consistently activates actions and initiatives in the upper circle: quick problem solving, persuasion and instrumental solutions. These actions seem to be copied by managers towards their employees. Although these actions are effective in (dynamically) simple situations, they are not in dynamically complex situations and lead to circular patterns (see next section).

Besides, unilateral control activates defensive strategies that block the lower circle (Senge, 'shifting the burden', 1990). Difficult issues that block effective change remain undebatable by defensive strategies. With these defensive strategies managers succeed to avoid discussion of the way they contribute to communication problems in their departments and in the management team. This way, the lower

circle (inquiry into underlying patterns) is not only blocked because of delay, but also because of defensive strategies by leader and subordinates. As a consequence, there is little learning and the same communication problems recur time after time.

The more unilateral control, the more the upper circle is activated and the lower circle is blocked, the more the fundamental problem grows, the more threatening the situation, the more control, etcetera. This leads to inconsistency: we say we want to change and we keep ourselves from changing. Figure 7.4 illustrates this situation.

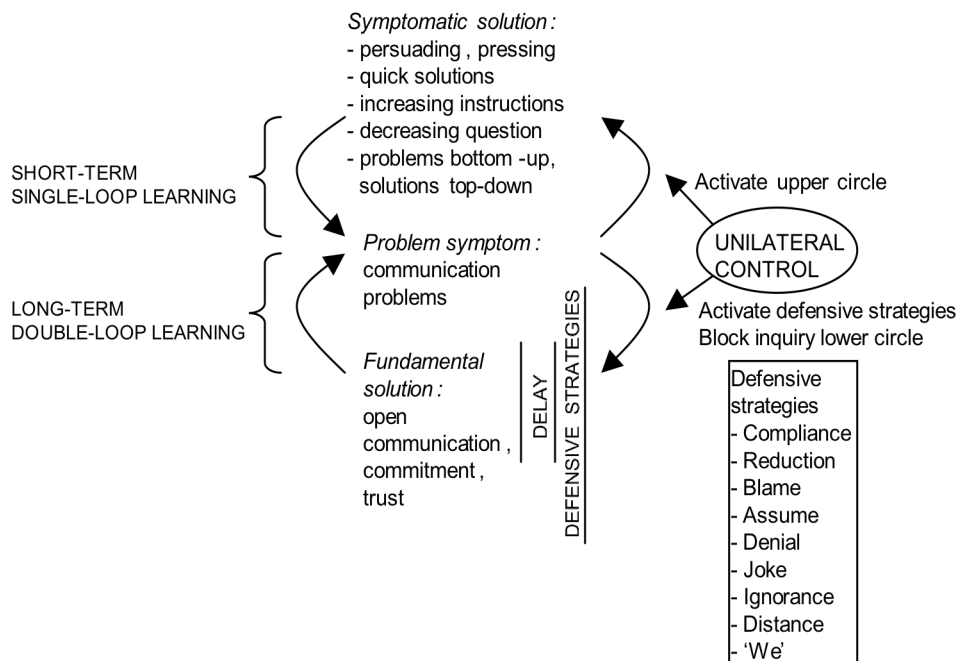


Figure 7.4 Unilateral control stimulates symptomatic solutions and blocks fundamental solutions

### What circular patterns are visible?

A focus on the upper circle leads to repetitive behaviour, as there is no learning and reflection. One tends to take a distance from the problems and expects others to change behaviour. This repetitive behaviour leads to circular patterns, e.g. the more one pushes, the less organization members take initiative. In this case one tends to copy these patterns deeper in the organization.

Typical circular patterns that are illustrated in this case are described below. Although these patterns are described as if they start with the manager, by and large it is not clear where the circle starts. However, it is clear that the circles are self-propelling (behaviours stimulate each other) and self-protective (if managers start changing their behaviour, they tend to be pushed back by employees).

### Manager initiates change process, employees (act as if they) follow

The more managers consider themselves as being capable of and responsible for imposing changes upon employees, the more they push employees into a following



(dependent, reactive) position, the more managers are confirmed in their belief they should impose changes, etcetera.

**Manager talks; employees (act as if they) listen**

The more managers talk (about 'the change approach', their opinion, the need for change) the more employees (act as if they) listen, the more managers direct, etcetera.

**Manager active; employees reactive**

The more initiative managers take (executing change actions, organizing meetings, chairing meetings, stressing the need for change), the more reactive and dependent employees behave ('apparently he feels responsible ...', 'let's wait and see ...'), etcetera.

**Manager solves problems; employees bring problems in**

The more managers solve problems that employees bring in, the more employees bring in their problems (instead of solving them themselves), the more managers solve their problems, etcetera.

**Manager instructs; employees wait for next instruction**

The more managers instruct, the more employees wait for the next instruction, the more managers instruct, etcetera.

**Manager acts as if he knows answers; employees act as if they don't**

The more managers act as if they know the answers (even if they don't – yet), the more employees act as if they don't, the more managers act as if they know the answers, etcetera.

**Manager feels uncomfortable and takes distance; employees feel uncomfortable and take distance**

The more uncomfortable managers feel, the more distance they take, the more uncomfortable employees feel and the more distance they take, the more uncomfortable managers feel, etcetera.

All circular patterns are based upon the same Subject-Object perspective. By perceiving this way, management and employees maintain a recurrent circular pattern: active management and acted upon dependent employees. As long as manager and employees do not openly reflect on these circular patterns and how they contribute to them personally, little (mutual) learning takes place and changing is blocked.

*What defensive routines are visible?*

Learning in this case is being blocked by 'defensive strategies'. In this study, defensive strategies are considered to be specific actions that block the lower circle of Senge's 'shifting the burden' and thus block fundamental solutions. Defensive strategies aim at making sensitive issues undebatable and, as a consequence, block learning and changing (as they protect the current reality). Or, in Argyris terms, defensive strategies cover sensitive issues up. For example, the director in this case firmly introduces the approach and asks for commitment. Everyone says 'yes'.

However, since 'no' seems not to be an option, this 'yes' might easily be invalid information. If one says 'yes' and thinks 'no', one has to cover up in order to save face. A first defensive strategy is activated, the compliance strategy.

This case illustrates several defensive strategies. The titles of these strategies have not been based upon existing literature; they have been developed and introduced in this study.

- Joke strategy: in case of embarrassment, make a joke and change subject.
- Reduction strategy: in case of embarrassment, reduce the problem until it is controllable again.
- Denial strategy: in case of embarrassment or threat, deny the problem.
- Compliance strategy: in case of threat, say that you comply (regardless of whether you really do).
- Ignorance strategy: act as if it is interesting, but ignore the information that is difficult to deal with.
- Distance strategy: in case of embarrassment or threat, change the subject to other parties or general observations (employees, middle management, 'the organization').
- Blame strategy: in case of embarrassment or threat, blame others.
- 'We' strategy: in case of threat, talk about 'our responsibility' and say things such as 'we should pay attention to the problems' (as a consequence, nobody has to feel personally responsible).
- Assume strategy: keep sensitive assumptions about others private.
- Withdraw strategy: in case of difficulties in the communication between manager and employee, withdraw and discuss the difficulties with peers.
- Shirk strategy: shift the responsibility to an 'outsider' and avoid sharing your own opinion about the process or colleagues.
- Non-intervention strategy: in case of embarrassment, do not confront others' dysfunctional behaviour (e.g. not keeping an appointment), so that others will not confront yours.
- Undergo strategy: in case of threat, just undergo the intervention (passively) and do not make the producing patterns debatable.

#### *How do leaders de-block changing, organizing and learning?*

At the start of this process the director says he does not want a planned and instrumental approach. Instead, he prefers an open approach and wants to find out how a better climate can be developed. In action, however, he blocks changing by unilateral control: he leaves no room for valid information on managers' commitment, increases pressure in case of deviant visions (just until one 'complies') and stimulates defensive strategies. If confronted with his behaviour and effects, he tends to respond with exactly the behaviour that is being shared.

After repetitive feedback and self-disclosure by the interventionist, he starts reflecting on the way he blocks changing. From this moment he starts developing alternative behaviour and contributes to de-blocked changing.

- Reflection and experimentation: *'The feedback gave me deep insight into my role. Since then I have been learning by experimentation. Last week someone*

*approached me to talk about some problems in project Y. Normally I would have tried to persuade him, but this time I said almost nothing. I just listened to his concerns.'*

- Self-disclosure and public reflection upon the way one contributes to lack of learning: *'I visited H. and K. and let them know I should have dealt with the situation either by leaving room for discussion or by asking questions (instead of making the issue undiscussable).'*
- Being proactive: *'When the management team prepares the sessions, we push employees into a dependent role. I don't think that is effective. What would you think about preparing the next session together?'*
- Making sensitive issues debatable by addressing them: *'Communication and safety is a sensitive subject, as we have just announced that X will have to leave.'*
- Confronting defensive strategies within the management team: *'Let's not focus on other parties. Let's start with our own role.'*
- Making circularity visible: *'The more we direct, the more passive they will be'. And in a meeting with all employees: 'We keep a tight grip on each other, e.g. management direct, employees listen ('watch this meeting'), management instruct, employees keep their ideas to themselves, first line management prepare this session and have foreknowledge; second line management and employees wait and see. That is what we stimulate.'*
- Sharing valid information: *'Well, I see that changing the atmosphere in this organization really requires us to change. The question is, do we really want to change and are we able to change. We should take more time for our people. Do we want that?'*

The director's personal changing positively influences some managers who copy his behaviour within the management team and towards their own employees. Some months later, in a session with all managers and team leaders, the director invites the interventionist as 'he would like feedback about his style'. During this session the director still shows several de-blocking behaviours as describes above, which seems to uncover a lasting effect.

One difficulty is that when managers try to break through circular patterns, initially they tend to be pushed back by the environment they have created through their unilateral control. Curiously, the case illustrates several moments when a manager changes his behaviour (e.g. instead of instruction, helping employees to bring in their own ideas), and employees push him back into the behaviour they are used to although they do not like it ('but what is your opinion?'). Some temporary conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly, if a system is interrupted by changed behaviour by one party, the system tends to protect itself. As a consequence, it is difficult to induce immediate effects and one has to take into account a delay. Secondly, for this reason changing requires managers to be courageous and patient. If a manager falls back into 'old' behaviour after the first disappointing results, the system will probably persist and produce recurrent problems. Thirdly, if a manager changes behaviour in order to break through a system without being open about this change to employees, he still behaves from a unilateral control model including a Subject-Object perspective. In

order to stimulate mutual learning, it is important to share his observations about the circular pattern, his reasoning and what he intends to realize with changed behaviour. Subsequently, employees can respond, add missing information and feel responsible for learning and changing.

### *Research question 3*

*How do interventions contribute to (de-)blocking changing, organizing and learning?*

The aim of this research question is to develop an intervention perspective that contributes to de-blocking changing, organizing and learning.

It is important to notice that interventionists cannot be separated from the organization. Their interactions are part of the system and contribute to blocking or de-blocking changing and organizing. This insight is in line with McCaughan and Palmer (1994): "We talk about a consultant being 'outside' the problem situation, but there are no insides and outsides in this kind of systems thinking. Feedback loops are no respecters of conventional boundaries" (p. 75).

### *How interventionists contribute to blocked changing and organizing*

This case study delivers some illustrations of situations in which interventionists contribute to blocked changing by their behaviour. The interventionists tend to activate a unilateral control theory-in-use in situations they perceive as threatening or embarrassing: situations in which their role (and added value) is at stake. Typical expressions of a unilateral control model under these circumstances, as illustrated in this case, are:

- proving one has 'everything under control'
- confirming managers who say that 'we are improving' and suppress hesitations about their real intentions (Argyris calls this 'self-censoring')
- persuading one has to show different behaviour (and showing a strong S-O definition of relations)
- confronting defensiveness in terms of 'wrong'
- showing one's added value through (immediate) answers, analysis and solutions

This way, the interventionists make defensiveness undebatable, create dependency and keep themselves and others from inquiry and learning. As a consequence, they contribute to blocked changing and organizing.

Being part of the system, the interventionists regularly contribute to circular patterns as well:

- Interventionist is active (takes initiative), participants are passive.
- Interventionist feeds back, participants wait and see ('that is an interesting analysis!!').
- Interventionist participates, manager directs difficult issues to interventionist.
- Interventionist talks with employees about their role, manager feels less responsible.
- Interventionist observes and feeds back, participants keep their feedback private.

In essence, it is the interventionist's very presence that might be an expression of management's distancing:

- Interventionist is present, participants feel less responsible (take distance).

Breaking through this circularity places the interventionist in some dilemmas:

#### **Asking questions versus feeding back**

If managers are asked to share their experiences, they tend to be skilled in covering up their defensiveness and tend to share espoused theories. By giving feedback, these very defensive strategies tend to be activated.

#### **Active versus passive**

Interventions (questions or feedback) contribute to reflection. However, each intervention is a sign of activity and can lead to passive participants.

#### **Close versus distance**

In order to de-block changing, self-disclosure by the interventionist appears to be effective. Self-disclosure supposes a close relationship with participants. However, neutral observation of the process requires a distance: the closer the relationship, the more difficult it is to see circularity and defensive strategies (as one tends to be highly skilled in covering these patterns up).

#### **Involved versus neutral**

Clients often expect active involvement of their consultants: working actively with us and being a partner in business. However, it is exactly this role that stimulates the consultant to activate a control model of proving his added value, to define problems and solve them as quickly as possible. A more neutral role is needed for confronting and inquiring into defensiveness. This role seems thus to contradict clients' expectations and consultant's tendencies.

In line with a mutual learning model, the best way to deal with these dilemmas is to share them openly with clients. That way, one can choose consciously.

#### ***Interventions that contribute to de-blocking of changing***

While attending sessions in the organization, the interventionist tries to support changing and learning. The basis of his interventions is directly observable data in the sessions. This case illustrates elements of an intervention perspective that seems to support changing and learning.

#### **Openly sharing what one fears to share regarding the effect of the leader's actions**

This case illustrates that the director's behavioural shift was influenced to a great extent by the interventionist's self-disclosure: *'I think you can be quite threatening for people. Even for me, while I am an outsider, this is the first conversation with you that I feel comfortable. So how safe are you for persons that report to you?'* This intervention, including the effect of the director's behaviour on the interventionist, appears to contribute strongly to the director's learning process. He changes his behaviour, that is copied by his managers and contributes to positive feedback by employees about the atmosphere and communication.

**Inviting to share valid information**

Invite openly to share valid information (*'What do you really think about this change approach?'*) and leave room for free choice, e.g. by asking the highest in rank whether one is allowed to say 'no' to a proposal (a 'yes' might only be valid information if a 'no' is allowed as well). Don't hesitate to confront invalid information (*'What you say seems to differ from what you really think and feel ...; am I right?'*)

**Confronting inconsistency neutrally**

Confront inconsistency neutrally (*'What you say and what you do are inconsistent'*), present possible consistent choices equally (*'Either you say you want to change and show consistent behaviour, or you accept the current reality – each option is fine'*) and invite to make conscious and free choices so that one can feel responsible. This way, managers are helped to be consistent, reduce defensiveness and hold a mutual learning theory-in-use.

**Sharing circularity and help managers/employees to reflect upon their contribution to the problem**

Confront circular patterns and one's contribution to the problems that one faces: *'Could there possibly be a circular pattern: the more active managers are, the more reactive and dependent employees are and vice versa?'* The underlying assumption is that by stimulating awareness of how one contributes to the recurrent patterns, it will be difficult to repeat these actions on purpose.

**Making defensive strategies debatable time after time (make the undiscussable discussable)**

De-blocking changing and organizing requires changing the defensive strategies that block changing and organizing. These defensive strategies, however, are built to defend themselves and can be characterized as ingrained routines. Feedback of defensiveness leads to activation of this defensiveness in the short run. However, the effect is visible in the longer run. This seems to be an argument for confronting defensiveness openly and repetitively. This conclusion is not in line with McCaughan and Palmer (1994) and Moeskops (2004), who emphasize caution and suggest addressing systemic hypotheses only to the client or oneself. However, the conclusion is in line with Argyris (1990), who argues that if the source of the defensive feelings is to avoid learning, defensive feelings should not be bypassed.

The next quote is illustrative of initiating activation of strategies when confronting them.

Interventionist: *We doubt how open people can be. We see some patterns that keep team members from being open. It appeared to us that you can say fairly hard things to each other. Each time this happens some one makes a joke, releases tension and changes the subject. Difficult or personal issues remain undebatable this way and - contrary to the desired effect- an unsafe climate is created. Let's call this a joking strategy. Another strategy with the same effect is the reduction strategy: you tend to make problems smaller if the situation might become difficult or embarrassing.*

HR manager (joking): *Then you must not make any jokes about my roots anymore (both laugh).*

Interventionist: *This is what we mean ....*

*Director: Now you are exaggerating. It is not that bad.*

After a week the director addresses this issue in a conversation with the interventionist and wishes to know more about these defensive strategies, which uncovers a delayed effect.

**Consider the use of humour**

Using some humour can help to make defensive strategies debatable, e.g. 'You are very good at keeping the situation as it is.' Compare Argyris' concept of 'skilled incompetence': 'You are very skilled in being incompetent ...'

**Confront defensive strategies just before they will be activated**

Confronting defensive strategies even before they are activated, helps persons to inquire into their defensiveness 'in action': 'I will mention some defensive strategies that keep you from effective change processes; you will probably feel them being activated while I talk about them. That is how they work; so don't worry. Try to listen and understand what I say and what you feel.'

This does also help to accept defensiveness as a natural response to something that makes defensive, to confront defensiveness neutrally and stimulate inquiry: 'do you feel you are stimulated to defend now? What exactly gives you that feeling?'

**Reduce (time) pressure**

A practical but helpful insight is to reduce pressure that might activate defensiveness by creating room for free choice, reducing time pressure and quick-fixes.

***De-blocking organizing and changing***

The experiences after some months in particular lead to some additional notes regarding de-blocking organizing and changing.

- De-blocking changing and organizing is characterized by delay; it takes time for 'the social system' to translate insights into behaviour. This observation resembles Senge's (1990) insights: changing the 'lower circle' is characterized by delay.
- Change methods (e.g. the way information sessions are organized) are easier to change than perception, behaviour and interventions: the structure of certain meetings fits in 'a new approach', while concrete behaviours during these meetings still fit in the 'the old approach'. There seem to be two explanations: firstly, change methods can be designed with time and attention. As a consequence, there is no direct pressure. Secondly, a method is discussed and put on paper. As such, this can easily be espoused theory.
- Start with the top (see Argyris, 1990). Before they expect employees to change, they have to show visible changes themselves. Espoused theories that are inconsistent with theories-in-use stifle management's credibility as employees focus on what managers do, not on what they say. Inconsistency confirms employees' negative assumptions about managers and activates circular patterns.





## 8. Moving moments 2

### 8.1 Type of organization

This organization is a division of a large company in the business-to-consumer market. Approximately 600 persons work within this division. The vast majority of employees have direct contact with customers by phone, e-mail and post. The market of this division is generally considered to be highly competitive. As a consequence, attracting and retaining customers is a major concern of the company.

### 8.2 Context of the change process

In 2004, top management developed a new strategy for the company. The main subject of this strategy was a shift 'from a product seller to a service supplier'. 'Selling products' was no longer the main aim, but 'solving customers' problems'.

Top management concluded that this new strategy had major consequences for the company in four areas:

- Structure: development of customer-focused work processes
- Marketing: development of a new market approach
- ICT: development of information that supports prompt and customer-oriented decision-making
- Human resources and culture: development of an entrepreneurial and customer-oriented culture and working methods.

This case focuses on the fourth area: human resources and culture.

For the overall coordination a program team was established. One of the first actions of this program team was collecting improvement issues in the organization, which led to more than 1500 ideas. A selection of these ideas was translated into projects. In order to focus, the remaining ideas were kept 'in stock' by the project team.

Based on the input from the organization, the program team developed attractive leaflets and brochures that described the ambitions, success factors, and concrete actions that could be put into action by employees. Regarding human resources and culture, one described the ambition:

- 'our employees are proactive and entrepreneurial'
- 'autonomy and a personal sense of responsibility are our employees' core characteristics'
- 'in our company we stimulate employees to contribute ideas on how to improve our service'.

Management and program team decided to organize professional support from outside the organization in order to 'implement' a new culture and new working methods. At this point the interventionists enter the case.

### 8.3 Moving moments

#### Period 1: preparation

The first meetings between (program) management and interventionists focus on information sharing and feedback. The interventionists' feedback mainly concerns the risk of inconsistency between ambitions, as quoted above, and the process. Some issues are shared:

- In practice, collection of improvement issues by the program team seems not to be in line with the ambition. Employees probably wait and see what 'one' is going to do with their ideas. In effect, they do not feel responsible for the issues anymore. Later, this assumption is confirmed.
- A strong focus is being put on the 'implementation' of changes (*C planned, C top-down, C rational, C step-by-step*). ICT and a market approach can probably be developed and implemented. However, a culture cannot. The more the focus is on implementation, the more employees will wait and see what 'one' is going to implement. In effect, this approach stimulates employees to be reactive instead of proactive.
- When the interventionists share some ideas, the program manager shows his enthusiasm by saying that he likes this way of 'boosting the new culture into the organization' (*P subject-object, O subject-object*). Communicating this way probably stifles employees' pro-activity, as management establish a relation of active management that impose their ambitions upon employees (which preconceives reactive and dependent employees).

The challenge is to develop an approach that at least does not stifle employees to be pro-active and feel responsible. The approach, as described below, is shared with and subscribed to by top management (for a more elaborative description that includes considerations, see box 2.1 in appendix 2):

- Start with top management: discuss approach and consequences for their own role (compare Argyris (1984, 1990), who argues that one should start with the top).
- Follow the 'cascade': director and management team, management team members with their teams, etcetera. This way, employees can be invited to bring in ideas within their own circle of influence that can be implemented by themselves. This approach enables direct communication between managers and their employees and gives the opportunity to organize reflection and learning about the way one works on improvement processes.
- Each department gets a team coach, who should support reflection and learning.
- Before and after each session the manager has a feedback session with the team coach about the communication patterns and his contribution. The underlying

belief is that the team coach can ask question and give feedback in order to enable reflection and learning.

- Regular progress meetings with director, individual managers and management teams contribute to keeps things result-oriented.
- Evaluation after a couple of months.

### Reflection 1

(narratives 2.1)

#### *A Subject-Object perspective leads to inconsistency*

Afterwards, by reflection, the start of this case reflects a strong Subject-Object perspective, considering the leader and interventionists as active agents and employees as passive Objects. This tends to work out as a self-fulfilling prophecy. It starts with the way management perceive the situation. Apparently, management believe they can 'make' employees more proactive and entrepreneurial. It is management who want employees to do something proactively, which in essence is a double bind message (Argyris, 1990). The vision on changing reflects a Subject-Object perspective as well: words like 'implementation' of culture suggest that management (Subjects) can impose a new organizational culture on employees (Objects).

The Subject-Object perspective easily leads to some pitfalls:

- If the leader (Subject) assumes his/her own actions to be effective, the ultimate effectiveness is perceived as dependent on the loyalty, commitment and competence of the employees (Objects) (Hosking, 2004).
- It is exactly this commitment and loyalty that is being stifled by a Subject-Object perspective, as the leader takes responsibility, tends to impose changes on employees, who – in turn – tend to react reactively and dependently.

A Subject-Object perspective basically leads to circular patterns that block the desired change:

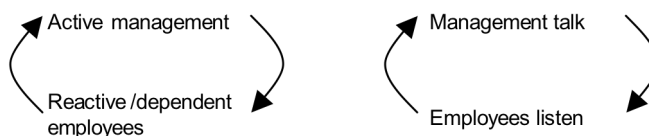


Figure 8.1 Circular patterns

The approach, as suggested by the interventionists, does not take away the risks as described above. Initiative is still in hands of top management (and interventionists), who expect employees to contribute by coming up with improvement ideas within their own circle of influence and putting them into practice. This way, coming up with ideas is still a reaction. In essence, it is paradoxical that management initiate a



<p>Silence ....</p> <p>Dir: I don't understand why people think they cannot be open. As if anyone has experienced some terrible punishment (dir laughs ...as well as some others). You can say anything to me. Please come to me if there is anything to share.</p>	<p>B control B reactive</p>	<p>'yes' and thinking 'no' is less threatening and more common.</p> <p>Inconsistent: what dir says is 'you can say anything to me', however what he does – instead of inquiring- is saying this perception of things makes no sense. The joking strategy helps making things undebatable. Thus, he exactly confirms the pattern.</p>
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Immediately afterwards the director and interventionists evaluate the workshop. The director's main feedback: the morning program was good, however the workshops in the afternoon have not contributed to participants' enthusiasm for this change process. He would have expected the interventionist to create this enthusiasm.

### *Conversation with director*

Director and interventionists briefly evaluate the workshop and prepare a meeting with the management team. In this meeting the director repeats his findings regarding the workshop and emphasizes the need for professionalism (a word that he uses often). He says he does not miss it, but 'only wishes to stress the interest of success'. This message, in combination with the difficulty to create a relation, puts pressure on the interventionists. In effect, again, they reinforce unilateral control and wish to prove their professionalism (translated into being a good 'partner-in-business').

Subsequently, they prepare the agenda of the management team meeting intensively. The interventionists feel highly responsible for the success of this meeting. As a consequence, they tend to persuade the director of the desired approach. The director, in turn, complies with their suggestions and says 'he hopes this is going to work'.

### *Meeting management team*

Director and managers start the cascade in a meeting that focuses on their role in the improvement process. The director leads the session, while the interventionists focus on the process. The latter strongly wish a positive experience for their client and wish to prove their professionalism. As a consequence, they are relatively tense.

<p>[...]</p> <p>Dir shares his disappointment about relatively passive role that managers have played during the kick-off meeting.</p> <p>Managers do not respond to this.</p> <p>Director invites managers to share their vision on what they want to realize with this process within their own departments.</p>	<p>P distance P blaming P linear</p>	<p>Actually, in this session the same pattern takes place as they are discussing. The director is relatively active and initiates the discussion, while managers are relatively reactive. These behaviours seem to relate circularly.</p>
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<p>Director gives turns to managers, takes time to ask questions and gives them room to share their ideas. Managers wait their turn and do not ask each other questions.</p> <p>Until it is K's turn.</p> <p>K: Am I allowed to divert a bit?</p> <p>Dir: Yes, but keep it brief please.</p> <p>K: Well, I have been working on my health more consciously lately. I even drink two litres of water, which I never did before. In short, I made a real behavioural change myself because I am intrinsically motivated. It is my ambition not to say my team leaders and their employees must change. I want them to do it because they intrinsically want to.</p> <p>Silence.</p> <p>Dir: Well, but you have also a responsibility to manage the change and make things really happen. It is not free of obligations.</p> <p>K: I know, it isn't. But in my opinion it would be better for me to coach them to find out their own way than tell them what they should do.</p> <p>Dir: As we have learned in our training program, you have three roles: leader, coach and manager. You easily forget the management role.</p> <p>H (another manager): How would you monitor progress? We have to make progress, don't we?</p> <p>K: Yes, of course we have to. But I don't believe people will really change if I push them.</p> <p>M (another manager): People won't change if you don't push them, will they?</p> <p>K: O.k., the message is clear. I will involve the management role as well.</p> <p>Int: What is happening? You put quite some pressure on K, don't you?</p> <p>All (including K): yes.</p> <p>Int: K, what is the effect of this?</p> <p>K: It does not feel pleasant; I feel I have to defend myself.</p>	<p>B control</p> <p>B control↑ B repeat</p> <p>B control↑ B repeat</p> <p>B control↑ B repeat</p>	<p>K's question confirms the circular pattern.</p> <p>This sounds like a double bind message: 'I want you to want it yourself.'</p> <p>This is exactly the difference in beliefs between K and his colleagues. K does not want to push his team leaders (he knows the effect from experience, illustrated in this meeting).</p> <p>The unilateral control model (pushing) leads to a short term solution: the manager says he complies (compliance strategy). However, this does not seem to be valid information and will probably not help in the longer run.</p> <p><i>Interventionist intends to make the effect of this behaviour debatable. After all, forcing each other to act and think the same as the majority seems to be not consistent with the desire to stimulate entrepreneurship and ownership.</i></p>
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<p>Int: But it works, right? After all, you say that you comply. Does it feel this way?</p> <p>K: Well, actually I believe my way also works. But I see I need to change my belief.</p> <p>Int (to all): Is that what you want?</p> <p>H: No, I think you are right. We should not try to convince him, but I think we have to take time to find out how we wish to contribute to the change process.</p> <p>All agree.</p> <p>Dir: We shall cover this later; we had already put the subject on the agenda.</p> <p>There appears to be not enough time. According to the agenda, director tries to initiate a brainstorm. However, the later it gets, the more he pushes and the less response by the managers.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Director seems to be very dissatisfied about the outcomes of this session and leaves the room with strong body language and without greeting.</p>	<p>B control</p>	<p><i>Int invites to share valid information.</i></p> <p><i>Int invites to make a free choice based on valid information and take responsibility.</i></p> <p>The pressure stimulates the director to activate a unilateral control model. As a consequence, the circular process of an active director and reactive (even passive) managers is activated.</p> <p><i>In the end the interventionists do not feel comfortable with the situation: there is still no relation and they are held responsible for the disappointment, as they 'should have known more time was needed for this session'. In this situation they find it difficult to step into an independent position and give feedback about the process. As a consequence, they indeed add too little value, which leads to new disappointments. A circular process, that has to be stopped ....</i></p>
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Afterwards there is only little time available for evaluation with the director. Director and interventionists agree to take time to evaluate by phone within two days.

#### *Conversation between director and interventionist*

Two days later director and interventionist have a conversation. In the meantime the interventionist does not feel comfortable in the process and has reflected upon possible explanations:

- he experiences director's behaviour as unpredictable,
  - he misses a relationship and feels he and his colleagues are being perceived as 'suppliers' and
  - the effect of this lack of comfort stimulates the need to stay in control by proving his professionalism and added value; as a consequence, he loses his independence and finds it hard to take a position from which he can reflect on the process and share valid information (in other words, pressure activates a unilateral control model).
- The interventionist wishes to break through this situation in this conversation.

<p>[...]</p> <p>Director and interventionist talk about the managers' reactive attitude.</p> <p>Int: Still, I think you might contribute to this attitude yourself.</p> <p>Dir (open, curious): How?</p> <p>Int: What I see is that they mostly wait until you personally turn to them; there is practically no interaction between the managers during the meeting. You strongly direct the meeting and use words like 'I'll come back to you later', which sounds like 'wait until your next turn'. In that way you stimulate a reactive and dependent attitude. While you wish to stimulate entrepreneurship and pro-activity.</p> <p>Dir: I see ... but I have to take initiative, right? Exactly because they act this way.</p> <p>Int: You perceive their behaviour as the cause and your behaviour as effect. But your behaviour and theirs might be cause and effect at the same time. Like a vicious circle: you take initiative, they behave reactively, this is a reason for you to take more initiative and, in turn they will even be more reactive.</p> <p>Dir: I see. You are right.</p> <p>Int: And there is something else. Would you be interested in an additional point?</p> <p>Dir: Yes, please ...</p> <p>Int: Let me present this from my personal perspective. In my experience you can be very unpredictable: from one moment to another you can be very dissatisfied about things, which you communicate verbally or nonverbally (Int gives some examples). Sometimes I think we have built a relationship, but the next moment it seems not to be there at all. As a consequence, I am on the alert and act very cautiously. I don't think I give you what you deserve, then.</p> <p>Int: Do you recognize what I say?</p> <p>Dir (positively aroused): Yes, I can follow you. Go on.</p> <p>Int: After all it is my own responsibility to be able to deal with you and my feelings. However, it becomes important if you have the same effect on your managers. Might they be cautious because they cannot predict your reaction?</p>	<p>P linear P subject-object</p>	<p><i>Interventionist gives feedback about the circular patterns and addresses director's role. The point is, the director is not satisfied about managers' reactive attitude and stimulates this attitude with his own behaviour (self-fulfilling prophecy).</i></p> <p><i>Interventionist clarifies circularity.</i></p> <p><i>Self-disclosure by interventionist. Int describes the effects of director's behaviour neutrally (without judging) and the way he tends to respond. Thus he shares valid information.</i></p> <p><i>Int checks if he misses information.</i></p> <p><i>Int helps the director to reflect: might your behaviour produce the same effects in your management team?</i></p>
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Dir: Yes, they might be ...		
Int: and as a consequence of their caution you increase pressure ...		
Dir: Yes, I see I may contribute to their behaviour.	P circular (D)	Director recognizes circularity.

### *Second management team meeting*

In a second meeting of the management team, the HR manager presents a well-prepared Powerpoint presentation about the themes that took a great deal of time to explore in the first session. The director has already approved the contents of the presentation. All managers listen carefully. After the presentation, the managers keep silent. The director inquires how they think about the contents. When one manager asks a critical question regarding the contents of the presentation, the director responds firmly: *'We have to make our decisions. If we wait for others, nothing will happen.'* All managers agree that it is a good piece of work and there is little to add. In the second half of the meeting the team members discuss some routine subjects. This part is much more effective: the director inquires and leaves room to the managers and managers, in turn, participate actively.

### *Meeting with director*

Later, director and interventionist evaluate the current reality and progress, including the second management team meeting.

<p>[...]</p> <p>Int gives the director feedback upon the way the director seems to contribute to managers' behaviour and the limited progress.</p> <p>Int: An illustrative example is the presentation by the HR manager. This was a great presentation. No doubt about that. And the contents were a major boost for the progress. However, a major reason for this presentation was you not being satisfied with the management team's working pace and your team leaders' initiative, right?</p> <p>Dir: Right.</p> <p>Int: Your solution helped in the short run. However, with this solution you stifled team leaders' initiative in the longer run. Now they know that, in the end, you will come up with a solution.</p> <p>Dir: I understand what you say. But we don't have plenty of time. I cannot wait all the time.</p> <p>Int: What are your considerations that make you decide to speed things up?</p>	B control	<p><i>Int shares the short-term and long-term effect of the HR manager's presentation. In the short run it helps. However, the underlying circular problem remains not discussed.</i></p>
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In case of threat, conflicting opinions and personal issues, unilateral control is not effective anymore.

If related to Senge's 'shifting the burden' structure, the unilateral control model consistently activates the upper circle and defensive strategies, and blocks inquiry into the lower circle, as depicted in figure 8.2.

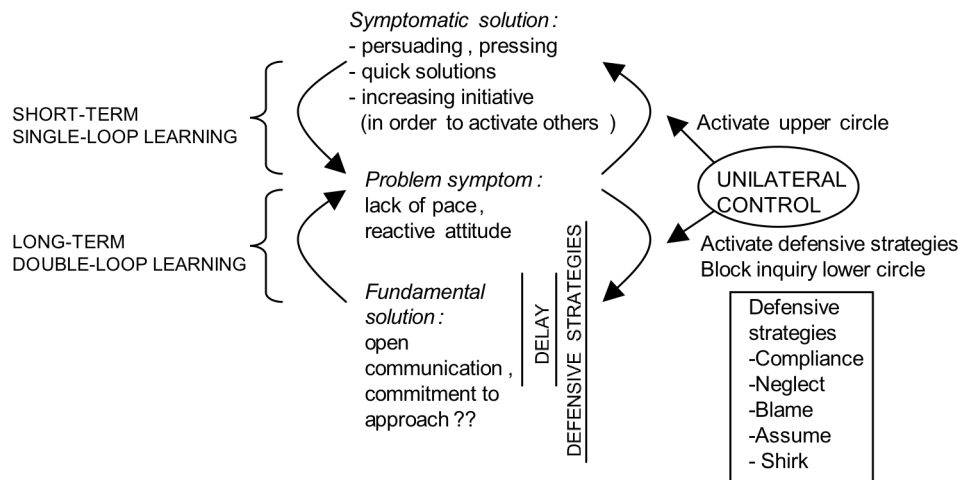


Figure 8.2 Unilateral control in relation to the 'shifting the burden' structure

The more pressure, the more activation of a unilateral control model:

- The director's perception of the employees who look at the management disdainfully activates a unilateral control model: increasing pressure, persuasion, neglecting underlying patterns.
- In complex situations the director tends to enlarge control and reduce room; initiative and participation reduce and managers wait for their turn; director's unilateral control and managers' dependency are linked circularly.
- The presentation by HR is strong; however, the reason for her presentation was the team not being fast enough; this way this problem is bypassed and even reinforced; it is a short-term solution that is accompanied neither by testing of one's beliefs (why did the director and HR manager choose this approach), nor inquiring into the underlying process (what makes managers act reactively and dependently). It is not the presentation as such, as much as the lack of (additional) inquiry that reinforces recurrent patterns and blocks learning and changing. Thus entrepreneurship and pro-activity are stifled.
- Some defensive strategies by director and managers are visible:
  - Compliance strategy: in case of threat, say that you comply (regardless of whether you really do).
  - Ignorance strategy: act as if it is interesting, but ignore the information that is difficult to deal with.
  - Assume strategy: hold strong assumptions about others and situations without

testing them.

- Shirk strategy: shift the responsibility to someone else and avoid sharing your own opinion about the process or colleagues.
- Changing the pattern is difficult and has a delay. The director does his utmost to leave room and stimulate managers to be proactive. However, managers do not immediately respond. In turn, the director tends to fall back to increasing pressure. Changing current patterns takes time and is characterized by delay, as the system is maintained by a number of routines that tend to defend themselves. Changing the system of interactive patterns by the leader, therefore, is preferably accompanied by openness about one's underlying beliefs: 'I ask you to share your opinion and I'll keep my mouth shut for a moment, because I am afraid I stifle your commitment and involvement otherwise. Shall we try how things work this way?' This way, responsibility is being shared and mutual learning stimulated.

#### *Consequences of unilateral control for change process*

A unilateral control model seems to have a number of consequences for the effectiveness of the change process.

- The aim of the process is to stimulate entrepreneurship and ownership. However, unilateral control activates the upper circle (see figure 8.2) and sooner stimulates reactive and dependent behaviour.
- The defensive strategies by managers (especially compliance strategy) easily lead to invalid information regarding their opinions, feelings and commitment and, subsequently, to problems in the process. A 'yes' to the question if managers are committed is only of value if one could say 'no' as well.
- Difficult issues that block effective change remain undebatable. Even if one says and believes one wants to change (espoused theory), one blocks the change process effectively (skilled incompetence, Argyris).

#### *Unilateral control by the interventionist*

Under circumstances of pressure and possible embarrassment the interventionists activate a unilateral control model. As a consequence, they tend to prove their professionalism and added value, being 'partners in business'. In effect, they are as vulnerable as their client to the expressions of a unilateral control model and lose their added value. Expressions:

- The interventionist tends to translate 'adding value' into 'helping to keep things under control', e.g. by managing meetings in such a way that no difficulties appear. This way, he adheres to the same unilateral control model as his client and does not add value.
- Interventionist's sensitivity to ineffective patterns diminishes; as he is so strongly involved, he does not see the unproductive patterns in actions. Only afterwards, in reflection, is he aware of what has happened.
- Interventionist tends to confront unilateral control in a unilateral control way, when things don't speed up: he persuades the director, who says he complies (but does not really feel personally responsible for the method). This pattern is identical with the circular pattern between director and managers.

In the end, the interventionist finds his way back by self-disclosure: he is open about the effect of the director's behaviour on him. However, the interventionist is not really open about 'him not being effective this way'. This way, he distances and considers the situation to be linear (the director has an effect on the interventionist; however, what is the effect of the interventionist's approach on the director?).

#### *Alternative interventions from a mutual learning model*

As an alternative for unilateral control, the interventionist had some alternatives in order to de-block processes (mutual learning).

- Making inconsistency visible and leaving room for the director to make his own choices: 'what you wish (proactive behaviour, entrepreneurship) is not consistent with what you do (stimulating reactive behaviour). You could either leave your actions as they are and accept your managers' behaviour or change your actions and contribute to their proactive attitude (valid information). Both options are consistent; it is up to you (free choice). This alternative is relatively easy, as the interventionist can still distance himself (act as if he is not a part of the system). The next alternative is more difficult.
- Being open about interventionist's own limited added value in this situation and exploring how this could be enlarged. This would require exploring the (circular) pattern between director and interventionist: how does the director perceive the interventionist's role and how does this perception affect him? The difficulty is that such inquiry requires the interventionist (and director) to feel comfortable. Here lies an important explanation of persistent and recurrent ineffective patterns: pressure and discomfort activate a unilateral control model, leading to circular patterns and defensive strategies. De-blocking these patterns requires a feeling of comfort. This case helps the interventionists to experience how difficult the assignment is that they give to their clients.

### **Period 3: sessions deeper in organization**

When director and managers have established a clear vision and main goals, the managers plan sessions with their teams (team leaders) in order to discuss the implications for their department. In addition, they prepare the sessions that team leaders will have with their teams. After a period, managers have follow-up sessions with their team leaders. During these sessions they discuss progress in the teams and share experiences on 'supporting change'. Managers lead these sessions and interventionists support them. Support means a pre-session, assistance during the session (feedback to manager and team and co-responsibility for a productive session) and a feedback session with the manager. The interactions in one department are described as illustrations.

### *Start meeting with manager and team leaders*

Before the first session by the manager and his team leaders the interventionists have heard some rumours about this team. It is known as a 'difficult' team. Some illustrative parts of the session are described below.

<p>Meeting starts with strong body language. Atmosphere is tense.</p> <p>Introduction by manager: some slides describe goals of session. Atmosphere is still tense, nobody responds.</p> <p>Mgr: Who would like to respond?</p> <p>TL1: I miss the connection.</p> <p>Mgr: What do you mean?</p> <p>TL1: I miss the connection between what the MT has developed and what we are doing in our day-to-day business. There should be acknowledgement of what our employees and we are already delivering.</p> <p>Mgr: Of course we do acknowledge your effort. But we are never good enough, are we. There is always room for improvement.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>TL4: The problem is, that we have brought in plenty ideas in the past. But the project team has done nothing with them.</p> <p>Mgr: You are right. We have a lot of improvement issues. Let us take our responsibility and bring them into practice ourselves.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>TL3: I understand that everything has already been decided.</p> <p>Mgr: No, it is just an outline. Just want to share this as input for your own thoughts.</p> <p>Other team leaders confirm TL3.</p> <p>Int: I don't understand. You seem to have two faces: when you work out things yourself, you act constructively and positively. However, as soon as mgr presents some outlines and gives some direction, you seem to be offended by it. How come?</p>	<p></p> <p>B control</p> <p></p> <p>B control</p> <p></p> <p>B control</p>	<p><i>The first impression confirms the rumours. In effect, the interventionist feels he has to support the manager to 'deal with this difficult team' and activates a unilateral control model.</i></p> <p><i>Introduction is relatively long. It seems that the more tense the atmosphere, the more the manager talks, etcetera (circular pattern).</i></p> <p>This message seems to be a reaction to episodic change, initiated by management. Episodic changes, combined with a subject-object perspective, give the impression that 'change should be imposed on the organization because otherwise nothing will happen'.</p> <p>Manager, nor interventionist, inquires what TL1 means. In this way they keep things under control.</p> <p></p> <p>All parties try to persuade the other party of one's position. No mutual inquiry into positions.</p> <p><i>Interventionist supports manager and takes a position against team leaders (partner-in-business with manager). Although his intention is to give feedback and help the process, in effect he blames and generalizes.</i></p>
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<p>TL5 (a bit offensive): What is your point?</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Int: This has been a difficult session. For all of us. I am afraid we are not connected with each other. I think you are all quite committed, but some of you are also disappointed. I think it is good that you share critical notes. This is much better than saying 'yes' and thinking 'no'. Before, some of you referred to this as 'political correctness'. However, at some moments I feel a firmness that makes it difficult to have an open conversation. This discouraged me to say what I think and stimulated me to be cautious. And it encourages me to stand beside the manager and against you. I am not sure if that is what you want. At the same time, we all have to reflect on the way we have contributed to this situation. This applies to the manager and us (interventionists) as well. We have to find out what the effect is of our approach and our behaviour.</p> <p>Mgr: Tomorrow we're meeting again. Let's evaluate then.</p>		<p>This defensive reaction is no surprise.</p> <p><i>Interventionist tries to share valid information about the effect of team leaders' behaviour and he addresses circularity. He also says that he appreciates them being open and sharing valid information (not saying 'yes' if one thinks 'no'). However, these words are not consistent with the interventionist's perception and behaviour during the session, as he experienced valid information as 'difficult behaviour' and 'resistance' and activated a unilateral control model that – as a self-fulfilling prophecy – stimulated 'difficult behaviour' and 'resistance'.</i></p>
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### Feedback session

After this meeting interventionist and manager have a feedback session.

<p>[...]</p> <p>Int: How did you feel during the session?</p> <p>Mgr: I felt not happy, more and more tense, disappointed about team leaders' ownership, I was let down, I missed contact. Actually I was angry.</p> <p>Int: What kept you from saying these things?</p> <p>Mgr: I don't know; it didn't occur to me.</p> <p>Int : There was a distance between you and your team: the more tension, the more distance and the more focus on procedures. It seems there was a circular process: the more distance you took, the more critical some became, the more distance you took, etcetera.</p> <p>We saw a manager, but didn't see you with your feelings and expectations. Do you see what I mean?</p> <p>[...]</p>		<p><i>Actually, the interventionist had not been able to share these kinds of feelings either. Both have been stuck in a unilateral control model, that instructs them to keep things under control, to win, to suppress feelings, to avoid testing one's own assumptions and to judge others. Manager and interventionist showed all these behaviours during the session. The interventionist was a good 'partner-in-business'.</i></p> <p><i>By giving this feedback, the interventionist distances himself from the situation, as if he were no part of the process.</i></p>
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### *Communication between manager and team leaders*

The next day the manager has a regular meeting with team leaders. In this session the manager is open about what he had felt during the session and why he was disappointed. In addition, he clarifies what he expects from his team leaders and he inquires what he did that stimulated the team leaders' behaviour. They agree a further session is needed; the manager and a team leader will prepare this session together and team leaders are invited to bring in ideas.

The next day the manager sends an email to the team leaders. He is open about his expectations and his own contribution to the stagnation. A quote: *'I'm letting you know that I have higher expectations regarding our leadership in this change process. Of course I will be very glad to involve my own role. I wonder, for example, if you think I take you seriously and if I take enough time to involve you. I look forward to your personal and constructive feedback.'*

### *Second session with manager and team leaders*

In a second session the manager wishes to create more active participation by team leaders, more connection and stronger commitment. After all, the improvement process aims at stronger entrepreneurship. This requires a feeling of ownership and responsibility. Therefore he has invited team leaders to bring in subjects for this session. By and large, the team leaders have given their ideas and wishes. They emphasize 'being concrete', 'how to involve employees' and 'action!'. In a pre-session with the interventionist the manager summarizes some points of attention regarding his role:

<p>Mgr:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- keep contact, stay in touch</li><li>- share valid information</li><li>- beware of circularity: if I feel unpleasant, I have to beware of directing more and more. I had better sit down and share what I see and feel.</li></ul> <p>Will you help me?</p> <p>Int: I will help you. However, this will not always mean that I confirm you. We have seen what happened last time.</p>	<p>P circular (D) P own role (D)</p>	<p>Manager is aware of the circular relation between his actions and his team leaders' actions. Besides, he is willing to share valid information. However, this all could be espoused theory. During the meeting, in action, he has to put this into practice.</p> <p>Int steps out of his 'partner-in-business' role, so that he feels free to act independently from the manager. He feels more relaxed in this role.</p>
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Below, some parts of the second session of manager and team leaders are described.

<p>Mgr (with a friendly, warm tone of voice): Welcome to this session. A second-chance session. In our first session we were not in touch. We were opposing instead of working together. In the meantime several important things have happened. We had a good evaluation the next day. And many of you have given input for this session.</p> <p>In the meantime I have learned. I have had</p>	<p>P circular (D)</p>	<p>Manager is open about his own role and gives</p>
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<p>intensive contact with A (interventionist) about my style. I have learned that I tend to take a distance in difficult situations. As a consequence, I lose contact, which stimulates you to be offended. I really want to keep in touch.</p> <p>TL1: It is not the change itself. I think most of us do want to change. It is the process and the tone of voice that bothered me: the management team has formulated exactly what we should do ....</p> <p>Mgr: .. but these were only outlines ...</p> <p>Int: I know you wish to listen carefully. ....</p> <p>TL1: We want to be taken seriously.</p> <p>Mgr: What do you feel needs to be taken seriously?</p> <p>TL1: The way we talk now. In an open discussion.</p> <p>Mgr: Does anyone else wish to share any issues about the past?</p> <p>TL2: We don't like to be 'the difficult team'. That is what we hear in this organization.</p> <p>TL3: What is the idea? Does one want yes-men in this organization? That doesn't feel good.</p> <p>Mgr: I don't want yes-men. Let's be honest, it would be easy if you just followed. However, I appreciate you being honest about your thoughts and feelings. Still, it is not always easy to deal with. I expect you to take responsibility as well. Can you imagine?</p> <p>TL3: Yes, I can.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Manager finishes the session with a brief evaluation by asking each individual team leader for his/her feeling. All are positive and agree this was 'much better'.</p> <p>Mgt invites int to share his observations.</p> <p>Int: I have learned from you. To be honest, in the first session I tended to perceive you as a 'difficult team'. I really appreciate if one is open, however one can easily label real openness as 'resistance'. I did. In turn, I started helping J (manager) to persuade you and took distance. This way I stimulated you precisely in your behaviour, didn't I? After all, I did not help J this way. On the contrary. Today you have shown how engaged you are.</p> <p>TL: Could you spread this message in the</p>	<p>P own role (D) B reflection (D) B proactive (D)</p> <p>B control</p> <p>B inquiry (D) I reflection (D) I long-term (D) I inquiry (D)</p> <p>B inquiry (D)</p> <p>B valid (D)</p> <p>P distance</p>	<p>insight into the circular process.</p> <p>TL1 tells he finds it hard to feel responsible for things that are being imposed on him. The words he chooses make the manager defensive; he tries to control the situation (to win?).</p> <p><i>Interventionist leaves his role of 'partner-in-business' and takes an independent role. The manager immediately brings the feedback into practice.</i></p> <p>Manager shares valid information. He is open about not wanting yes-men and about yes-men being easier to deal with. He is also open about his expectations.</p> <p><i>Interventionist reduces distance by self-reflection and involving his own role. He also shares valid information and addresses circular patterns.</i></p> <p>TL does not involve their own role, as if 'the</p>
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<p>organization? To be honest, we don't like to be labelled as 'the difficult team' time after time.</p> <p>Int: What is the effect of being labelled this way?</p> <p>TL: We feel unhappy with it. Actually I get angry. It de-motivates me when the organization talks this way, just because we are not yes-men.</p> <p>Int: I will talk positively about you. However, if you are labelled this way time after time, you should think together why one would do that. You might be in a vicious circle: you get angry, which leads to more negative labels, which make you even angrier, etcetera. Try to find out together how you could stop this recurrent pattern.</p>	P linear	<p>organization' perceives them as difficult without any reason.</p> <p><i>Interventionist tries to make circularity visible and stimulates reflection on one's own contribution to the situation.</i></p>
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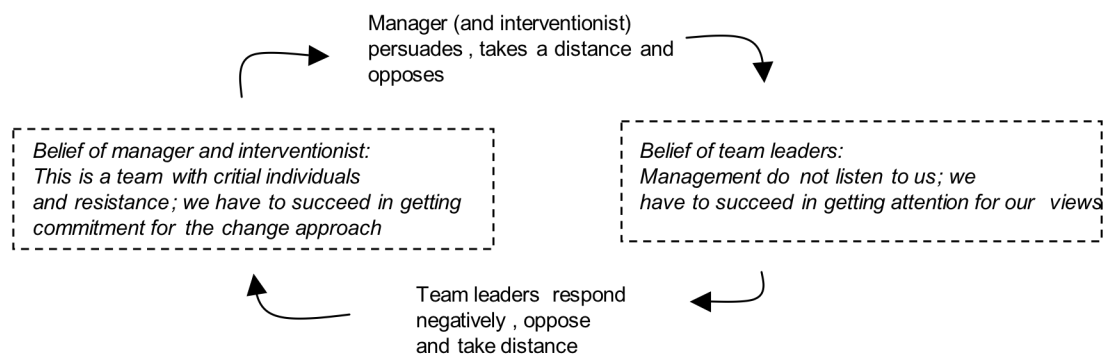
### Reflection 3

(narratives 2.8– 2.13)

The sessions with manager and team leaders illustrate the development from a unilateral control model that leads to strong tensions towards a mutual learning model that leads to learning and dialogue.

#### *How unchecked beliefs lead to self-fulfilling prophecies*

Before the first session the interventionists heard several rumours about this team (difficult, critical). Furthermore, the manager is quite tense because he expects some resistance. However, what is the effect of this belief? Afterwards, through reflection, the effect was 'we have to manage this process carefully. Otherwise things could escalate. In other words: 'we have to keep things under control'. This way, the unchecked 'negative beliefs' create a threat, which in turn activates a unilateral control model by managers and interventionists: they persuade, distance, blame, oppose and make the source of the tension undebatable. As a consequence, team leaders distance and oppose as well and tend to respond more and more negatively to the manager. This, in turn, is a confirmation for manager and interventionists that this is 'a difficult team with resistance', which reinforces their unilateral control. This way, their beliefs turn out to be self-fulfilling prophecies. Later, in a subsequent session, team leaders say that they believe that management do not listen to their opinion. This unchecked belief influenced their behaviour during the first session. Figure 8.3 illustrates the circular and self-fulfilling character of this pattern.



**Figure 8.3**     *Unchecked beliefs become self-fulfilling prophecies*

As long as this pattern is not the subject of inquiry, it will go on and the situation will grow worse.

#### *Different views perceived as resistance*

The sessions with this team strongly illustrate that different views are being perceived as resistance (from a management perspective), which subsequently leads to activation of a unilateral control model. The espoused theory is that we would like valid information, especially about a fundamental thing like commitment. A leading question in mutual learning is 'are we missing some information?' However, if this valid information is unpleasant and even threatening, this valid information tends to activate a unilateral control model, with another leading question: 'how do we keep things under control?' This case is clear: team leaders are quite explicit about their lack of commitment (to the process). This is valid information. However, manager and interventionist label this information (different view) as resistance and activate a unilateral control model, which further stifles team leaders' commitment. The difficulty in action is to deal with valid information if we perceive this information as threatening. It is easier to manage people who say 'yes' and think 'no', even if a 'yes' is not valid information.

#### *How to break through the negative circular pattern?*

The atmosphere in the first and last session with this team is very different. The manager has contributed directly with some behavioural changes that fit in a mutual learning model.

- Self-disclosure and reflection upon his own role: *'I have learned that I tend to take distance in difficult situations.'*
- Making circularity visible: *'As a consequence, I lose contact, which stimulates you to be offended. I really want to keep in touch.'*
- Inquiry into underlying pattern: 'What do you feel needs to be taken seriously?'
- Sharing valid information: 'I don't want yes-men. Let's be honest, it would be easy if you just followed. However, I appreciate you being honest about your thoughts'

and feelings. Still, it is not always easy to deal with. I expect you to take responsibility as well. Can you imagine?’

The consequence of the manager’s approach is that team leaders follow his example (e.g. ‘The effect is that we create a distance between our employees and us. They might feel that we don’t take them seriously’). This leads to an open dialogue and learning. As a consequence, the team leaders take initiatives to prepare sessions with their employees autonomously and show (internal) commitment.

*From ‘partner-in-business’ to ‘independent professional’*

Together with the manager, the interventionist has developed his approach from unilateral control to mutual learning. In first instance, the interventionist’s reasoning is that he should help management to make the process successful. Regardless of his knowledge about the risks of unilateral control, in action the interventionist translates ‘help’ into ‘assisting management to realize an episodic change within a certain time frame with as few problems as possible’. Or, in other words, assisting management to keep things under control.

The preparation of sessions together with the manager easily activates this ‘partner-in-business’ model: helping the manager under difficult circumstances easily becomes helping to keep things (read ‘individuals’) under control. The greater the desire to help the manager, the less help (bypass, persuasion, growing control under stress, directing instead of asking). As a consequence, in this case team leaders perceive the interventionist as a partner of management and make no difference in their response. This, in turn, reinforces the interventionist’s unilateral control. This circular pattern is highly identical to the one between manager and team leaders.

An alternative approach, in line with a mutual learning model, would have been to inquire into the manager’s beliefs from scratch:

- why do you expect resistance?
- what exactly do you mean by resistance?
- what examples do you have in the past?
- what exactly happened and how did you act?
- what is the effect of your belief (they will have resistance’) on your behaviour?
- what is the effect of that behaviour and are you satisfied with that effect?
- might they have information that you’re missing?
- could you explain why they act as they do?
- how do you contribute to their behaviour?
- how could you create an open dialogue instead of unilateral control?

The problem is, the interventionist was not able to ‘produce’ these questions in action and under pressure. During the process, the interventionist becomes aware of his ‘partner-in-business’ role and becomes increasingly independent: *‘I will help you. However, this will not always mean that I confirm you. We saw what happened last time’*. The more (emotionally) independent he feels, the more he succeeds to

contribute to mutual learning.

#### *Interventions that contribute to (de-blocking) changing, organizing and learning*

The interventionist has contributed to the development from unilateral control model towards a mutual learning model.

- Publicly reflecting on his own contribution/sharing valid information: *'To be honest, in the first session I tended to perceive you as a 'difficult team'. I really appreciate if one is open, however one can easily label real openness as 'resistance'. I did. In turn, I started helping J (manager) to persuade you and took distance. This way, I stimulated you precisely in your behaviour, didn't I?'*
- Helping the manager to reflect upon his own role: *'How did you feel during the session? What kept you from saying these things? What was the effect of these strong feelings?'*
- Suggesting what to do and what to say in order to change the process: *'Try to be open then about what you really felt as an effect of their behaviour: you felt you were let down. Share valid information. Why do you think they acted the way they did?'*
- Helping team leaders to reflect upon their own role: *'At some moments I feel a firmness that makes it difficult to have an open conversation. This discouraged me to say what I think and stimulated me to be cautious. And it encourages me to stand beside the manager and against you. I am not sure if that is what you want.'*
- Making circularity visible: *'You might be in a vicious circle: you get angry, which leads to more negative labels, which make you even angrier, etcetera..'*
- Inquiry into underlying pattern: *'What is the effect of being labelled this way?'*

#### **Period 4: monitoring sessions**

In a next stage all teams have monitoring sessions. The main goal of these sessions is to discuss progress and to schedule new actions.

#### *Meeting with manager and team leaders*

Illustrative is the meeting with the manager with his team leaders who have been described before. This session demonstrates the interventionist's attempts to make defensiveness debatable. Some parts are described below.

<p>[...]</p> <p>Mgr: Today, I would like to explore with you how we can keep the energy in the process. Besides, I would like to inspire you.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Mgr shows an instruction movie (Fish!) about leading change, followed by a question: What struck you while watching this movie?</p>	<p>P subject-object</p>	<p>The belief that the manager is responsible for inspiring team leaders, leads to the opposite. Team leaders respond dependently and reactively (we will wait and see').</p>
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<p>TL1: They focus on coaching, which attracts me more than steering.</p> <p>TL2: One really has to believe; it has to be genuine. That is not always the case here. Here we tend to be politically correct.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Mgr: Let's apply the insights to our own situation. What is needed to keep the improvement process alive?</p> <p>TL6: We have to repeat our vision time after time.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>TL8 (just a team leader for a week; has been one of the employees before): People do not really find this process important.</p> <p>TL1: There is no clear sense-of-urgency.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Int: It strikes me that you don't explore two remarks that have been made: political correctness and 'people don't really find the improvement process important'. I have heard this 'political correctness' several times. What do you mean by it?</p> <p>Silence ...</p> <p>TL2: Well, it means people just follow and are not open about what they really think: here, employees, top managers....</p> <p>TL4: I don't like the word. And actually it bothers me that this is brought in time after time.</p> <p>TL5: Let us focus on what we can do ourselves, what is within our own circle of influence.</p> <p>Int: This 'political correctness' word seems to hang over the process like a dark cloud. Let us inquire how we could help the process forward.</p> <p>TL2: The best way is to ignore it.</p> <p>Int: But if you say that we don't say how we really think about this improvement process we cannot ignore it, can we?</p> <p>TL2: But the problem is not in this group. It is somewhere else ....</p> <p>Tense silence</p> <p>TL4: We should neither accept nor ignore, however we should be aware of the risk and go on</p>	<p>B valid</p>	<p>Openness about defensiveness. However nobody responds. This is in line with Senge (1990): "To retain their power, defensive routines must remain undiscussable. Teams stay stuck in their defensive routines only when they pretend that they don't have any defensive routines, that everything is all right, and that they can say 'anything'" (Senge, p. 255).</p> <p>TL8 shares a threatening message. Nobody responds.</p> <p><i>Interventionist tries to make defensiveness debatable.</i></p> <p>Valid information.</p> <p><i>Interventionist tries to stimulate inquiry into defensiveness.</i></p> <p>Several defensive strategies are being activated: ignorance/denial strategy.</p> <p>Distance strategy: it is not here but somewhere else.</p> <p>This seems to be an ignorance/denial strategy in different words.</p>
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<p>with this process.</p> <p>Int: This is difficult, isn't it. Saying that this is not really a problem could be a confirmation of the problem.</p> <p>Several managers: We think we just have to go on.</p> <p>Mgr: This is difficult to grasp. I think we should all focus on our own role. And I appreciate if we can be open about what we really think. We have learned that before. Let's go back to where we were (looks at TL1).</p> <p>TL1: Well, after all I don't want them to do it for me. I want them to do it because they want it themselves.</p> <p>Many confirm.</p> <p>Mgr: That is important indeed. We have to make them do it by themselves.</p> <p>Int: Sounds like a difficult assignment: 'I want you to do it because you want it yourself.'</p> <p>[...]</p>	<p>B control</p> <p>P subject-object B control</p> <p>P subject-object B control</p>	<p><i>What could interventionist do differently, without being in a control model of persuading and pressing?</i></p> <p>Mgr makes this issue undiscussable .... <i>The interventionist feels he is pushing too hard and stops trying to make this discussable. Two team leaders watch him in a way he translates as 'please don't go on, as we just don't want her negative remarks about political correctness'. He does not check this. The question is, how far should the interventionist go to make the undiscussable discussable?</i></p> <p>Feedback of double bind assignment.</p>
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#### Reflection 4

(narratives 2.14 – 2.15)

##### *A Subject-Object perspective leads to the inconsistency*

The last meeting illustrates how a Subject-Object perspective leads to inconsistency.

Two examples:

- 'I want to inspire you'
- 'We have to make them do it by themselves'

These examples show how these managers try not to be directive, however still push subordinates into a dependent and reactive position because they act from an S-O perspective. The belief that the manager is responsible for inspiring team leaders easily leads to the opposite. After all, team leaders will wait and see how their manager tries to inspire them. This, again, illustrates how an S-O perspective leads to a circular pattern of active subjects and passive objects and how the intention to inspire and to motivate can stifle inspiration and motivation (see Swieringa & Jansen, 2005). The second example illustrates the belief that things don't work if employees do not want it *and* that management is able to 'make them want it'. The more management suggest they can, the more employees will wait and see.

### *Making defensiveness debatable*

The last session illustrates the difficulty to make defensiveness debatable. Or, in other words, to make the undiscussable discussable (Noonan, 2007). The process:

- One team leader addresses defensiveness (*'Here we are politically correct'*) at an abstract level: where is 'here'?
- Others just ignore (ignorance strategy).
- Interventionist confronts ignorance and repeats team leader's remark.
- Others activate several defensive strategies: ignorance ('The best way is to ignore it'), distance ('But the problem is not in this group. It is somewhere else ...'), ignorance ('We should neither accept nor ignore, however we should be aware of the risk and go on with this process') and ignorance again (*'This is difficult to grasp. Let's go back to where we were'*).

The question for the interventionist is where to stop. He stops confronting the defensiveness as he believes he is pushing too hard which reflects a unilateral control model (*'You have to discuss the undiscussable'*). Besides, he takes some team leaders' body language as an appeal to stop. At that moment, the interventionist wonders what it would do if he shared this dilemma. In the end he doesn't, as he assumes this would be experienced as pressure and would have unintended effects.

## **Period 5: later developments**

Some months later some evaluation sessions are planned. Generally, people are satisfied about the improvement initiatives that are being taken. All teams have had a number of sessions in order to select improvement issues and initiate concrete actions. In a customer satisfaction survey, customers evaluate service higher than one year before.

Generally, managers say that management on all levels should steer the process to keep things going: ask for concrete results that customers really take advantage of. Keep showing commitment and keep discussing results. Accept no freedom of obligations. However, several managers and team leaders bring in that *they have to work very hard to keep the process going on*. Illustrative are minutes of meetings of some management reflection sessions, aiming at sharing experiences in the development process, reflecting and learning. The reported leading question in these sessions is: *'how can we get our employees in the right mode and how can we explain why this process is so laborious?'*



## 8.4 Analysis of moving moments 2

In this section the findings of case 2 are summarized and interpreted. Preceding the analyses, which follows the structure of the research questions, the point of departure and results of this case are summarized.

### Point of departure and results

The case starts with management's desire to develop from 'a product seller to a service supplier', which requires the development of an entrepreneurial and customer-oriented culture and working methods.

In this case, the 'assignment' is to support a process that aims at concrete initiatives in order to improve customer processes and the development of an entrepreneurial and pro-active culture. This is a combination of a relatively linear and a dynamically complex aim. The linear part has been successfully managed with a unilateral control model in the upper cycle of Senge's 'shifting the burden' structure. The dynamically complex part (entrepreneurship, pro-activity), however, cannot be managed this way.

As to the results, this case has two faces. The main focus of the managers and interventionist has been on the quality of the processes and service. This aim seems to be realized, illustrated by the higher customer satisfaction ratings. Regarding the long-term aim to create more pro-activity and entrepreneurship, the results are not that evident. If managers realize their goals with unilateral control there seems to be little reason or urgency to develop alternatives. As a consequence, most attention regarding learning and changing has been paid to managers who faced problems in interaction with their teams and did not realize their goals. As a result, these managers have learned most of all. They have illustrated that they are able and prepared to develop towards mutual learning in situations they cannot manage with unilateral control. And they have contributed most of all to the development of entrepreneurship and pro-activity.

#### *Research question 1:*

*To what extent are the expressions of unilateral control visible in interactions?*

In this case numerous observations have been made regarding Perceiving (reductionism, distancing, blaming, linear perception and S-O relations), Behaving (controlling circumstances, repeated behaviour, stronger control in case of threat and reactive behaviour) and Intervening (focus on symptoms, cover-up of underlying patterns, quick wins and focus on impersonal instruments)<sup>14</sup>. The 'diagnostic model' helps to recognize situations that are influenced by unilateral control.

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<sup>14</sup> For numbers of observations, see appendix 4 'Cross-case analysis'.

In the encoding of transcripts, there are only few illustrations of Design of organization (positional organization, variety reduction, S-O relations and organization/change as separated entities). Regarding Change of organization (goal-oriented and planned process, step-by-step, episodic and top-down, rational), this case illustrates a change process that rests heavily upon an episodic and top-down perspective. Illustrative is the program manager, who shows his enthusiasm about the change approach by saying that he likes this way of *'boosting the new culture into the organization'*. The more management communicates this way, the less pro-active employees will be. This will be discussed more thoroughly in the next section (research question 2).

#### *Research question 2*

*How does unilateral control relate to (de-)blocking of changing, organizing and learning?*

This research question aims at gaining insight into the 'black box' between unilateral control and changing, organizing and learning. Research question 2 has been specified into four questions. The findings are summarized under these specific questions.

#### *How do expressions of unilateral control contribute to recurrent problems?*

The improvement of customer processes in this case has led to some successes: in about one year all teams have developed improvement issues and have put several actions into practice. Customer ratings have been improved and customers give positive feedback about the developments. All in all this process is generally perceived as successful.

A closer look uncovers different successes regarding short-term aims on the one hand and long-term aims on the other hand. The improvement of customer processes typically has a single-loop character and fits the upper circle in Senge's 'shifting the burden' structure: quicker responses to customers, better telephone management, more personal contact with customers, better complaint management. These issues have a linear character: the problems can be reduced with obvious solutions. These improvements are important for customers and, thus, important for the company. This case illustrates that unilateral control is effective for linear problems and contributes to visible improvements.

However, the aim of the process was not only to realize quick wins, but also to stimulate entrepreneurship and ownership in the longer run. Unlike the linear problems as described before, this aim cannot be realized by managers' and interventionists' unilateral control perception, behaviour and interventions. This case offers several illustrations of blocked changing, organizing and learning regarding this aim.

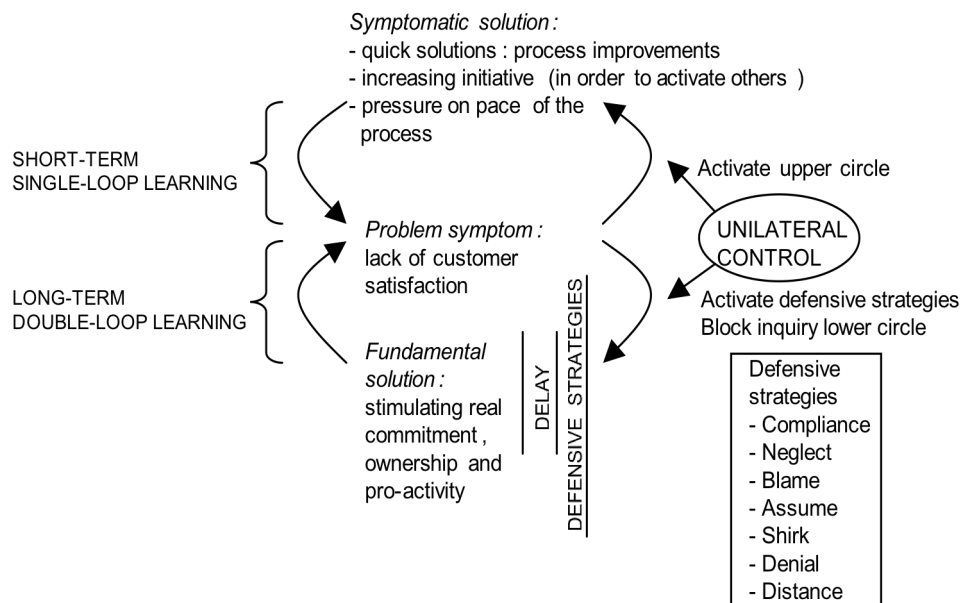
From the 'start', this case reflects a strong Subject-Object perspective, considering the leader and interventionists as active agents that impose an episodic change upon

passive and reactive employees. This tends to work out as a self-fulfilling prophecy. At the end of the case description managers discuss the question *'how do we get our employees in the right mode and how can we explain why this process is so laborious?'* This question still strongly reflects a Subject-Object perspective and uncovers some assumptions:

- 'Management are able to get employees in the right mode.'
- 'If management do not succeed in interaction with their employees they should not discuss this openly with employees, though they should think up new strategies alone or with peers.'

Both assumptions do not stimulate employees to be active and to take co-responsibility for the recurrent problems. On the contrary, they keep managers and employees from (mutual) learning. This way, a Subject-Object perspective preserves the current reality: management initiate and employees follow. This is exactly the opposite of what one aims to realize.

Taking Senge's 'shifting the burden system' as a starting point, unilateral control consistently activates actions and initiatives in the upper circle: quick problem solving, persuasion and instrumental solutions. This appears to be helpful to short term and linear solutions, e.g. quicker responses to customers and better telephone management. Unlike these relatively simple situations, the long-term aims like improvement of entrepreneurship and pro-activity cannot be realized in the upper circle. Here, the limits of unilateral control become visible: activation of defensive strategies that block the lower circle in Senge's 'shift the burden' structure and activation of circular patterns. Figure 8.4 summarizes these findings.



**Figure 8.4** *Unilateral control stimulates symptomatic solutions and blocks fundamental solutions*

### *What circular patterns are visible?*

This case illustrates that many circular patterns start with the way one thinks and perceives. If leaders hold a Subject-Object perspective of relations, they tend to impose changes upon employees. This is problematic, if the very aim of the change is to stimulate pro-activity and entrepreneurship. After all, a Subject-Object perspective is only effective if employees accept the changes as imposed and follow the leader (be reactive and dependent).

If team members do not automatically follow and hold different views, leaders (and their consultants) tend to label this as resistance. In turn, they tend to enlarge control in order to 'save the situation'. This, in turn, stimulates employees to develop negative feelings that management perceive as resistance again. As long as one holds a unilateral control model and does not reflect upon one's own contribution to the problems, these patterns keep repeating themselves.

Typical circular patterns that are illustrated in this case are described below.

#### **Manager initiates change process, employees (act as if they) follow**

The more managers consider themselves as being capable of and responsible for imposing changes upon employees, the more they push employees into a following (dependent, reactive) position, the more managers are confirmed in their belief they should impose changes, etcetera.

#### **Manager expects resistance and braces himself, employees respond negatively and oppose**

The more managers expect employees will show resistance, the more they tend to brace themselves and persuade, the more employees respond negatively and develop resistance, the more managers brace themselves, etcetera.

#### **Manager talks; employees listen**

The more managers talk (about 'the change approach', their opinion, the need for change), the more employees (act as if they) listen, the more managers direct, etcetera.

#### **Manager active; employees reactive**

The more initiative managers take (executing change actions, organizing meetings, chairing meetings, stressing the need for change), the more reactively and dependently employees behave (*'apparently he feels responsible ...'*, *'let's wait and see ...'*), etcetera.

#### **Manager tries to motivate and inspire employees; employees feel lack of motivation and inspiration**

The more managers try to motivate and inspire their employees, the less employees feel responsible for their own motivation and the more they feel dependent on the manager's ability to motivate and inspire, the more managers need to motivate and inspire, etcetera.

**Manager pushes to speed up progress; employees are passive and wait for their turn**

The more managers increase pressure to speed up progress, the less employees feel responsible and the more they become reactive, the more managers increase pressure to speed up, etcetera.

**Manager instructs; employees wait for next instruction**

The more managers instruct, the more employees wait for the next instruction, the more managers instruct, etcetera.

**Manager feels uncomfortable and takes distance; employees feel uncomfortable and take distance**

The more uncomfortable managers feel, the more distance they take, the more uncomfortable employees feel and the more distance they take, the more uncomfortable managers feel, etcetera.

*What defensive routines are visible?*

Defensive strategies are considered to be behaviour and actions that block the lower circle of Senge's 'shift the burden' and thus block fundamental solutions. Defensive strategies aim at making sensitive issues undiscussable. Or, in Argyris' terms, defensive strategies cover sensitive issues up and undermine changing, organizing and learning.

This case illustrates how defensive strategies make it possible to invest much energy in a change process, realize short-term improvements but stifle long-term fundamental changing, while making this undiscussable and avoiding painful situations: 'as long we don't discuss that we are not effective, we don't have a problem'. How does this work? Managers (and their consultants) start with a Subject-Object perspective and initiate a process that has to contribute to employees being more entrepreneurial and pro-active. Many employees say they comply with this change process and bring in ideas. Later, managers complain that although employees bring in ideas, they don't show real commitment to put them into practice. This might uncover a compliance strategy: employees have said 'yes' even if they were not really internally committed. A couple of times this strategy was referred to with the word 'political correctness' (*'one just doesn't say what one really thinks'*). A unilateral control model does not instruct managers to make this discussable. On the contrary, it instructs managers to 'withdraw' and think up a new strategy 'how to get employees in the right mode' alone or together with peers (in their management team or supervision lunches). This way, managers and employees block learning.

This situation resembles a case described by Argyris (1990), who argues that the most important question that the (top) manager should ask, though seldom is asked: "what is it that I do or the company does that makes it necessary for me to take the initiative to identify their barriers, and to design a workshop to reduce them, when you knew the barriers, and you knew how to reduce them?" (p. 126-127). One could conclude that something – read: defensive strategies – prevents them from doing this by themselves. And it is exactly these defensive strategies that are not openly

discussed. This way, things can be improved in the short run, though in the longer run the same problems will probably recur. When the interventionist asked some managers in the case *'why was it necessary to design this improvement process while you already knew the improvement issues?'*, their reaction was: *'well, when we ask this question, we don't come any further, do we? We have realized quite some improvements, haven't we?'* At that moment, the interventionist accepted that this was difficult to discuss, made a trade-off, and did not bring it up again. By reflection, he could have shared this trade-off openly and helped the manager to make a free but conscious choice.

This case illustrates several defensive strategies:

- Compliance strategy: in case of threat, say that you comply (regardless of whether you really do); in this case, one refers to this strategy as being 'politically correct'.
- Ignorance strategy: ignore information that is difficult to deal with.
- Distance strategy: in case of embarrassment or threat, change the subject to other parties or general observations (employees, middle management, 'the organization').
- Blame strategy: in case of embarrassment or threat, blame others.
- Assume strategy: keep sensitive assumptions about others privately.
- Shirk strategy: shift the responsibility to an 'outsider' and avoid sharing your own opinion about the process or colleagues.
- Withdraw strategy: in case of difficulties in the communication between manager and employee, withdraw and think up new strategies unilaterally.

All strategies help to make sensitive issues that could lead to embarrassment or threat undiscussable.

#### *How do leaders de-block changing, organizing and learning?*

Although unilateral control leads to much defensiveness and circularity in this case, there are several situations that illustrate changing and learning. In reference to the diagnostic model, some typical examples of leadership perception and behaviour are visible in this case: perception and sharing of circularity, mutual influences, dynamical patterns and the way one contributes to the problems. Regarding leadership behaviour, the case illustrates moments of inquiry into and public reflection upon the circular situation including one's own role.

One manager in particular illustrates the effects of a strong behavioural change from unilateral control to mutual learning:

- Reflection and experimentation: the director responds to feedback of circularity and says *'Yes, I see I may contribute to their behaviour.'* In the next session he shows different behaviour and tries not to stimulate the circular pattern anymore.
- Self-disclosure and public reflection upon the way he contributes to lack of learning: *'I have learned that I tend to take distance in difficult situations.'*
- Making circularity visible: *'As a consequence, I lose contact, which stimulates you to be offended. I really want to keep in touch.'*

- Being proactive: *'I wonder, for example, if you think I take you seriously and if I take enough time to involve you. I really want to hear your personal and constructive feedback in a next session.'*
- Inquiry into underlying pattern: *'What do you need to feel taken seriously?'*
- Sharing valid information: *'I don't want yes-men. Let's be honest, it would be easy if you just followed. However, I appreciate you being honest about your thoughts and feelings. Still, it is not always easy to deal with. I expect you to take responsibility as well. Can you imagine?'*

The consequence of the manager's approach is that team leaders follow his example, which leads to the development from opposing to an open dialogue and from stagnation to learning. As a consequence, the team leaders show (internal) commitment and take responsibility for the improvement process.

### *Research question 3*

*How do interventions contribute to (de-)blocking changing, organizing and learning?*

The aim of this research question is to develop an intervention perspective that contributes to de-blocking changing, organizing and learning.

By organizing sessions, offering methods and supporting managers, the interventionists in this case contribute directly to the development and execution of improvement initiatives, which lead to higher customer satisfaction rates. This relates to the (dynamically) simple part of this change process. This study, however, focuses on the dynamically complex part: developing employees' entrepreneurship and pro-activity in the longer run and contributing to (continuous) changing and learning. The dynamically complex part cannot be managed by unilateral control and requires attention to circular patterns, defensiveness and interactions that contribute to (mutual) learning.

This case illustrates how the interventionist develops from a management serving (partner-in-business) role, with much unilateral control, to a professional independent consulting role (Drukker and Verhaaren, 2002), with a stronger contribution to (mutual) learning.

During the first part of this case the interventionist's perception, behaviour and interventions are strongly governed by a unilateral control model. How can this be explained, while he knows the limits? There are several elements (in the interventionist's perception) that create pressure, which in turn activates a unilateral control model:

- It is a major opportunity that has to succeed.  
*Reasoning:* this is a new client and the business unit of a large company. This project has to be successful in the eyes of the client, as this might lead to new opportunities.

- The relationship with the client is not easy.  
*Reasoning:* it is difficult to get contact with the client. This does not feel comfortable and we should try to get in touch with him in order to work together.
- The client is critical.  
*Reasoning:* the client seems to perceive us as 'suppliers'. He takes distance and stresses regularly that he wants 'professionalism'. We have to please the client and deliver 'professionalism', which means we have to organize things very well, we should contribute to quick visible results and should keep things under control.

### *Partner-in-business*

Under these circumstances of pressure and possible embarrassment, the interventionist activates a unilateral control model that, in turn, has some consequences for his role. The interventionist reasons that he should help management to make the process successful. Regardless of his knowledge about the risks of unilateral control, *in action* the interventionist translates 'help' into 'assisting management to realize an episodic change within a certain time frame with as few problems as possible'. Or, in other words, assisting management to keep things under control. Preparing sessions together with the manager easily activates this 'partner-in-business' model.<sup>15</sup>

The interventionist's unilateral control is expressed in different ways in this case.

- Confirming the director who says that he desires professionalism, without inquiring into what he exactly means by that and what makes him say that.
- Confirming the manager who expects resistance and helping him to think up strategies to break through this resistance. Thus he labels employees with different views as 'difficult people' who have resistance. This preconception leads to pressure and discomfort, which in turn activates a unilateral control model (distance, blaming, linear thinking). In effect, resistance grows and the unchecked assumption turns out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- Supporting the manager in taking his view (on the change approach, the sense-of-urgency and the difficult team) as true and stifling inquiry into this view and exploring different views. As a consequence, reducing listening and increasing directing and persuading.
- Proving one's added value through (immediate) answers, analysis and solutions.

While activating a unilateral control model, the interventionist's sensitivity to ineffective patterns diminishes. As he is so strongly involved in the 'control game', he recognizes unproductive patterns only afterwards, in reflection. This way, a typical dilemma becomes visible again between being involved or being neutral and at a distance. Here, a relation with the client seems to help the interventionist to get comfortable and take a neutral position towards the patterns and contents.

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<sup>15</sup> Compare Argyris' description of Help and Support from a Model I perspective: "[...] if possible, agree with them that the others acted improperly" (2004, p. 398).



### *From management serving to independent advising*

After some weeks, the interventionist finds his way back by self-disclosure: he is open about the effect of the director's behaviour on him. The director appreciates this feedback, which, in turn, makes the relationship stronger. This is the start for the interventionist to develop from management serving to independent consulting (Drukker and Verhaaren, 2002). From this moment his added value to learning and changing grows.

This case illustrates some elements of an intervention perspective that seems to support changing, organizing and learning.

### **Openly share what one fears to share regarding the effect of the leader's actions**

This case illustrates that the director's behavioural shift was greatly influenced by the interventionist's self-disclosure: *'Let me present this from my personal perspective. In my experience you can be very unpredictable: from one moment to another you can be very dissatisfied about things, which you communicate verbally or nonverbally (interventionist gives some examples). [...] It becomes important if your behaviour has the same effect on your managers. Might they be cautious because they cannot predict your reaction?'*

This intervention, including the effect of the director's behaviour on the interventionist and inquiry into the circular relation of managers' behaviour, appears to contribute strongly to the director's learning process. He shows different behaviour in the next management team sessions.

### **Share valid information about one's own role and the role of other people**

The interventionist creates a learning atmosphere by public reflection on his own contribution to difficulties. For example, in one of the sessions: *'To be honest, in the first session I tended to perceive you as a 'difficult team'. I really appreciate if one is open, however one can easily label real openness as 'resistance'. I did. In turn, I started helping J (manager) to persuade you and took distance. This stimulated you precisely in your behaviour, didn't it?'*

In this team, the interventionist also shares the effect of the team leaders' behaviour, in order to support learning: *'At some moments I feel a firmness that makes it difficult to have an open conversation. This discouraged me to say what I think and stimulated me to be cautious. And it encouraged me to stand beside the manager and against you. I am not sure if that is what you want.'*

### **Invite to share valid information**

In order to stimulate learning, the interventionist stimulates individuals to share valid information. For example, when one manager says he complies with the group norm (unlike what he seems to think), the interventionist inquires into what happens. The manager responds.

*Manager: 'It does not feel pleasant; I feel I have to defend myself.'*

*Interventionist: 'But it works, right? After all, you say that you comply. Does it feel this way?'*

*Manager: 'Well, actually I believe my way also works. But I see I need to change my belief.'*

*Interventionist (to all): 'Is that what you want?'*

*Another manager: 'No, I think you are right. We should not try to convince him, but I think we have to take time to find out how we wish to contribute to the change process.'*

The interventionist invites the manager to share valid information and leaves room for free choice to the other managers. In the end, other managers agree that persuasion is not effective in this change process.

#### **Confront inconsistency neutrally**

By confronting inconsistency between espoused theory and theory-in-use neutrally, the interventionist leaves room for free choice and commitment to this choice. For example, in relation to the director: *'What you wish (proactive behaviour, entrepreneurship) is not consistent with what you do (stimulating reactive behaviour). You could either leave your actions as they are and accept your managers' behaviour or change your actions and contribute to their proactive attitude (valid information). Both options are consistent; it is up to you (free choice).'*

#### **Stimulate inquiry into unchecked beliefs**

Instead of accepting a manager's beliefs, the interventionist stimulates inquiry into these beliefs and their influence on the manager's actions. For example, the manager in this case expected his team to show resistance. The interventionist might ask him questions like

- why do you expect resistance?
- what exactly do you mean by resistance?
- what examples do you have in the past?
- what exactly happened and how did you act?
- what is the effect of your belief ('they will have resistance') on your behaviour?
- what is the effect of that behaviour and are you satisfied with that effect?
- might they have information that you are missing?
- could you explain why they act as they do?
- how do you contribute to their behaviour?
- how could you create an open dialogue instead of unilateral control?

With these questions the interventionist helps the manager to get insight into the effect of his beliefs, circularity and his own contribution to the problem. Subsequently, he has a free choice as to what extent he is satisfied with these effects. This way, he makes a picture that includes himself.

**Share circularity and help managers/employees to reflect upon their contribution to the problem**

By sharing observations regarding circularity and asking questions about the way one perceives one's own role in the circular patterns, the interventionist supports learning and changing. An illustration:

Team leaders: *'To be honest, we don't like to be labelled as 'the difficult team' time after time.'*

Interventionist: *'What is the effect of being labelled this way?'*

Another team leader: *'We feel unhappy with it. Actually I get angry. It de-motivates me when the organization talks this way, just because we are not yes-men.'*

Interventionist: *'If you are labelled this way time after time, you should think together why people would do that. You might be in a vicious circle: you get angry, which leads to more negative labels, which make you even angrier, etcetera. Try to find out together how you could stop this recurrent pattern.'*

**Make defensive strategies debatable (make the undiscussable discussable)**

Two times in this case someone addresses defensiveness (*'Here we are politically correct and do not really say what we think'*). The first time, the interventionist does not address it. The second time he does, however, he is strongly confronted with other defensive strategies that make it impossible to inquire into the defensiveness. After some attempts, the interventionist stops trying as he feels he is starting to push which reflects a unilateral control model (*'You have to discuss the undiscussable'*).

The question for the interventionist is where to stop. In the end, he decides that he has shared valid information and has left room for free choice and he hopes that, just as in case 1, the effect will be visible in the longer run. While the episodic change project is finished and customer satisfaction rates are improved, changing and learning seem still be blocked. Knowing that continuous changing and learning is never finished, the interventionist decides to share these insights with his client at a later evaluation moment.

**Reduce (time) pressure**

In this case, the interventionist discusses with the manager how he could create circumstances that reduce pressure for him, in order to make it less difficult to develop alternatives for unilateral control.



## 9. Moving moments 3

### 9.1 Type of organization

This organization is one of the divisions of a large educational institute. Each division, including this one, offers education in a certain field of attention. Staff consists of approximately 75 well-educated professionals.

### 9.2 Context of the change process

Recently, the Board of this institute gave a consultancy the assignment to assess all divisions on quality of education, work processes and atmosphere. Some divisions did not pass the exam. Subsequently, the directors of these divisions got the assignment to improve things in order to meet the norms. If they did not succeed, the Board would intervene.

The director of one of the divisions, who had been one of the teachers, was given a specific assignment, as stated by the Board: 'try to make the institute more businesslike, entrepreneurial and result-oriented and introduce more innovative teaching methods. In addition, create a more positive culture, as there are rumours about a negative atmosphere within the institute.'

As management experience difficulties with changing, they invite a management consultant (interventionist) in order to support them in this process. The consultant has no relations with the firm that conducted the organization assessment.

### 9.3 Moving moments

#### Period 1: start-up

##### *Intake with director*

The director of the division invites the interventionist for a first session. This session is used to become acquainted and to explore the current reality as well as his expectations of the interventionist. Below, some characteristic phrases are quoted.

Dir: Recently, the Board gave me an assignment: 'try to make the institute more businesslike and result-oriented'. Well, in the meantime I know the consequences of that.	P subject-object C top-down C rational	The assignment, as formulated here, reflects the assumption that the director can 'make' or 'produce' another organization and act upon a passive and reactive system of persons.
Int: What do you mean by that?		
Employees complain, the organization consists of many islands, the grapevine is active, employees have a 'we-they' attitude towards management.	P distance P blame P linear	Director focuses on the role employees play and seems to overlook the fact that their behaviour might be a consequence of a S-O relationship.

<p>[...]</p> <p>We have taken a lot of initiatives [...]. We have formulated a clear mission for the organization.</p> <p>Int: So what is missing?</p> <p>Dir: Well, this organization behaves like a family. Although there are differences, many employees act dependent on and –at the same time - aversive to management. They say: 'you give too little room'. Well, we are quite willing to take some distance, as long as they take their responsibility.</p> <p>Int: Sounds to me that you are waiting for each other. Might it be possible that you stifle their personal sense of responsibility just by giving little room?</p> <p>Dir: This might be possible. Still, we also tried the opposite just by letting go. However, they did not take their responsibility either. They seem to have an anti-management attitude.</p>	<p>P distance P blame P linear</p>	<p><i>Intervention: feedback of circular pattern.</i></p> <p>Reflection: it is not clear how they have tried the opposite. Assumption: one cannot break through a circular pattern by one action, as 'the other party' is used to the pattern they don't like. One should be open about the new strategy and take into account some delay. Otherwise one still acts from an S-O perspective.</p>
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### *First session with the division management team*

Director and interventionist agree upon a session with the management team of the division (MT), in order to explore visions of the current reality. The MT consists of the director and three department managers. During this session they share their opinions about the current situation. Some quotes are presented below.

<p>W: They are quite committed to the content of their jobs. However, it is quite difficult to talk about the way we communicate and work together. People are afraid of change.</p> <p>I have tried to solve some concrete problems. However, this seems to be not satisfying for them. Management seems to be always distrusted in this division, regardless of what they do.</p> <p>Dir: Yes, we really have tried to respond to their needs. They ask for clear procedures, we give them. And in the end they reject them.</p> <p>Typical quotes of employees are 'we are not being heard' and 'management do almost nothing with our ideas'.</p> <p>Int: It seems they feel quite dependent on management. What do you think?</p> <p>All: Yes, they do.</p> <p>Int: Could there possibly be a circular pattern: the more active managers are, the more reactive and dependent employees become and vice versa?</p> <p>All (while making notes): Yes.</p>	<p>P distance P blame P linear</p> <p>P reduction</p>	<p>The difficulty to talk about the way we communicate seems to reflect on this manager as well. And on the interventionist, who does not test this belief publicly.</p> <p>Reduction to procedures and neglect of the underlying pattern; why do they ask for procedures?</p> <p>Just like management seems to hold an S-O perspective on relations, employees hold an O-S perspective: they behave like objects who are acted upon by management. Consequently, they might judge the way management acts critically.</p> <p><i>The reasoning behind this intervention is that feedback of circularity facilitates learning about the way one contributes to the problems one faces.</i></p>
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- In their analysis of the situation, managers tend to distance themselves, point to employees and reason from a linear perspective. For example, the director says that 'employees have a 'we-they' attitude towards management' and tends to overlook his own Subject-Object definition of the relation between management and employees: 'we have taken quite some initiatives, but employees are aversive to management'. Apparently, a Subject-Object definition by management has a circular relation with an Object-Subject definition by employees.
- In this situation, employees say that they are not being heard and managers should prove their added value. However, working harder and being more active in order to meet this expectation would probably activate the circular pattern.
- This situation is probably threatening for management as well as employees, and people take distance. Distance will grow as an effect of circularity (the more distance from managers, the more distance from employees, etcetera).
- Employees ask for procedures and instruments, probably in their desire for something to hold on to (this assumption has to be tested). Managers tend to respond by developing these procedures and are confronted with employees who are 'still not satisfied'. A possible explanation is that employees translate their real needs into instrumental solutions. By responding directly, managers do not inquire into underlying needs. This way, instrumental solutions become a bypass.
- Although managers tend to focus on the employees' role, they respond open to feedback about circularity and act receptively if confronted with their own role ('we have to break through this paradox').

This reflection as described above is more elaborative than the analysis that is shared with the management team. Some distance from the situation helps to recognize the patterns. The challenge is to recognize these patterns 'in action'.

### *Feedback of circularity*

In this stage, the interventionist's actions focus on feedback of circularity. The underlying reasoning is that this feedback helps managers to see how they contribute to the problems they face. The interventionist assumes that insight into one's own role is a first step in order to facilitate learning. This is in line with Argyris (1990, p. 95).

## **Period 2: further inquiry into situation**

### *Session with the division management team*

This session aims at elaborating on management's role in confirming the current and undesired situation. The director and three managers attend this meeting.

<p>[...]</p> <p>A: Teachers have quite some problems in this division. I think it is my duty to solve problems for them.</p> <p>Int: There is nothing wrong with that. On the</p>		<p><i>Int confronts effects of his behaviour neutrally.</i></p>
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<p>contrary ... However, if I understand you correctly, this leads to reinforcement of a reactive attitude that you do not like....</p> <p>A: Yes.</p> <p>Int: What would happen if you were open about your assumptions? For example: 'Dear employee, I would love to solve the problem for you. However, I am afraid that will stifle your pro-activity and you will become dependent on me. That, I do not want. I think it is more effective if you try to solve this problem yourself. What do you think?'</p> <p>Dir: This sounds good and would lead to learning. However, this requires a certain level of reflection that not all employees possess.</p> <p>Int: By assuming this, you confirm the situation as it is, don't you? Would you be prepared to take a risk by trying?</p> <p>Dir: Yes, but I still believe they find this very difficult to deal with.</p> <p>Int: I understand. I suppose this is difficult for all of us.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Int: Shall I share some ideas about a possible approach?</p> <p>All confirm.</p> <p>Int: I would not suggest designing a formal plan including phases and steps. Nor would I suggest organizing special meetings. Rather, I prefer an open approach that is characterized by learning. I suggest I join several meetings in the organization, management team meetings as well as education teams with their team leads. In these meetings I will help to make patterns regarding leadership, cooperation and changing debatable. Besides, I give feedback to managers afterwards. After all, you seem to be caught in strong mutual beliefs and circular patterns that are not open to discussion yet.</p> <p>All respond positively and agree to work this out later.</p>	<p>P distance P blame P s-o</p>	<p><i>Int illustrates how to be open about one's dilemma. This way, he tries to make an alternative (mutual learning) model actionable.</i></p> <p>Compare Isaacs (1999), who describes how one tends to attribute to others that they would not be interested, able or open to tackling the 'real' difficulties and so do not raise them.</p> <p><i>Int tries to put it into a broader perspective. Actually, he wants to persuade the director and is not aware of this; he holds a unilateral control theory-in-use. He is not open about his own assumption that the director's beliefs seem to be persistent and that he should be open about these beliefs. Thus, he acts exactly the same as the director.</i></p> <p><i>Giving feedback to managers afterwards reflects the assumption that personal feedback is threatening and should be shared privately. This way, the interventionist confirms a culture that does not allow being open about one's effectiveness and blocks learning (unilateral control).</i></p>
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## Reflection 2

### *Blocking strategies and beliefs*

The last meeting with the management team uncovers some blocking strategies and beliefs.

- Some strategies stimulate a reactive and dependent attitude and lead to circularity:
  - taking care of employees and, thus, solving problems for them
  - in case of threat, taking decisions for employees
- Changing is complicated by some strong beliefs that managers have about employees
  - *'dialogue presumes the ability to reflect, which some lack'*
  - *'employees find management a priori not okay'*
  - *'giving room to work autonomously presumes trust, while it is betrayed by some'*
- These beliefs block changing and learning as long as they are not tested openly.

### *Confrontation and self-censoring by the interventionist*

- The interventions focus on confronting managers' beliefs and how they contribute to circular processes and self-fulfilling prophecies. This might have a delayed effect that should be checked later in the process.
- Furthermore, the interventionist tries to make an alternative (mutual learning) model actionable (compare Argyris, 1990, p. 87) by literally phrasing the words one could use. For example, 'What if you shared your considerations with the employee? Such as: 'I am hesitating. I would like to give you the opportunity to run the project autonomously. However, I need some security. How shall we organize this situation?''  
Compare Argyris (1990), who states, "the advice should contain the action strategies (e.g. advocate your position in a way that encourages inquiry). Second, it should be accompanied with actual statements that illustrate what you would have to say and do" (p. 87).
- The interventionist is cautious with personal feedback to the director about his beliefs. The main reason, in reflection, is the wish to save the director's face (Argyris calls this 'designed self-censoring', which is an illustration of a unilateral control model). This way, he shows the same behaviour as the managers and does not help them to share their beliefs and attributions openly.

### *Contact between director and interventionist*

A week after the last management team meeting a document is distributed in the organization by management. The document describes all steps to be taken in the near future (*C planned, C step-by-step, C top-down, C rational*). One of these initiatives concerns workshops on 'giving and receiving feedback' and 'customer-oriented behaviour' for all managers, team leaders and teachers. This description has a number of pitfalls. Such a workshop, focusing on teaching how to perceive and behave, leaves defensiveness and recurrent patterns unaddressed (*I symptom, I cover-up, I short-term, I instrumental*). After all, they will possibly participate as they have to and they know it will not help them to refuse (compliance strategy). This way,

the workshops would be a bypass and cover-up of the underlying problems (compare Argyris, 1990, p.127). Besides, organizing a workshop and expecting employees to participate would reinforce the circular pattern of active management/interventionist versus reactive and dependent employees.

The interventionist gets in touch with the director and shares his concerns about this description. The director agrees and reports some first signals from employees like 'this is another initiative by management; well, let us wait and see again'. The director intends to join some team meetings within the organization to discuss some misunderstandings.

### *Interviews with teachers*

In order to get insight into team leaders' and teachers' visions of the situation, the interventionist conducts some interviews. The approach is unstructured and open, in order to give interviewees room for sharing their story. After a brief introduction, the interventionist invites them to describe how they experience the current reality within the organization. Below, some illustrative quotes are summarized.

<p>Management should create a better climate and inspiring atmosphere. They have to take initiative.</p> <p>....</p> <p>I think the MT should show some more vulnerability. The employees just look at the MT but don't take action themselves. There is a lot of negativity and little pro-activity.</p> <p>....</p> <p>Support for management decreases because people do not get the guidance they need or wish. Recently somebody said: We need a real leader, someone who inspires us, solves our problems and is a content specialist.</p> <p>....</p> <p>We do not implement our plans. And, subsequently, we do not evaluate our changes. [...] For example, we agreed upon organizing customer focus sessions. However, management does not organize them. I really miss those sessions.</p> <p>Int: What keeps you from organizing these sessions yourself?</p> <p>We have tried, but we lost interest when we saw that people did not show up.</p> <p>Int: What would happen if management organized these sessions and forced everyone to attend?</p>	<p>P distance P blame P s-o B reactive</p> <p>P distance P blame P s-o B reactive</p> <p>P distance P blame P s-o B reactive</p> <p>P distance P blame P s-o B reactive</p>	<p>This reflects the belief that management is an active subject that should act upon this reactive/dependent object. Changing is perceived as fully dependent on management.</p> <p>This example strongly illustrates a dependent attitude and defines the relation between management and employees as a S-O relation: 'management has to inspire me'. Or, in other words, 'I do not feel inspired and management is accountable for that'. The problem in this S-O definition is that if management take the responsibility to inspire employees, they stifle employees' responsibility and stimulate a dependent attitude. In other words, taking responsibility to inspire employees works out counterproductively.</p> <p>This sounds like we say we wish to change and make plans (but actually do not want to change really), do not put these plans into practice and do not discuss that we do not put these into practice. Or, in Argyris' words: 'we cover up that we do not want to change and cover up the cover-up'. The defensive strategy is a 'plan-strategy': we make a plan and act as if we comply.</p> <p><i>Interventionist asks questions to raise awareness of reactive and dependent attitude.</i></p>
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- Most interventions in the past fit a unilateral control model. They activate the upper circle in Senge's 'shifting the burden' structure by instruments, procedures and workshops. And they bypass the way one maintains the current reality: why do employees ask for instruments time after time and how could one avoid workshops becoming bypasses and cover-ups?

The focus of perception, behaviour and interventions is on the upper circle in Senge's 'shifting the burden' structure (figure 9.2). This leads to recurrent patterns. What keeps management and employees from inquiring into the lower circle?

- Management as well as employees seem to hold strong beliefs about the other 'party'. Many employees hold persistent beliefs about management's responsibility to change the situation. Management, in turn, seem to be blocked by their perception that employees lack the ability to reflect.
- The strong and anti-management beliefs of some employees put management (and interventionist) in a difficult double bind (compare Argyris, 1990): if defensive routines are not confronted, they will keep blocking any changing. If they are confronted in order to reduce them, there is a risk of "opening up a can of worms because the players do not know how to do it effectively" (p. 45). This risk might be threatening and not attractive from a unilateral control perspective.
- In the current reality, some defensive strategies block inquiry into the patterns that managers and employees keep alive together. The interviews uncover some of them:
  - plan strategy: we agree to make a plan and act as if we comply to the plan
  - we strategy: in case of threat, we talk about 'our responsibility' and say 'we should pay attention to the problems' (as a consequence, nobody has to feel personally responsible)
  - undergo strategy: in case of threat, just undergo the intervention (passively) and do not make the producing patterns debatable
  - assume strategy: hold strong assumptions about others and situations without testing them.
- Much communication, including this reflection, is highly vulnerable to reification and underestimates individual differences. By and large, management talk about 'the employees', employees talk about 'the management team' and 'the organization'.

Figure 9.2, which is based on Senge's 'shifting the burden system', summarizes these observations.

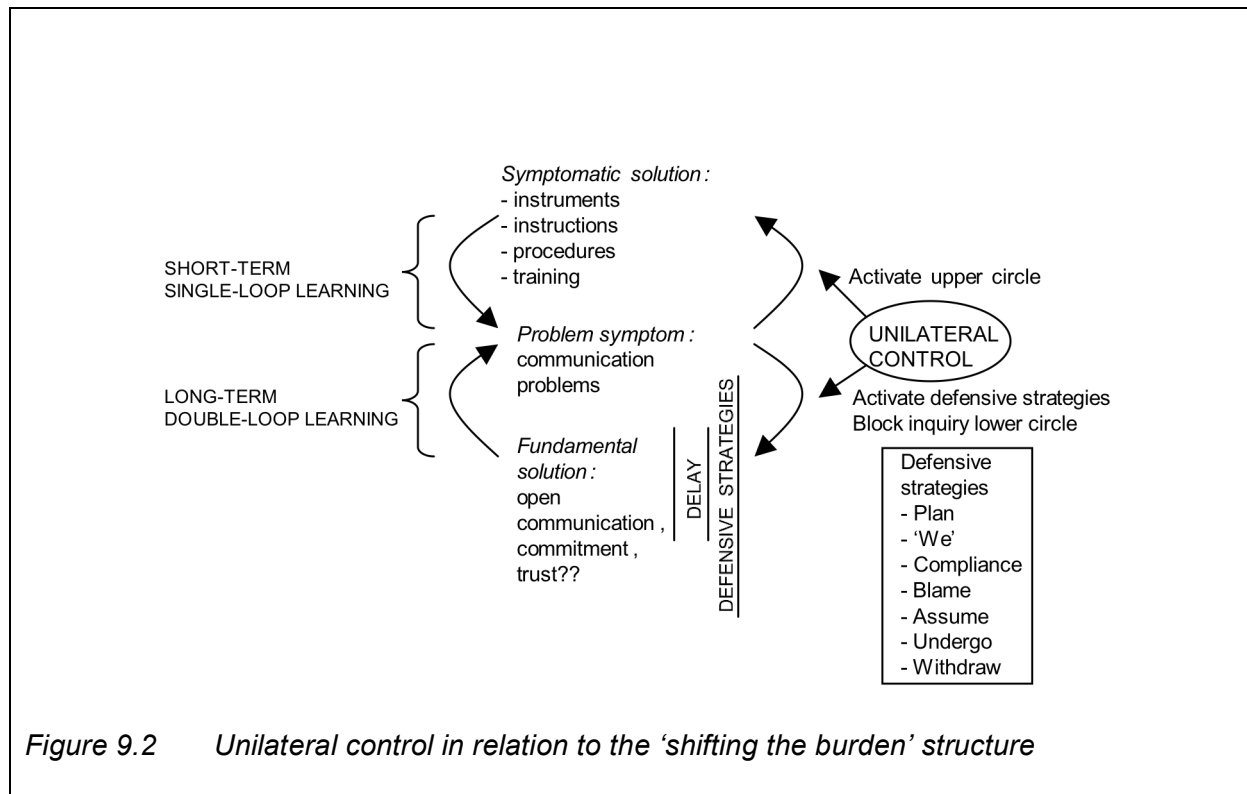


Figure 9.2 Unilateral control in relation to the 'shifting the burden' structure

#### Session with the division management team

In a session the outcomes of the interviews are discussed with the management team. Managers become defensive when confronted with the outcomes of the interviews. Management have heard these signals so often that they seem to be not open to them anymore. For example: *'This is about the old story of 'we are only making plans but nothing is implemented', right?'* As an effect (and cause), the interventionist activates a unilateral control model as well. He persuades managers that their approach is not effective, tries to prove he did a proper job in the interviews, and presents the information as objective facts/analyses. From a mutual learning model, he could have confronted the observation that people do not seem to be open to feedback from employees (anymore) and that he tends to persuade them (which is not effective either). The interventionist's and managers' behaviours relate circularly: persuasion leads to defensiveness, leads to persuasion.

In a conversation by phone, director and interventionist agree this was not a satisfying meeting. The director felt there was a distance between interventionist and management team. The interventionist felt he had been directing too much. Both agree upon a meeting between interventionist and director and a full day management team meeting.

## Reflection 4

### *How the way the interventionist helps does not really help*

The methodology of the interventionist in this part of the process is characterized by

- conducting interviews with employees, in order to get insight into their perceptions and beliefs regarding the current reality,
- analysing this information and developing temporary conclusions
- sharing these outcomes with the management team.

What happens? Managers and employees seem to be stuck in little learning by reflection, strong beliefs about 'the other party' and little public testing of their beliefs. Managers, as well as employees, impose their beliefs and reasoning upon each other, which blocks changing and learning. The interventionist, with this methodology, does exactly the same. He makes interpretations of the situation, based on the interviews and presents these as 'the analysis'. In other words, he 'imposes' these outcomes as a truth on the managers. The underlying reasoning is that these interpretations are 'more valid', since he is an expert. The effect is managers' defensive behaviour: *'Did they say this again? We are fed up with giving more and more.'* Besides, this methodology leaves room for managers to distance themselves: the analysis is or is not interesting or valid. The interventionist becomes a bypass of the communication problems between management and employees. This way, this methodology does not support learning and changing.

What, in reflection, would have supported learning and changing?

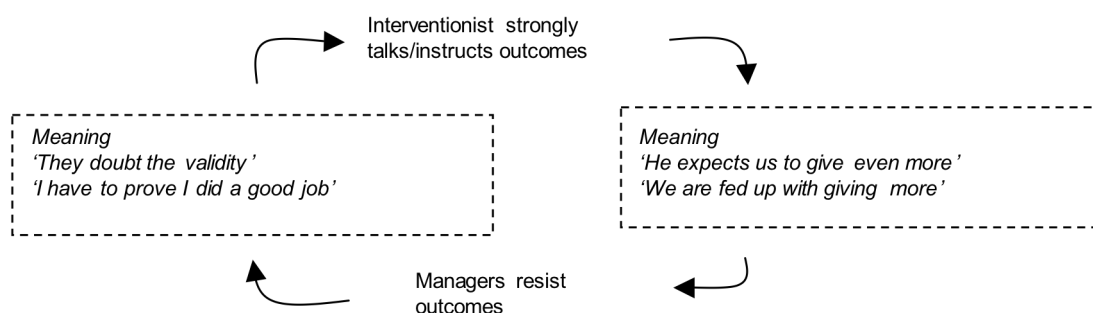
Instead of new interpretations and meaning, the interventionist could have shared 'raw material' with the managers: what exactly did employees say? Subsequently, he could have invited managers to find out what these kinds of quotes could mean. What could these quotes say about the employees' beliefs and reasoning? How do they apparently perceive management? And how do managers contribute to these beliefs?

If managers become defensive, what does this mean? What makes them defensive? Do managers have the same response to employees when the latter confront them with their beliefs? Could there be any circular patterns? By slowing down and opening inquiry, there would probably be much more learning than by presenting the interventionist's interpretations of the interviews.

A typical problem would be 'how to guarantee employees' anonymity?' This problem, in essence, uncovers the doubtful value of interviewing as a methodology in situations with interpersonal, behavioural and communication problems. After all, what is the added value of information that employees would not share with their manager and the interventionist cannot share with their manager? For this reason, direct communication between managers and employees is to be preferred in such situations. The interventionist can help them to create an atmosphere that supports mutual learning.

### *A circular pattern between managers and interventionist*

The last management team meeting illustrates a circular pattern. The interventionist presents his interpretations of the interviews as 'the outcomes'. Managers interpret this information as 'we must give even more attention'. As a consequence, managers become defensive ('did they say this again?'). In turn, the interventionist interprets this defensiveness as 'the managers doubt the validity of the outcomes' and feels he has to prove that he did a good job. Thus, he tends to persuade managers of the need to take these signals seriously. Figure 9.3 summarizes this situation.



**Figure 9.3** *Circular pattern between interventionist and managers*

This circular pattern can keep repeating as long as interventionist and managers hold a unilateral control model, characterized by having strong beliefs about the situation and the other party without checking them (Argyris would call this 'designed self-censoring'), and keeping things 'under control'.

### *Meeting between director and interventionist*

Director and interventionist evaluate the last MT session and prepare the next meeting.

<p>[....]</p> <p>Dir: I would like to share how I experienced the last meeting. I would like you to understand the feeling behind what we say. [...]</p> <p>We experience continuous negativism that we have to cope with. Whatever we do, management is not okay. Actually we have a double bind assignment: 'give more attention to people who push you away'.</p> <p>The basis of our subjective experience is in all the things we have already tried. I would like to share some of them.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>You know, when you shared your analysis last time, we felt this all had been in vain. It is very</p>	<p>P linear P subject-object</p>	<p>Dir formulates the essence of the perceived problems very skilfully.</p> <p>Dir is open about his feelings of disappointment and disbelief. Managers have tried a lot. His analysis is open and clear. He focuses on the difficult situation from a management perspective and reflects an S-O definition of relations: 'whatever management do, employees show an 'anti-management attitude'.</p>
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<p>persistent. This is the subjective experience, which we have to take into account in our next steps: what do we want to commit to?</p> <p>Int: I understand. We cannot neglect these feelings. In the last session we actually did. The situation is rather fixed, isn't it? Employees seem to have strong perceptions about management. You, in turn, have strong perceptions about them. For example, you said that a dialogue requires the ability to reflect, which some employees would lack. This assumption blocks change. How strong is this assumption; do you still believe in and feel the energy for improving the situation?</p> <p>Dir: Sometimes this assumption is very strong. However, I still want to learn and find alternatives to deal with this situation.</p> <p>Int: What exactly is the effect of these beliefs on your actions?</p> <p>Dir: Sometimes I find it hard to invest again, especially regarding some employees.</p> <p>[.....]</p> <p>Now what will we do in the MT session of next week?</p> <p>Director and interventionist agree upon an open session, aiming at</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- understanding better what they already have done and why things are as they are;</li> <li>- agreeing upon the next steps in the process;</li> <li>- finding alternative interactions to break through the fixed patterns.</li> </ul> <p>Int: regarding these fixed patterns, I have derived some first suggestions from our earlier meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- share cyclical patterns: e.g. 'active management leads to reactive employees and vice versa', check for different views and explore together with employees how to break through these patterns.</li> <li>- open dialogue and sharing of dilemmas: e.g., if you would like to give room to manage a project autonomously and feel insecure, share this dilemma and try to find a solution together.</li> <li>- share assumptions that block change: make a start in being open about your beliefs regarding the how the problems recur time after time.</li> </ul> <p>Do you recognize these suggestions as being valuable?</p> <p>Dir: Yes, let's bring them in during our session.</p>		<p><i>Interventionist shows understanding for his feelings and confronts linearity; the interventionist wishes to re-establish the relation and confidence after the dissatisfying meeting. Showing understanding, in reflection, is equal to not upsetting the other (unilateral control model). The interventionist would have stimulated learning, if he had asked for valid information: how do you know that 'whatever management do, employees show an 'anti-management attitude'? Could you share an example? How did you act in that example? How did your behaviour contribute to the situation?</i></p> <p>Dir tells int that he still wants to learn. To what extent is he willing to reflect on his own contribution to the recurrent patterns?</p> <p><i>Int stimulates reflection on effect of director's beliefs on his effectiveness.</i></p> <p>Director is open about his considerations.</p> <p><i>The interventionist holds some underlying assumptions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- an open session refers to an atmosphere without time pressure that allows participants to say what they think (and, thus, share valid information); the more pressure, the more unilateral control and the less learning;</li> <li>- management should start to find out how they contribute to recurrent problems and how they could contribute to mutual learning;</li> <li>- the interventionist helps by sharing his opinion on how to de-block changing and learning; by sharing these ideas with the director, the latter can already think about these suggestions.</li> </ul>
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### Meeting with the division management team

The next session of the division management team aims at reflecting upon people's contribution to recurrent problems and sharing feelings regarding the current reality.

<p>[....]</p> <p>W: We are grid locked in the active manager - passive employee problem. How do we get ourselves out of that situation? The MT is the leading group, but how do we make the others follow us? I don't feel like building even more bridges.</p>	<p>P circular (D)</p> <p>P linear</p> <p>P subject-object</p> <p>B control</p>	<p>W describes the situation circularly in words (espoused theory). However, he reasons from a linear and Subject-Object perspective.</p> <p><i>Interventionist is not aware of this inconsistency while it happens. He wants to re-establish the relationship and confidence, as he feels responsible for the last dissatisfying MT-meeting. This activates a unilateral control model, including the social virtue that confronting difficult issues harms the relationship. Besides, by working on a closer relationship, the interventionist's capability to recognize defensiveness and circularity decreases.</i></p>
<p>I invested more in personal contact with employees and I feel there is a healthy professional part in that contact, but some people want more personal attention. That doesn't fit. However, a more open culture is still what I want to achieve in this organization.</p>	<p>P subject-object</p> <p>P distance</p>	<p>There seems to be inconsistency between espoused theory (an open culture) and theory-in-use, as his behaviour seems not to contribute to an open culture. His belief seems to be that he can 'create an open culture as if he is not an active part of it'.</p>
<p>[...]</p> <p>Dir: My approach is positive and I want to go and deal with these problems, but we have to consider that 'whatever we do, management of this division is not okay'.</p> <p>Int: What are you aiming at?</p> <p>Dir: A fresh look at the situation. If we succeed we can add something to the world. I have the feeling we have to be much more strict. The hard part is how do we combine a strict policy and possibly even firing people with building contacts with employees?</p> <p>Int: You can also be strict in an open way. The process dialogue can be open with a strict message: 'To be honest. I feel tired investing in our relationship. And I don't like that. Actually, I don't know how to reach you and still expect you to contribute to our goals. How could we improve this situation?' In that way you have a conversation that is based upon equality.</p> <p>Dir: I see.</p> <p>Int: In the last meeting we reflected on some responses we got from the teachers. That gave you negative energy. Employees ask things you don't want to give anymore. The question is: have</p>	<p>P blame</p> <p>P reduction</p> <p>P subject-object</p>	<p>Director shows positive energy. Still, he is inconsistent by sharing his message that employees do not talk positively about management, while talking negative about employees himself. Besides, from a Subject-Object perspective he makes success dependent on employees' competence and willingness.</p> <p><i>Int illustrates an approach that is based on mutual learning. He makes his advice actionable by literally phrasing what one could say.</i></p> <p>Managers repeat the message that they cannot pay more personal attention and give more energy. Giving more and more, while not realising the desired effect,</p>

<p>you given what they want? [...] When you give more and more of something that doesn't help, you are probably stuck in a circular pattern. Now you face a dilemma: they ask for something you don't wish to give anymore. Try to be open about that: 'I feel that I cannot satisfy you. Regardless of the amount of procedures and attention I give, you ask for even more. If this does not satisfy you, then what is it really you need?' What about such an approach?</p> <p>All (all make notes): Yes, yes, we need to ask that question.</p> <p>[ ...]</p> <p>Int: I have noticed that you and the employees have strong assumptions about each other. Examples of your assumptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'dialogue presumes the ability to reflect, which some lack'</li> <li>- 'teachers find management a priori not okay'</li> </ul> <p>I appreciate you have built these assumptions upon your experiences and don't say they are 'wrong'. However, by holding these assumptions without inquiring into them, they tend to turn into self-fulfilling prophecies as they filter what you perceive. You can start to break through the circular patterns by inquiring into these beliefs. [...]</p>		<p>uncovers a circular pattern, kept alive by a unilateral control model.</p> <p><i>The interventionist wishes to make clear that 'more of the same' is probably not effective; an approach based on valid information advocacy and inquiry into one's own assumptions would probably be more effective.</i></p> <p><i>Int assumes managers will probably not succeed using these kinds of words while not being aware of their governing beliefs. However, he does not share this assumption, as he thinks that will stifle their motivation (and thus, they will not be able to deal with that information). By not being open about this assumption, the interventionist strongly holds a unilateral control model and contributes to blocked learning and changing.</i></p> <p><i>Int confronts managers' beliefs that govern their perception and behaviour and describes consequences.</i></p> <p><i>In reflection: the interventionist confronts managers' beliefs, however does not invite managers to make a (free) choice. Alternatively, he might ask them whether they accept the effects of these beliefs. If yes, they can stop worrying. If not, the interventionist could ask whether they are willing and able to inquire into these beliefs.</i></p>
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## Reflection 5

### *A dynamically complex situation*

Several managers emphasize that they are fed up with giving more and more (of the same), without getting any further. The recurrent problems in the longer run, despite several initiatives, seem to disclose a dynamically complex situation. "When obvious interventions produce nonobvious consequences, there is dynamic complexity" (Senge, 1990, p. 71).

This situation will remain as long as unilateral control keeps managers and employees from learning. Managers maintain the current situation by

- holding the same beliefs without publicly testing and using the same strategies without reflection (*'Whatever we do management is not okay', 'how do we get rid of the current attitude of the teachers?'*),
- holding others responsible for the recurrent problems (*'I know perfectly well who's the crazy one'*) and/or
- taking distance (*'I reduce my contacts. Actually, I take distance'*).

### *How the way we discuss blocks change and preserves the current reality*

Instead of sharing problems and dilemmas openly with employees, managers discuss the problems they face in the management team: the only team without employees. Here, they develop new strategies how to deal with difficulties in interaction with employees. This common use is an expression of a Subject-Object perspective: we, managers (and interventionists), design strategies that we can impose upon employees. This way, managers are not open to employees about their beliefs, nor their reasoning and experimenting (we are going to try something new to improve the way we work in interaction with you). Just by acting this way they confirm the situation as it is (we are not open about our beliefs and impose our actions upon employees), push employees into a dependent and reactive position and stifle their sense of responsibility for the current reality. This, in turn, will probably help to fulfil management's prophecies about unwilling and difficult employees.

The interventionist recommends an approach that gives the opportunity to see the managers in action with their employees, in order to support mutual learning in interaction. During the management team meeting, the interventionist illustrates to managers how they can be open in interaction with their employees about their dilemmas. For example: 'Now you face a dilemma: they ask for something you don't wish to give anymore. Try to be open about that: 'I feel that I cannot satisfy you. Regardless of the amount of procedures and attention I give, you ask for even more. If this does not satisfy you, then what is it really you need?'

### *Interventions that contribute to de-blocking of changing*

In some sessions the interventionist tries to contribute to changing and learning by a number of interventions.

- Share that 'more of the same' is probably not effective. By asking questions about the effects of one's actions the interventionist stimulates reflection on one's own contribution to blocked changing (*'Are you satisfied with the effects of your actions? If not, how can you continue saying that you are doing the right things?'*).
- Confront strong beliefs and self-fulfilling prophecies: *'By holding these assumptions without inquiring into them, they tend to turn into self-fulfilling prophecies as they filter what you perceive'*. Compare Isaacs (1999): "These beliefs then reinforce what we select out to see. We can easily become locked into a way of thinking that is hard to change" (p 97).
- Confront circular patterns and one's contribution to the problems that one faces: *'Could there possibly be a circular pattern: the more active managers are, the more reactive and dependent employees are and vice versa?'* The underlying assumption is that by stimulating awareness of how one contributes to the recurrent patterns, it will be difficult to repeat these actions on purpose.
- Confront inconsistency neutrally (*'what you say and what you do are inconsistent'*), present possible consistent choices equally (*'you might decide you are satisfied with the results until now and accept some people do not feel safe; if you do not accept this, you will need to inquire into defensive strategies; each option is fine'*) and invite to make conscious and free choices so that one can feel responsible. This way, managers are helped to be consistent and reduce defensiveness.

- Relieve (time) pressure that might activate managers' and interventionists' defensiveness.
- Illustrate what one literally could say to stimulate mutual learning. *'Getting rid of an attitude is probably not possible without inquiring into your own role. Be clear about your hesitations and dilemmas in the process and be prepared to inquire into the patterns that stimulate the attitude you want to get rid of: 'I see this behaviour and to be honest, I would like to get rid of it. Still, I understand I cannot just say 'stop it'. What do I do that stimulates your attitude?'*

These interventions, until now, contribute to awareness and understanding. However, this is not necessarily consistent with actions. This manager's quote is illustrative: *'We are grid locked in the active manager / passive employee problem. How do we get ourselves out of that situation? The MT is the leading group, but how do we make the others follow us?'*

#### *Self-censoring by interventionist*

The interventionist is part of the system as soon as he enters. Just like the managers, the interventionist holds beliefs and assumptions that he does not openly test. For example, the interventionist is not open about his hesitations about the managers:

- are they really prepared to learn?
- are they prepared to reflect on their own role?

This 'designed self-censoring' (Argyris) withholds valid information from the managers and thus blocks learning. This is a typical expression of a unilateral control model (compare Argyris' social virtues of Model I: Respect for others means "Defer to other people and do not confront their reasoning or actions" (1990, pp. 106-107)).

This self-censoring becomes stronger when the interventionist feels he has to re-establish the relationship and his position. His reasoning is as follows: as managers were not satisfied with the process in one meeting (they experienced distance and my expectations did not do justice to their situation), they might have lost confidence in me. Thus, I have to re-establish the relationship and my position. This means I have to ease in and pay personal attention to their experience. This does not allow me to confront painful issues, as this will damage the relationship and confidence again. Mutual learning would have meant sharing this reasoning, checking how valid it is and checking if managers have a different view.

#### *Meeting with employees*

In a meeting with team leaders and teachers the interventionist shares the first findings and the suggested change approach. The interventionist has prepared an interactive presentation on the current reality, possible reasons why changing seems to be difficult and a possible approach to start a learning and development process. Below, some illustrative parts of this meeting are described.

The atmosphere is a bit tense. People look at the interventionists expectantly.

[...]

<p>One interventionist starts the presentation. Core issue: You – including managers – are very good at keeping the situation as it is. (Some laugh). How do you do that? We perceive some patterns (int elaborates on these patterns): parties, circularity, reactivity, distancing. Summarized, successful changing requires all of you, including managers, to make a picture that includes yourself.</p> <p>During and after the presentation, some interactions take place.</p> <p>Employee 1: Do you really expect us to change? I am not sure if I want to.</p> <p>Int: I do not expect you to do anything. But whatever your choice is, try to be consistent. Either keep doing the same things as you do and accept some tension and discomfort (and do not complain about it), or contribute to changing by reflection on your own role. For me it is a free choice.</p> <p>Empl 2: I think he is right. We cannot change anything as long as we are not willing to do anything ourselves.</p> <p>Empl 3: But let us be honest. We can talk as if we are equal, but management has more influence. After all, we are dependent. So they have to start.</p> <p>Int: Managers have stressed they are open to feedback and are willing to learn. Regardless of that, you show some of the patterns that I have just described. Do I say things that give you the feeling you have to defend yourself?</p> <p>Empl 3: Well, eh, actually I do not trust them and don't feel comfortable.</p> <p>Int: What is the effect of that?</p> <p>Empl 3: I don't go to my manager anymore.</p> <p>Int: You take distance. What is the effect on your manager?</p> <p>Empl 3: He seems to pay less attention to me.</p> <p>Int: He takes distance as well; is that what you want?</p> <p>Empl 3: No, I don't.</p>	<p>P s-o P blame B reactive</p>	<p><i>The interventionist's intention is to stimulate awareness of circular patterns and to help employees to see how they contribute to the problems that they face. However, in reflection, presenting an analysis could be a bypass of the problems, as employees and management can take distance, saying that this is interesting and subsequently waiting and seeing what happens.</i></p> <p><i>The interventionist confronts inconsistency in current situation (valid information), invites them to make a free choice (each option is fine, as long as it is consistent) and to take responsibility. By this intervention he stimulates employees to hold a mutual learning model.</i></p> <p>Empl 3 confirms an Subject-Object relation by taking a dependent position towards management. Management will have to show different behaviour consistently in order to break through the circular pattern. The effects will only be visible with a delay, as employees will have to get used to the new pattern.</p> <p><i>Int tries to improve trust in managers' willingness to change, although he is not really convinced. The underlying reasoning is that he wants to stimulate employees to follow managers' learning attitude. This is, however, not entirely valid information as he has not seen real management learning until now. Subsequently, he illustrates a mutual learning model by making defensiveness debatable without blaming.</i></p> <p>As a consequence, empl 3 responds quite openly and seems to share valid information.</p> <p><i>Int helps empl 3 to make a picture that includes herself and to gain insight into the circularity of this pattern.</i></p>
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<p>Int: He might not feel comfortable either. If I understand you correctly, your manager and you act identically towards each other, don't you?</p> <p>Empl 3: Maybe ...</p> <p>Interventionist just wants to pay attention to someone else, when empl 3 makes an additional remark.</p> <p>Empl 3: But the reason why I don't trust him, is a consequence of [...]; so it seems to be reasonable to me that he ...</p> <p>Int: ... has to start changing his behaviour?</p> <p>Empl 3: Yes ...</p> <p>Int: Waiting for others is deciding to take responsibility for the situation as it is. If you do not accept the situation, you will need to reflect on your own role and take responsibility for change. Both choices are fine to me.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Empl 7: How will you know something has changed really? I think we are all quite smart and able to act constructively as long as you join our meetings for a couple of months ...</p> <p>Int: If you show you are able to act constructively for a couple of months, I am quite happy. Show each other you can. You might bring about new patterns that you even like.</p> <p>Some, including empl 7, laugh and confirm.</p> <p>After all, the meeting ends rather positively. Some employees thank the interventionists personally. One of them returns after ten minutes and reports a positive atmosphere in the corridors, although some employees say words like 'let us see what happens'.</p> <p>One employee takes time to share another negative story about managers.</p> <p>Int: I understand you had negative experiences. However, telling negative stories about management to me does not change the situation. On the contrary, it is the current situation. Please take some time to consider if you are willing to contribute to change this situation. It is up to you.</p> <p>Empl: Well, but management should ...</p> <p>Int (impatient): ... you are right, management should do this as well.</p>	<p>P s-o P blame B reactive</p>	<p>Empl tries again.</p> <p><i>Int loses patience ...</i></p> <p><i>... and puts pressure on her to make a free choice (!). The signal, however, is 'you have made your point and must stop droning on'.</i></p> <p>Empl 7 asks for valid information about the effectiveness of the approach. Subsequently, she is open about defensiveness. What she actually says is 'our (my?) defensive strategy is active (compliance strategy); and we are quite good at it'. This remark is quite unusual, as she uncovers defensiveness.</p> <p><i>Partly as a consequence of the critical tone of voice, int takes the remark as 'resistance'. He succeeds in not reacting negatively, however, activates a unilateral control model as he tries to 'win by being smart'. The interventionist does not take the opportunity to inquire into the employee's remark. From a mutual learning approach the interventionist could have shared his appreciation that she brought in this issue and stressed this issue is essential. Questions could have been: what would it bring you if you acted as if you are constructive? What makes you expecting that constructive behaviour would only last as long as we are joining you? And: how could this 'acting' have contributed to the preservation of the current situation and difficulties to change? These questions stimulate to find 'valid information'. Subsequently, the interventionist could have asked if they are satisfied with these effects of their actions. If so, they take responsibility for these actions and results. If not, they could explore alternative thinking and acting.</i></p>
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After this session the interventionist gets in touch with the director. The director says 'he has heard several positive signals; some employees had found the session inspiring'. He concludes the interventionist has a positive influence on the atmosphere: 'I have heard some employees, who are open to change, have met; they no longer want to accept this negative behaviour of some colleagues'.

### *Meeting with director*

In a conversation with the director the interventionist shares his hesitations in being open about his observations and beliefs, as he perceives that the director tends to take distance and make pictures of the situation that do not include him. This, in turn, blocks learning and contributes to the fixed situation. The director responds by saying that he already felt that the interventionist took distance for a period and should have brought this issue in earlier. He emphasizes that he really wants to learn and is glad to know that this is not visible in action yet.

## **Reflection 6**

### *How effective is it to present a diagnosis?*

The interventionist presents his diagnosis to a group of employees. What is the effect of this methodology? The diagnosis could be a bypass of the problems, as employees and management can take distance, saying that this is interesting and subsequently wait and see what happens. Besides, the diagnosis could make them defensive; this could be uncomfortable for the interventionist who, in turn, activates a control model (persuasion, trying to win). In turn, employees would probably show a compliance and undergo strategy: 'we say yes and think no or we don't say what we think at all'.

Presenting a diagnosis, however, can stimulate awareness of

- how changing is (possibly) blocked,
- how one contributes to the recurrent problems,
- how one could contribute to de-blocking of changing.

This could contribute to learning, as long as this is not presented as 'the truth' but only a possible explanation (*'It is the best I could think up. Have you got something else in mind?'*) and as long as the interventionist leaves room for free choice and personal commitment (*'I do not expect you to do anything. But whatever your choice is, try to be consistent. Either keep doing the same things as you do and accept some tension and discomfort (and do not complain about it), or contribute to changing by reflection on your own role. For me it is a free choice.'*).

Having a discussion with a large group can only be a start, as it does not stimulate a personal sense of responsibility. The larger the group, the larger the 'diffusion of responsibility' and the less individuals feel personally responsible. This social psychological principle explains the so-called 'bystander effect' (Latané and Darley, 1970).



### *Management has to start?*

Employees often tend to refer to management: management has more influence and management has to start. This is a reasonable expectance. Argyris (1984, 1990) argues that one should start with the top. This is confirmed by Weick & Quinn (2004), who argue “most top managers assume that change is something that someone with authority does to someone who does not have authority”. However, to engage the logic of attraction (instead of power), leaders must first make deep changes in themselves. “When deep personal change occurs, leaders then behave differently toward their direct reports, and the new behaviours from followers” (p. 190).

However, stressing the position that management has to start has some disadvantages. First, it is a confirmation of a Subject-Object perspective: change starts with management and is, thus, top-down. As long as managers do not succeed in making visible behavioural changes, employees will not feel responsible either. This situation is still unilateral and does not support mutual learning. Second, if managers start changing their behaviour unilaterally, their attempts can easily be frustrated by employees who try to push them back into the ‘old system’ (even if they don’t like this ‘system’).

For this reason, managers should be open about their beliefs and considerations regarding their new behaviour and be open to inquiry: *‘I feel that I cannot satisfy you. Regardless of the amount of procedures and attention I give, you ask for even more. If this does not satisfy you, then what is it really you need?’* This way they involve employees in changing and learning from scratch.

Besides, in this case the interventionist invites employees directly to decide whether they wish to contribute either to preserving the current reality or to changing and learning. Two examples:

*‘However, telling negative stories about management to me does not change the situation. On the contrary, it is the current situation. Please take some time to consider if you are willing to contribute to change this situation. It is up to you.’*  
*And: ‘Waiting for others is deciding to take responsibility for the situation as it is. If you do not accept the situation, you will need to reflect on your own role and take responsibility for change. Both choices are fine to me.’*

### *On resistance and valid information*

By and large, defensiveness protects itself. According to Argyris, we tend to cover up and cover up the cover-up. For example, we say ‘yes’ and think ‘no’ and we are not open about this (compliance strategy). This is in line with Senge (1990): “To retain their power, defensive routines must remain undiscussable. Teams stay stuck in their defensive routines only when they pretend that they don’t have any defensive routines, that everything is all right, and that they can say ‘anything’” (p. 255).

Sometimes, as illustrated in this case, one makes one’s own defensiveness debatable. For example: *‘How will you know something has changed really? I think we are all quite smart and able to act constructively as long as you join our meetings for a couple of months ...’* As it is not usual to be this open about one’s own defensiveness (after all, a unilateral control model instructs to cover up our defensiveness), this can be experienced as uncomfortable or even threatening.

The espoused theory is that we would like valid information, especially about a thing as fundamental as commitment. However, it seems to be much easier to manage people saying 'yes' while thinking 'no' than people saying 'no'. This probably explains why managers (and consultants) often tend to favour a possibly invalid 'yes' to a valid 'no'.

This puts common insights regarding 'dealing with resistance' in a different perspective. Generally, 'positive' (and neutral) persons tend to be perceived as constructive, while critical persons are usually perceived as not constructive. This perception contributes directly to defensiveness, as it makes different views undebatable and stimulates a compliance and undergo-strategy: 'we say yes and think no or we don't say what we think at all'.

On the other hand, making all individual views debatable time after time will undermine 'momentum'. A mutual learning approach would stimulate sharing this valid information: 'I know we do not all agree now and I know I will disappoint some of you and might make you defensive, but now I will have to take a decision. I will not ask you to agree and I understand your defensiveness, though I expect you to respect this decision.'

### Period 3: team sessions deeper in organization

The interventionist joins a number of team sessions deeper in the organization. By and large, these meetings follow a structure and agenda as usual. The interventionist has room to intervene during the session and share his observations at the end of the sessions. The approach aims at supporting a learning process. More specifically, the ambition is to contribute to a development from

- blocking to inquiring into mutual expectations and interaction patterns
- opposing to dialogue
- 'they must' to 'we go' and 'I go'.

This approach is based on the assumption that the interventionist can support learning by sharing his observations on how one seems to contribute to the recurrent problems one faces and how one can help to de-block changing and learning.

Some illustrative parts are described below.

#### *Session team 1*

In the first half of this meeting, some routine topics are discussed that seem to be content-driven and not stressful or threatening to anybody. This part comes across as effective and result-oriented. Until a delicate issue is brought in ...

Team leader (TL): We will introduce new procedures regarding learning methods. The aim is to standardize some methods in line with a quality system.	O variety reduction	
Empl 1: What? Why don't we know that? I am not going to do that. [...] They are over-demanding.		Empl 1 is very clear about his annoyance; he strongly resists the new activity report.

<p>They cannot expect us to do this. If they go on this way, we lose any professional freedom.</p> <p>TL: Let us share this with A (department manager). We will meet him next week.</p> <p>Empl 1: Yes, we must say that we are not going to do this. It has to stop.</p> <p>A strong tension fills the room.</p> <p>Int: You are angry, aren't you?</p> <p>Empl 1: Yes, we are. They ask more and more.</p> <p>Int: I appreciate your disappointment. However, the way you respond to them is quite blocking: you say you are not going to do it, that it has to stop, etcetera. It is a brief 'no'. Can I tempt you to inquire into this situation?</p> <p>Empl 1 and 2: Right.</p> <p>Int: What exactly makes you angry?</p> <p>Empl 2: Managers try to enlarge their control step-by-step.</p> <p>Int: What is the effect of this assumption on your behaviour?</p> <p>Empl 1: We do not accept that and try to block it.</p> <p>Int: Does this normally help?</p> <p>Empl 1 and 2: No, actually it doesn't. On the contrary.</p> <p>Int: If I understand you well, you say you do not want to do what managers ask you to do, right?</p> <p>Empl 1 and 2: Right.</p> <p>Int: So, if it is true that managers try to enlarge their control, this does not sound very foolish. You seem to encourage them to do so.</p> <p>Empl 1: The question is, who is the cause? That is not us.</p> <p>Int: In my opinion you are both cause <i>and</i> effect. This is an illustrative example of a circular pattern: the more control by managers, the more you block, the more control by managers, etcetera.</p> <p>Silence</p> <p>Int: Blocking does not seem to help, does it?</p> <p>Empl 1: No.</p> <p>Int: An alternative is to approach your manager and have an open conversation that sounds different to 'we are not going to do what you ask</p>	<p>P linear P distance B reactive</p>	<p><i>Int tries to describe the situation in neutral terms, in order to invite them to inquiry.</i></p> <p><i>Int tries to help them to get insight into the effect of their beliefs on their actions and into the effects of their actions.</i></p> <p><i>Int confronts inconsistency by describing how they might contribute to management's behaviour.</i></p> <p>The employee holds management as responsible for the situation and –thus– behaves reactively.</p> <p><i>Int describes circularity.</i></p>
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<p>us'. Rather, try to find out what they need in order to play their role and what you need to work effectively as a professional. Try to make this circularity debatable.</p> <p>Empl 1: I understand, but that requires them to be really open.</p> <p>Int: Indeed. Well, would you be prepared to give it a try?</p> <p>Empl 1: I wish to think about that for a while.</p> <p>TL: I think this is very good. We should try to involve our own role.</p>		<p>In other words: would you be prepared to be really open yourself?</p>
<p>After two weeks the employee gets in touch with the interventionist. He wishes to prepare a conversation with the manager, together with his team leader.</p>		<p>De-blocking changing and organizing is characterized by delay. This observation resembles Senge's (1990) insights: changing the 'lower circle' in the 'shifting the burden' structure is characterized by delay.</p>

### Session team 2

One day before this session, the interventionist organized a half-day workshop on circular and recurrent patterns and de-blocking of these patterns. The focus is on reflection on one's own cases from a unilateral control and mutual learning model. Some of the employees in team 2 have attended this workshop and immediately bring the new insights into practice.

<p>TL: This subject logically fits team x better. They have thorough knowledge of the potential partners in this field. For that reason they will do it from now.</p> <p>Empl 1: Oh .... (looks disappointed and angry)</p> <p>TL: There are good reasons why team x will adopt it.</p> <p>Empl 1: Well, you should have let me know, but anyhow ... (looks even more disappointed and angry).</p> <p>TL (a bit irritated): I understand you are disappointed, but I'm telling you now, am I not?</p> <p>Empl 1: Yes ... (nonverbally 'no')</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Int: This looks a bit complicated. Are you satisfied with your result? If so, let's go on. If not, let's take a moment to evaluate this situation.</p> <p>Both: Let's take a moment ...</p> <p>Int: What did you wish to realize?</p> <p>Empl 1: I feel so powerless and frustrated. It always goes this way within this organization. It is</p>	<p>B control</p> <p>B control↑ B repeat</p> <p>P distance P blame</p>	<p>This sounds as a free choice, but how free is the choice between 'learning' and 'not learning'?</p> <p>Empl 1 is open about his feelings. But he talks in abstractions. Int could have facilitated</p>
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## Period 4: learning process director and division management team

### *Meeting with the division management team*

The interventionist is invited to join a two-hour management team meeting. The agenda covers several formats/instruments, such as project plans, performance management system and registration of hours. One of the items is the development process that the interventionist is involved in. He has been invited to share some experiences and insights during the last month. Some illustrative parts are described below.

<p>In the first part of the meeting several formats and systems are discussed, like project plans, performance management system and course evaluations.</p>	<p>I symptoms I cover-up I short term I instrumental O variety reduction</p>	<p><i>In fact, the interventionist is surprised by this focus on systems. There are many signals in the organization that the distance between management and employees is huge. In the interventionist's feeling, it has been too long ago that he has joined a management team meeting.</i></p>
<p>Dir: A problem is that teachers do not fill out these course evaluations properly. How come?</p>		<p>Dir tries to explore the problem openly.</p>
<p>Mgr 1: We have to improve the system. It has to be easier.</p>	<p>I symptoms I instrumental P distancing</p>	
<p>Mgr 3: I agree, but I don't think that is the problem. The problem is they lack knowledge and skills to work with such a system. For many years they could do what they liked. And now we expect them to work transparently.</p>	<p>P dynamic (D) P circular (D)</p>	<p>Mgr 3 recognizes a system that protects itself. If we have 'trained' employees to act a certain way, we cannot expect them to change from one day to another.</p>
<p>Dir: I guess you are right. We must think about how to support our teachers.</p>		
<p>Mgr 3: I think we have to train them in the field of performance management in education.</p>	<p>I symptoms I instrumental</p>	
<p>Dir: I think we indeed have to invite a specialist in this field.</p>		
<p>Int: Can I interrupt for a moment?</p>		
<p>Dir: Yes, of course ...</p>		
<p>Int: If I understand you well, your teachers do not fill out the course evaluations properly. And now you discuss what the problem is: the complexity of the evaluation method or their lack of knowledge and skills. Right?</p>		<p><i>Interventionist tries to facilitate learning by</i> <i>- checking what exactly they are doing,</i></p>
<p>Some (hesitantly): Right ...</p>		
<p>Int: How will you decide what the problem is?</p>		<p><i>- checking upon what (valid) information they want to decide,</i></p>
<p>Dir: We're trying to make an analysis of the problem.</p>		
<p>Int: And how will you know that you are right?</p>		
<p>Silence ...</p>		

<p>Int: Could this be a part of the difficulties? You discuss what the teachers' problem is, you share beliefs about them but not with them and you develop solutions for their problems. For example, they need training. What would happen, if you told them that they need training? I think you'd push them into a reactive and dependent position. What would you think?</p> <p>Dir and some mgrs: Yes, you are probably right.</p> <p>Int: I know this is not what you want. I guess you need to facilitate mutual learning. By sharing the problem, sharing your beliefs, asking their beliefs and co-developing solutions. What do you think?</p> <p>Dir: We have discussed this subject with the team leaders, but indeed, we have to do that more intensively.</p>		<p>- confronting inconsistency and the way they contribute to the problems they face,</p> <p>- describing the alternative (although this is rather abstract and high on Argyris' ladder of inference),</p>
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Immediately afterwards, director and interventionist evaluate this session.

<p>Dir: How did you experience this meeting?</p> <p>Int: As I said, there was significant focus on 'control'. You work on instruments to control work processes. And if employees do not commit to these instruments, you discuss ways to improve the instruments or to get the employees 'in position'. Where is the dialogue with your employees? How do you try to find out what the underlying problems are? What keeps them from obeying?</p> <p>Dir: People wait until something happens. We have to become a more professional organization.</p> <p>Int: How does this belief affect your actions?</p> <p>Dir: Someone has to steer very powerfully. And that is me.</p> <p>Int: I suppose you are right. Be clear about your expectations. However, I think you need (output) steering and process dialogue. If you don't explore why employees don't follow your instructions and how you could contribute to commitment, you will have to control more and more.</p> <p>Dir: You are right.</p> <p>Int: It is quite a job, isn't it? How do you manage your energy?</p> <p>Dir: It is very busy for me.</p> <p>Int: How come?</p> <p>Dir: Everything is on my shoulders.</p> <p>Int: How come?</p>		<p>Int tries to stimulate learning by</p> <p>- inquiring into the effect of dir's beliefs on his actions,</p> <p>- sharing circularity (including his role),</p> <p>- inquiring into circularity (including his role),</p>
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[illegible]

P own role (D)
B reflection (D)

- asking for a concrete case (valid, observable data),
- inquiring into the effect of actions,
- inquiring into what beliefs produce her actions,
- sharing how dir produces his own problems,
- inquiring into alternatives,
- sharing alternatives to make things actionable.



### *Session with management, team leaders and teachers*

Management decides to organize a half-day meeting with all team leaders and teachers. This meeting aims at discussing how the strategy of the organization can be put into practice and how to deal with difficult problems and different opinions, as these situations often lead to stagnation instead of learning. Director, some employees and interventionist prepare the meeting. This way, it is not only a program that management imposes upon employees. During the preparation, the director is very open to any suggestion and leaves room for employees to bring in their ideas. The director opens this session and shares the problems, including the way he contributes to them: *'We are facing quite a few difficult issues. An important issue is how we deal with these. And let's be honest: we don't always do this effectively; I don't always do this effectively. I know that there is too large a distance between employees and management.'* While most teachers respond positively to the director's opening in the plenary, during the break some of them still talk negatively about the director, the Board, management and the organization. Nobody, including the interventionist, addresses these opinions in the plenary. The program is closed 'positively'.

### **Reflection 7**

#### *Quick fix and slow change*

Some positive developments are visible, but there are also some persistent patterns that make changing still difficult. Some positive developments:

- The division management team works hard on instruments that should support a result-oriented organization. There is no reason to believe that this, in itself, is ineffective. The effectiveness is questionable, as soon as this same single-loop approach is used for people problems. For example, there is an attempt to solve the problem that 'teachers don't fill out the course evaluations as we instruct them' through improvement of the system and/or education of the team leaders. This way, a more fundamental question is bypassed: 'what makes the teachers not follow the instructions?'  
If the management team designs solutions for these kinds of problems, they might contribute to several circular patterns:
  - active managers who impose solutions on teachers versus dependent teachers (and team leaders) who wait and judge management's solutions
  - distant managers versus distant employees.
- Several employees and some managers visit workshops on circular patterns and de-blocking of these patterns voluntarily and show active interest in how to learn. Some of them actively bring their insights into practice soon after the workshop (*'I want to try something that I have learned. My belief was that if we ask for more information and bring in our frustration time after time, that we will reach our goal, but I doubt if this assumption is valid.'*) This, in turn contributes to reflection on recurrent patterns and the way one contributes to these patterns. A significant number of employees, however, feel discouraged to learn as they believe management do not learn and should be a positive role model.

As a consequence, some tend to resist management initiatives, which leads to reduction of management influence. This, in turn, encourages management to enlarge control. Here, the circular pattern is activated again.

*Don't ruin the good atmosphere that we don't have*

The session with management, team leaders and teachers strongly illustrates the 'current situation': the director's vulnerable opening of the day, the discussion about circular patterns and defensiveness, as well as the way employees, management and interventionist contribute to defensiveness.

The director opens with a vulnerable presentation. He talks frankly about his contribution to difficulties and takes responsibility. This, with delay, is an important step ahead and reduces the gap between him and the employees. Many employees say they are impressed and there is a positive atmosphere in the room. Later, after the interventionist's presentation, interventionist and management think most participants agree that *'we can only get further if we are willing to reflect on our own contribution to recurrent patterns'*. How valid is this information?

This appears to be questionable. In a break some employees talk negatively about management and organization and don't seem to be able or willing to reflect on their own role. This seems to uncover an 'undergo strategy' during the plenary session: 'we just act as if we commit, even if we don't'. This undergo strategy helps to make this issue undiscussable. Later, in the plenary session, the interventionist only refers to this issue in general terms (*'not all employees seem to feel intrinsically motivated to join'*) and stimulates employees to share their concerns frankly in a conversation with a manager (however, why would they if they haven't done that until now?). The director confirms this invitation and all participants cover up the painful issues effectively and cover up the cover-up.

Afterwards, the interventionist asks the director how representative the critical voices during the break are. The director: *'They are not, this was a selection of critical persons.'* The interventionist does not inquire into how he knows that he is right. Both contribute to cover up this issue and prevent learning. Later, the director shares with the interventionist that he wants to invite employees who seem to be unhappy to have a conversation with either him or the HR manager.

Main interventions that support learning

In several sessions with management and production teams the interventionist tries to stimulate learning. The main interventions:

- Sharing observations and interpretations regarding
  - beliefs that people seem to hold
  - circular patterns, including the contribution of several parties
  - how one preserves the current reality and contributes to recurrent patterns
  - defensiveness
- Teaching how a unilateral control model can stifle learning and block changing and how a mutual learning model can contribute to learning and changing. One gets acquainted with the conceptual models and how these help to gain insight into the way one preserves the current reality and blocks changing and learning.

- Trying to be consistent in one's own behaviour and support learning in action.  
Typical ingredients that contribute to learning:
    - instead of talking about abstract interpretations, ask for valid, observable data: *'Have you got an example?'*
    - inquire into the effect of one's beliefs on his/her actions
    - inquire into the effects of his/her actions: *'What are the effects?'*
    - explore to what extent one is satisfied with these effects: *'Is that what you want?'*
    - share how a person produces his own problems: *'I am afraid you produce your own problems: you have beliefs about him, you assume it does not help to share these beliefs, you take his responsibility away, you think this will make him less secure and you are busier and busier.'*
    - share circularity (including one's role): *'If you don't explore why employees don't follow your instructions and how you could contribute to their commitment, you will have to control more and more.'*
    - inquire into alternatives: *'What would be an alternative?'*
    - share alternatives and make them actionable: *'What if you shared your dilemma openly with him? Such as: 'I am hesitating. I would like to give you the opportunity to take this responsibility. However, I feel insecure because I get no signs that you're working on it. How shall we organize this situation?'*
- Compare Argyris (1990), who states, "the advice should contain the action strategies (e.g. advocate your position in a way that encourages inquiry). Second, it should be accompanied with actual statements that illustrate what you would have to say and do" (p. 87).

## 9.4 Analysis of moving moments 3

In this section, the findings of case 3 are summarized and interpreted. Preceding the analyses, which follow the structure of the research questions, the point of departure and results of this case are summarized.

### Point of departure and results

The case starts with communication and interaction problems between management and employees, leading to blocked changing. The problems already exist for a longer period and the situation does not improve despite several management initiatives. The recurrence of the problems in the longer run, while obvious actions do not lead to obvious results, seems to reveal a dynamically complex situation. This situation relates directly to the subject of this study.

Although the process in this case is laborious, in the end managers and employees start a learning process and after half a year they report improvements regarding open communication, learning and changing. After all, it remains the question how lasting these changes are.

*Research question 1:*

*To what extent are the expressions of unilateral control visible in interactions?*

In this case numerous observations have been made regarding Perceiving (reductionism, distancing, blaming, linear perception and S-O relations), Behaving (controlling circumstances, repeated behaviour, stronger control in case of threat and reactive behaviour) and Intervening (focus on symptoms, cover-up of underlying patterns, quick wins and focus on impersonal instruments)<sup>16</sup>. The 'diagnostic model' helps to recognize situations that are influenced by unilateral control.

There are only few observations regarding Design of organization (positional organization, variety reduction, S-O relations and organization/change as separated entities). These observations relate to the discussion about organization structure at the start (O positional), the wish to implement a uniform culture (O subject-object) and the focus on instruments and formats that aim at standardisation (O variety reduction). Design of organization is also illustrated when one employee talks about lack of clear tasks, information and responsibilities as well as the structure that does not allow flexibility. These observations, in reflection, seem to be conflicting. It is this employee who also says: *'Sometimes I surprise myself. I can behave quite dependent and ask for things I do not really want. I call for procedures and forms, but regularly think: why do I need all these procedures? I would rather work without them. We are looking for grip, but all the forms and formats only cause annoyance.'*

As for Change of organization (goal-oriented and planned process, step-by-step, episodic and top-down, rational), the case delivers only a few illustrations. Especially at the start of the case, the director's assignment reflects a rational, episodic and top-down rationale: *'Try to make the institute more businesslike and result-oriented'*. Later, one of the managers follows the same line when he suggests reforming the organization (culture).

*Research question 2*

*How does unilateral control relate to (de-)blocking of changing, organizing and learning?*

This research question aims at gaining insight into the 'black box' between unilateral control and changing and organizing. The findings are summarized under some specified questions.

*How do expressions of unilateral control contribute to recurrent problems?*

Several managers in this case emphasize that they are fed up with giving more and more (of the same), without coming any further. The recurrent problems in the longer run, despite several initiatives, seem to disclose a dynamically complex situation. "When obvious interventions produce nonobvious consequences, there is dynamic complexity" (Senge, 1990, p. 71).

The case illustrates a difficult change process and a highly fixed situation. Although most actors, managers, team leaders as well as employees, say the current situation

<sup>16</sup> For numbers of observations, see appendix 4 'Cross-case analysis'.

is undesirable (espoused theory), together they appear to be very skilful in preserving that situation with the way they perceive, behave and intervene (theory-in-use). This way, they block changing, organizing and learning. How?

Management hold a strong Subject-Object definition of relations while in several instances employees reflect an Object-Subject definition. Some typical quotes by managers:

- *'How do we get rid of the current attitude of the employees?'*
- *'We have to change the culture of this organization.'*
- *'We have taken quite a few initiatives, but employees are aversive to management'.*

And some typical quotes by employees:

- *'I need a manager who inspires me.'*
- *'Sometimes I surprise myself. I behave quite dependent and ask for things I do not really want.'*

Thus this case illustrates how a Subject-Object perspective of relations is reinforced by both managers and employees in a circular way: managers perceive themselves as active subjects that (can) impose change on reactive employees, while employees perceive themselves as dependent on management actions and behave reactively. In this circular pattern, employees tend to distance themselves and put a strong responsibility on management's shoulders. The circular pattern contributes to self-fulfilling prophecies, as depicted in figure 9.4.

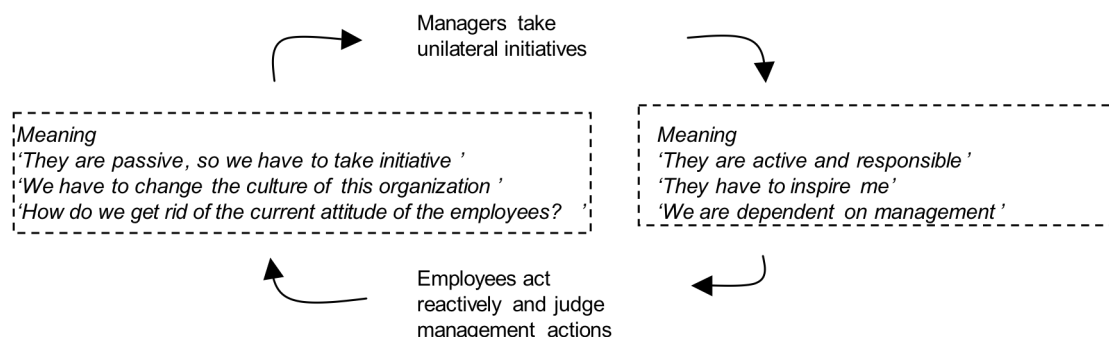


Figure 9.4 Circular pattern between managers and employees

In this circular pattern, managers and employees tend to reason in a linear way and repeat their behaviours. Typical illustrations:

- If employees, from a dependent perspective, expect management to offer instruments or instructions, management tend to respond by delivering those instruments or instructions (and keep the circularity active). If this appears to lead to dissatisfaction, management sometimes stop offering solutions. It seems to be either 'the upper circle' (hands on), or 'not the upper circle' (hands off). They cover up the underlying problem: 'why do they ask for more and more, regardless of what we deliver?'
- If teachers do not fill out course evaluations properly, management consider developing a better system or educating them. They cover up the underlying problem: 'why don't employees do what we expect them to do?'

- If employees don't like the way managers respond to their needs, they tend to distance themselves and discuss managers' incompetence amongst peers.

The focus of perception, behaviour and interventions is on the upper circle in Senge's 'shifting the burden' structure: single-loop learning based on a unilateral control model. This leads to recurrent patterns. What keeps management and employees from inquiring into the lower circle and asking 'how do we create the same problems time after time?'

First, management as well as many employees seem to hold strong beliefs about the other 'party', without publicly testing them. For example, *'dialogue presumes the ability to reflect, which they lack'*, *'employees find management a priori not okay'*, *'giving room to work autonomously presumes trust'* and *'management is responsible for changing the situation'*. Compare Isaacs (1999): "These beliefs then reinforce what we select out to see. We can easily become locked into a way of thinking that is hard to change" (p 97). This is in line with Van Dijk (1989), who argues that fixed beliefs normally aim at defending and confirming themselves.

Second, management as well as many employees hold others responsible for the recurrent problems (*'I know perfectly well who's the crazy one'* and *'The question is, who is the cause. That is not us.'*). There is little (open) reflection on one's own contribution to the problems.

Third, both management and employees tend to take distance towards each other (*'I reduce my contacts. Actually, I take distance'* and *'I don't even try again'*). There is little dialogue with each other about the problems. Managers talk with managers about what to do and employees talk with employees about what management should do. To avoid dialogue about sensitive issues, people activate defensive strategies. These are discussed in later in this section.

Figure 9.5, based on Senge's 'shifting the burden system', summarizes these observations.

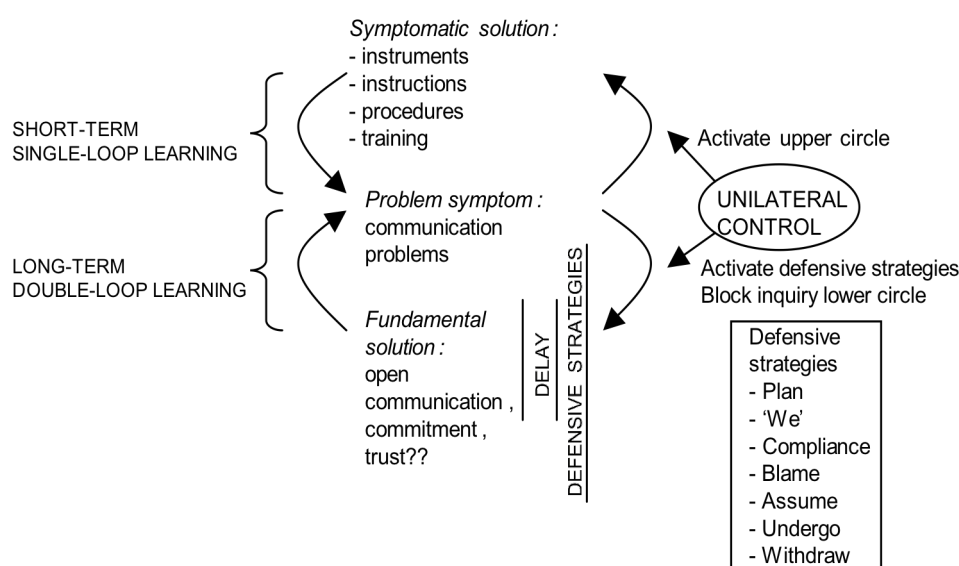


Figure 9.5 Unilateral control stimulates symptomatic solutions and blocks fundamental solutions

An additional element that blocks change, though not an element of the theory in this study, is the element of 'power' and 'parties'. In this case people often state that 'management', 'teachers' and/or 'staff' say or do something, as if all individuals in that group act and think exactly the same. Thinking in terms of 'parties' seems to lead to ignorance of individual differences, de-personification (it is relatively easy to say ugly things about a party) and a struggle for power (which party is in charge?). Illustrative quotes are:

- management: *'But we know that the game for power will be played and that the employees will organize themselves.'*
- employees: *'But let us be honest. We can talk as if we are equal, but management has more influence. After all, we are dependent. So they have to start.'*

Both managers and employees (both 'parties') bring in the power issue on a regular basis. The issue can be linked to the blocking effect of a unilateral control model: both 'parties' try to impose their reality on the other party and both parties are hindered in having a pro-active contribution because they think 'the other party' behaves from a power model and success is dependent on this other party. Which is probably right: the more they think in terms of parties, the more power thinking 'on both sides'. Beside this perspective, the power issue might have another consequence: it may lead to parties just not willing to learn, not willing to have a dialogue and just wanting the other party to lose or leave.

#### *What circular patterns are visible?*

As discussed, this case illustrates repetitive behaviour by both managers and employees, reinforced by strong but unchecked beliefs about the other 'party', the expectance that others are responsible for problems, and little reflection on one's own contribution to the problems. This repetitive behaviour leads to circular patterns. The patterns have in common that they are built on this strong Subject-Object perspective that managers as well as employees hold.

Typical circular patterns that are illustrated in this case are described below.

#### **Manager initiates change process, employees (act as if they) follow**

The more managers consider themselves as being capable of and responsible for imposing changes upon employees, the more they push employees into a following (dependent, reactive) position, the more managers are confirmed in their belief they should impose changes, etcetera.

#### **Manager expects resistance and braces himself, employees respond negatively and oppose**

The more managers expect employees will show resistance, the more they tend to brace themselves and persuade, the more employees respond negatively and develop resistance, the more managers brace themselves, etcetera.

#### **Manager active; employees reactive**

The more initiative managers take (executing change actions, organizing meetings, taking, chairing meetings, stressing the need for change), the more reactive and dependent employees behave, etcetera.

**Manager tries to motivate and inspire employees; employees feel lack of motivation and inspiration**

The more managers try to motivate and inspire their employees, the less they feel responsible for their own motivation and the more they feel dependent on the manager's capability to motivate and inspire, the more managers need to motivate and inspire, etcetera.

**Manager solves employees' problems; employees bring in their problems**

The more managers deliver the instruments that employees ask for, the more employees keep asking for instruments (instead of bringing in their underlying needs), the more managers deliver instruments (instead of inquiring into underlying needs), etcetera.

**Manager feels uncomfortable and takes distance; employees feel uncomfortable and take distance**

The more uncomfortable managers feel, the more distance they take, the more uncomfortable employees feel the more distance they take, the more uncomfortable managers feel, etcetera.

**Manager implements control instruments; employees resist management initiatives**

The more managers enlarge control, the more employees believe managers are not a positive role model and resist management initiatives, the less management influence, the more managers enlarge control, etcetera.

These circular patterns go on as long as no one makes them debatable. In order to avoid inquiry, one uses defensive strategies.

*What defensive strategies are visible?*

Defensive strategies are considered to be specific behaviours and actions that block the lower circle of Senge's 'shifting the burden' and thus block fundamental solutions. Defensive strategies aim at making sensitive issues undiscussable. Or, in Argyris' terms, defensive strategies cover sensitive issues up and undermine learning and changing. This way, defensive strategies support preservation of the current reality without making this debatable or even visible.

The last session with management, team leaders and teachers delivers the most striking example of defensiveness in this case. While all attendees agree that 'we can only get any further if we are willing to reflect on our own contribution to recurrent patterns', in a break employees talk negatively about management and don't seem to be able or willing to reflect on their own role. This seems to uncover an 'undergo strategy' during the plenary session: 'we just act as if we commit, even if we don't'. Later, while all parties know about the discussions in this subgroup, neither employees nor managers nor interventionist make this openly debatable. All try to maintain 'the good atmosphere that we do not really have'. This is an example of the 'ignorance strategy': just ignore the information that is difficult to deal with. Compare Senge (1990): "To retain their power, defensive routines must remain undiscussable. Teams stay stuck in their defensive routines only when they pretend that they don't have any defensive routines, that everything is all right, and that they can say 'anything'" (p. 255).



This case illustrates nine defensive strategies:

- Compliance strategy: in case of threat, say that you comply (regardless of whether you really do).
- Ignorance strategy: act as if it is interesting, though ignore the information that is difficult to deal with.
- Blame strategy: in case of embarrassment or threat, blame others.
- Assume strategy: keep strong assumptions about others and situations private.
- 'We' strategy: in case of threat, talk about 'our responsibility' and 'we should pay attention to the problems' (as a consequence, nobody has to feel personally responsible).
- Undergo strategy: in case of threat, just undergo the intervention (passively) and do not make the producing patterns debatable.
- Plan strategy: agree to make a plan and act as if you comply with the plan.
- Withdraw strategy: in case of difficulties in the communication between manager and employee, withdraw and discuss the difficulties with peers.
- Shirk strategy: shift the responsibility to an 'outsider' and avoid sharing your own opinion about the process or colleagues.

#### *How do leaders de-block changing, organizing and learning?*

As described, changing and learning are quite problematic in this case. Leaders as well as many employees tend to stick to their beliefs about the other party and find it hard to reflect on their own contribution to the recurrent problems. The managers, especially the director, have no problems with understanding the circular patterns that the interventionist shares with them. The difficulty seems to be to accept that they have to start changing their behaviour before anything can change. Illustrative quotes are:

- *'Actually we are fed up with giving more and more'.*
- *'Actually we have a double bind assignment: 'give more attention to people who push you away'.*
- *'Giving room to work autonomously presumes trust, which is betrayed by some'*

With negative emotions, feeling that one is let down or treated unpleasantly, it is difficult to take distance, reflect on one's own role and change one's approach.

The interventionist tries to support learning by showing that giving more and more is probably not the solution, as the current strategy does not seem to improve the situation. He tries to help them to show different behaviour by giving concrete illustrations of what they could say and do time after time. After repetitive feedback of circular patterns and his contribution to these patterns, and many illustrations of an alternative approach, the director really makes a behavioural shift. Typical expressions of his different approach:

- Reflection and experimentation: *'I don't know how I will succeed in this new strategy, but I am going to find out.'*
- Making sensitive issues debatable by addressing them: *'I know that there is too large a distance between employees and management.'*
- Self-disclosure and public reflection upon the way one contributes to lack of learning: *'We do not communicate enough and effectively. I personally don't.'*

- Making circularity visible: *'There are all kinds of circular patterns that create recurrent problems and we seem to be stuck in it together: the more we, management, have the feeling that employees don't pick things up, the greater our inclination to enlarge control, the more defensiveness of employees, the more control... And I take responsibility for my part.'*
- Being proactive: *'I want to organize sessions with employees in order to share mutual feedback. We have to find out together how we can communicate and work better.'*

The consequence of the director's approach is that employees respond positively. They appreciate the director's vulnerability, which contributes to the common statement that 'we can only come any further if we are willing to reflect on our own contribution to recurrent patterns'. Later, this appears to be not consistent with the behaviour of at least some employees.

Six months after the last session that the interventionist attended, an evaluation meeting takes place. In this meeting some employees, a manager and the director discuss the current reality with the interventionist. During the meeting there is a different atmosphere, that is confirmed by findings that they share: there is better communication, all parties tend to find solutions together instead of working against each other, in case of problems people tend to talk to each other instead of about each other and people tend to consider more often how they can contribute to improvement themselves. Employees also agree that managers are more open in their communication, though this is still vulnerable. According to the director, there seems to be a delayed effect.

### *Research question 3*

*How do interventions contribute to (de-)blocking changing, organizing and learning?*

The aim of this research question is to develop an intervention perspective that contributes to de-blocking changing, organizing and learning.

This case delivers interesting illustrations of how commonly used interventions can contribute to blocked changing and organizing as well as how interventions can support changing and organizing. In addition, the role of the interventionist develops during the case.

From the beginning, the situation is strongly characterized by recurrent problems, circular patterns and defensive strategies. The assignment is to help the organization in their attempts to change successfully. In other words, the assignment focuses on exactly the contents of this study. During this tough process, the interventionist develops beliefs about management and employees and becomes defensive at several moments. Besides, he learns that some intervention methods do not and others do contribute to changing, organizing and learning. The insights are presented below.

### *Interviews as a bypass*

The interventionist conducts a number of interviews with employees in order to gain insight into their perceptions and beliefs regarding the current reality, analyses this

information, develops temporary conclusions and presents these outcomes to the management team. As a consequence, managers become defensive as they have heard employees' visions too often and do not agree with them. In effect, the interventionist becomes defensive, as he does not like the managers offending his outcomes. It becomes clear that this methodology does not support learning and changing, because

- the interventionist, just like managers and employees, 'imposes' his beliefs (outcomes) as a truth upon the managers, and
- the analysis leads to abstractions that lack valid information.

As described before, the interventionist could better have shared 'raw material' with the managers and inquired into the meaning of this together with the managers. Possible defensiveness from management could have been a source of inquiry as well. An important notion refers to employees' anonymity. This issue uncovers the doubtful value of interviewing as a methodology in situations with interpersonal, behavioural and communication problems. The question is, what is the added value of information that employees would not share with their manager and the interventionist cannot share with their manager? For this reason, direct communication between managers and employees is to be preferred in such situations. The emphasis of the interventionist's activities in this case concerns attending sessions, collecting directly observable data and sharing interpretations in the 'here and now'.

The limited value of this intervention is not only methodological, but also relates to the interventionist's defensiveness when he is confronted with managers' defensiveness. Here it becomes visible how the interventionist activates a unilateral control model when he is confronted with managers who are opposed to the outcomes of the interviews. Their behaviours relate circularly, as depicted in figure 9.3.

#### *Self-censoring by interventionist*

The case illustrates moments of self-censoring by the interventionist, meaning that he withholds valid information from the managers and blocks learning (compare Argyris' social virtues of Model I: Respect for others means "Defer to other people and do not confront their reasoning or actions" (1990, pp. 106-107).

Typical beliefs that the interventionist does not openly share with the managers, are

- Are they really prepared to learn?
- Are they prepared to reflect on their own role?
- We are acting as if there is a good atmosphere, but I know that individuals are not saying what they think.
- Each time employees show 'difficult' behaviour, the director says that this is typically part of the system. This reaction is also typically part of the system.
- I am not sure if we can manage the effects of making the undiscussable discussable.

The underlying reasoning and beliefs are that the interventionist does not want to give the director feedback when the other managers are there, as this would harm his reputation. Besides, the director is his client and should not be pushed into a difficult position. This way, he saves the director's face. Moreover, the interventionist does not really believe that the director wants to reflect on his own role. This belief highly resembles the director's belief about the employees' limited ability to reflect. In the end, all parties, including the interventionist, doubt the ability of others to reflect and learn, and therefore keep their beliefs private and block learning. Compare Isaacs (1999): "These beliefs then reinforce what we select out to see. We can easily become locked into a way of thinking that is hard to change" (p 97).

Another belief that stimulates self-censoring is that the interventionist has to re-establish the relationship and his position after a session that led to managers' defensiveness. His reasoning: 'as managers were not satisfied with the process in one meeting, they might have lost confidence in me. Thus, I have to re-establish the relationship and my position. This does not allow me to confront painful issues.' Mutual learning would have meant sharing this reasoning, checking how valid it is and checking if managers have a different view.

#### *Interventions that contribute to de-blocking of changing, organizing and learning*

While attending sessions in the organization, the interventionist tries to support changing and learning. The basics of his interventions are directly observable data in the sessions. This case illustrates several elements of an intervention perspective that seems to support changing, organizing and learning.

#### **Openly share what one fears to share regarding the effect of the leader's actions**

In one conversation with the director the interventionist shares his hesitations about being open about his observations and beliefs, as he does not see that the director tends to learn. This conversation contributes to an open relationship between director and interventionist and lays a foundation for later meetings.

#### **Invite to share valid data**

Instead of talking about abstract interpretations (*'Regardless of what we do, employees are anti-management'*), ask for valid and directly observable data: *'How do you know that you are right?' 'Have you got an example?' 'What exactly happened?'*

#### **Stimulate inquiry into beliefs and actions**

Share that 'more of the same' is probably not effective. By asking questions about the effects of one's beliefs and actions, the interventionist stimulates reflection on one's own contribution to blocked changing.

- Confront unchecked beliefs: *'By holding these assumptions without inquiring into them, they tend to turn into self-fulfilling prophecies as they filter what you perceive'.*
- Inquire into the effect of one's beliefs on one's actions: *'What is the effect of this belief on your actions?'*
- Inquire into the effect of his actions: *'How does he respond to your behaviour?'*
- Explore the extent to which one is satisfied with these effects: *'Are you satisfied with the effects of your actions? Do you succeed in changing the situation this way? If not, how can you continue saying that you are doing the right things?'*

- Share how one contributes to one's own problems: *'I am afraid you produce your own problems: you have beliefs about him, you assume it does not help to share these beliefs, you take his responsibility away, you think this will make him less secure and you are busier and busier.'*

#### **Share circularity and help managers/employees to reflect upon their contribution to the problem**

Confront circular patterns and one's contribution to the problems that one faces:

*'Could there possibly be a circular pattern: the more active the managers, the more reactive and dependent the employees and vice versa?'* The underlying assumption is that by stimulating awareness of how one contributes to the recurrent patterns, it will be difficult to repeat these actions on purpose.

#### **Confront inconsistency neutrally**

Confront inconsistency neutrally (*'what you say and what you do are inconsistent'*), present possible consistent choices equally and invite to make conscious and free choices so that people can feel responsible: *'I do not expect you to do anything. But whatever your choice is, try to be consistent. Either keep doing the same things as you do and accept some tension and discomfort (and do not complain about it), or contribute to changing by reflection on your own role. To me it is a free choice.'*

This way, managers are helped to be consistent and reduce defensiveness.

#### **Share alternatives and make them actionable**

In many situations the interventionist shares alternative strategies and illustrates literally what one could say to stimulate mutual learning. Some examples:

- *'Getting rid of an attitude is probably not possible without inquiring into your own role. Be clear about your hesitations and dilemmas in the process and be prepared to inquire into the patterns that stimulate the attitude you want to get rid of: 'I see this behaviour and to be honest, I would like to get rid of it. Still, I understand I cannot just say 'stop it'. What do I do that stimulates your attitude?'*
- *'What if you shared your dilemma openly with him? Such as: 'I am hesitating. I would like to give you the opportunity to take this responsibility. However, I feel insecure because I get no signs that you're working on it. How shall we organize this situation?'*
- *'Now you face a dilemma: they ask for something you don't wish to give anymore. Try to be open about that: 'I feel that I cannot satisfy you. Regardless of the amount of procedures and attention I give, you ask for even more. As if we are stuck in a circular pattern. If this does not satisfy you, then what is it really you need?'*

Compare Argyris (1990), who states, "the advice should contain the action strategies (e.g. advocate your position in a way that encourages inquiry). Second, it should be accompanied by actual statements that illustrate what you would have to say and do" (p. 87).

#### **Teach the concepts**

In this case the interventionist conducted workshops on blocked changing and learning, circular patterns, defensiveness, and unilateral control versus mutual learning. In these workshops people become acquainted with the concepts and how the current reality is maintained. There were concrete examples of experimenting with these new insights. An example of an employee, one day after he has joined the

workshop: *'I want to try something that I have learned from A (interventionist). My belief was that if we ask for more information and bring in our frustration time after time, that we will reach our goal, but I doubt if this assumption is valid.'*

**Reduce (time) pressure**

As pressure tends to activate a unilateral control model, it appears to be effective to reduce pressure by slowing down. The more pressure there is, the more automatic behaviour and less freedom to choose behaviour. This case illustrates that taking time helps all participants, including the interventionist, to inquire into the patterns and the way one contributes to them.

## **10. Cross-case analysis: moving moments compared**

### **10.1 Introduction**

In this chapter the outcomes of the cases are mutually compared. Just like the within-case analysis at the end of each case, the structure in this chapter follows the research questions. In each section the outcomes of the cases are summarized and similarities and differences are addressed. Subsequently, differences are interpreted and, if possible, explained. In principle, discussion of the results is limited to similarities and differences. In chapter 11, Conclusions and discussion, the outcomes will be discussed more elaboratively. This chapter starts with a summary of the point of departure and the results of the cases.

### **10.2 Point of departure and results**

Before the three cases are submitted to a cross-case analysis, in this section the character of the three cases, as well as the results, are mutually compared.

A first subject is the point of departure of the cases. As argued by Eden & Huxham (1996), action research demands an integral involvement by the researcher and intent to change the organization. All cases are combined consultancy and research projects. The problem in the organization that leads to the invitation of an interventionist (consultant) plays a pivotal role. The point of departure of the cases is summarized below.

- Case 1:       Communication problems between management and employees, leading to employees' fear and a negative working climate.
- Case 2:       Desire to develop from 'a product seller to a service supplier', which requires the development of an entrepreneurial and customer-oriented culture and working methods.
- Case 3:       Communication and interaction problems between management and employees, leading to blocked changing.

Unlike case 2, cases 1 and 3 focus on problems that relate to communication and interaction leading to blocked changing. In the past, interventions had been conducted that did not lead to improvement of the situation. These situations are dynamically complex from scratch: "When obvious interventions produce nonobvious consequences, there is dynamic complexity" (Senge, 1990, p. 71). The character of these cases is directly related to the subject of this study. Although the consultant is involved during a specific period, the cases do not have the character of episodic change as the problem relates to the daily interactions that do or do not support changing and organizing.

The starting point of the second case is different. The change process does not stem from a negative current reality, but is rather a consequence of the strategic shift of this company that should contribute to a new position in the market. This process can

be characterized as strategy implementation. This assignment focuses on a combination of 'hard' improvement of customer processes and 'soft' development of an entrepreneurial, customer-oriented and proactive culture. While the improvement of working processes can be characterized as an episodic change project, the development of a different culture relates strongly to the daily interactions between managers and employees. In the light of this study, the focus will be on these interactions.

As to the results of the cases, all show some improvement regarding the diagnosed problem. In case 1 (some) managers illustrate that they can put some insights into practice, e.g. by confronting circularity and defensiveness and developing approaches that break through circularity. Furthermore, the employee satisfaction survey demonstrates higher scores on the quality of communication after the period that is described. Case 2 has two faces. The customer satisfaction survey shows higher scores on the quality of the processes and service. The main focus of the managers and interventionist has been on this subject. However, regarding the long-term aim to create more pro-activity and entrepreneurship, results are less convincing. During the course of the case, some managers show the ability to deal with non-routine and dynamically complex situations in action. Cynically, they are all persons who have had difficulties during the process and, as a consequence, got intensive personal support on how to deal with difficult situations. What the case teaches, is the difficulty to work on a single-loop and linear improvement process and at the same time organize enough reflection for double-loop and circular problems. Although the process in case 3 is laborious, in the end managers and employees start a learning process and after half a year they report improvement regarding open communication, learning and changing.

### **10.3 Cross-case analysis research question 1:**

#### ***To what extent are the expressions of unilateral control visible in interactions?***

The aim of this research question is to develop and validate a diagnostic model that helps to perceive and understand expressions of a control model in practice.

The transcripts of all cases have been encoded, based on the diagnostic model that is introduced in section 2.9 (figure 2.20). Appendix 4 'Cross-case analysis' summarizes how often each expression of unilateral control is noticed in the cases. As can be derived from this overview, all cases deliver illustrations of three expressions of unilateral control: Perception (reductionism, distancing, blaming, linear perception and S-O relations), Behaviour (controlling circumstances, repeated behaviour, stronger control in case of threat and reactive behaviour) and Interventions (focus on symptoms, cover-up of underlying patterns, quick wins and focus on impersonal instruments).

Without exception, the cases deliver only few observations regarding Design of organization (positional organization, variety reduction, S-O relations and organization/change as separated entities) and Change of organization (goal-oriented and planned process, step-by-step, episodic and top-down, rational).



Illustrations of Change of organization are especially visible at the start of the three cases, when leaders, managers and interventionists discuss the change approach. Here it becomes visible how people tend to think and talk about change. Later, during the process, the change approach is no longer the subject of discussion. As a consequence, there are few relevant observations during the process. Afterwards, in reflection, it is questionable if this is effective. An 'open consultancy approach' would suppose continuous reflection upon one's role, behaviour and (change) approach (Ardon, 2002, p. 175).

Case 2 and 3 deliver observations regarding Design of organization. These observations relate to the discussion about organization structure at the start (O positional), the wish to implement a uniform culture (O subject-object) and the focus on instruments and formats that aim at standardisation (O variety reduction). Generally, these cases do not focus on design issues. As a consequence, they do not strongly illustrate expressions of unilateral control in this area.

Design and Change of organization (as defined here) seem to be of a different order than the other expressions, as the former are vulnerable to espoused theory. In talking and on paper one can easily describe a certain way of design and change of organization, however, in action one actually blocks or de-blocks changing and organizing through the way one perceives, behaves and intervenes. This finding will be involved in the diagnostic model.

The analytical process of encoding the transcripts led to a number of insights regarding the diagnostic model (figure 2.20). Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between two expressions because they can both be used to encode the situation. This is especially the case with the combination of 'repeated behaviour regardless of ineffectiveness' and 'stronger control in case of threat'. One could argue that these expressions should be combined into one. Still, the specific meaning of both expressions is not identical. The analysis does not lead to decisive reasons to change the expressions in the diagnostic model.

#### **10.4 Cross-case analysis research question 2:**

***How does unilateral control relate to (de)blocking of changing, organizing and learning?***

This research question aims at gaining insight into the relation between unilateral control and (blocked) changing and organizing. The findings are summarized under some specified questions.

*How do expressions of unilateral control contribute to recurrent problems?*

A comparison of the outcomes of the three cases regarding this question leads to an overview as depicted in table 10.1.

<b><i>How do expressions of unilateral control contribute to recurrent problems?</i></b>	<b><i>Case 1</i></b>	<b><i>Case 2</i></b>	<b><i>Case 3</i></b>
Unilateral control activates activities in the upper circle: quick symptomatic solutions, pressure, linear thinking.	X	X	X
Unilateral control activates defensive strategies that block the lower circle: no inquiry into the underlying problems and maintenance of the current situation.	X	X	X
Symptomatic solutions (upper circle) and lack of learning (lower cycle) lead to repetitive patterns and recurrent problems.	X	X	X
Director and managers hold a Subject-Object definition of relations, leading to circular patterns.	X	X	X
Director and managers, as well as employees, hold strong beliefs about the situation and others though do not check them.	X	X	X
If director/manager tries to change his approach unilaterally, employees push him back into his routine behaviour and – thus – defend the system.	X		X
Thinking in parties and power: 'who is going to win?'			X

*Table 10.1 Contribution of unilateral control to recurrent problems*

Taking Senge's (1990) 'shifting the burden' system as a framework, the cases lead to a number of mutually related outcomes: a unilateral model activates the upper circle, which can be characterized as actions with a short-term, linear and single-loop character. In dynamically complex situations these actions do not lead to lasting improvements, as they do not cover the underlying problem that produces the symptoms. This distinction is clearly illustrated in case 2: activities in the upper circle induce short-term and linear solutions, e.g. quicker responses to customers and better telephone management. Unlike these relatively simple situations, the long-term aims like improvement of entrepreneurship and pro-activity are not realized by activities in the upper circle. All cases show that the activities in the upper circle are strongly governed by a Subject-Object definition of relations: director and managers consider themselves as the ones who inquire, develop knowledge and design and implement necessary changes based on this knowledge (Hosking, 2004). Especially in case 3 it becomes clear that this definition of relations is not only held by managers, but also by employees who consider themselves as dependent on managers' actions. All cases show that, in the process of changing, managers as well as employees tend to hold strong beliefs about others that influence their behaviour.

Besides, all cases illustrate that unilateral control leads to activation of defensive strategies that block the lower circle in Senge's 'shifting the burden' (solving the underlying or fundamental problem). As these cases show, as long as one repeats the same activities, contributes to circular patterns and does not reflect upon one's own contribution to the problems, one produces repetitive patterns and recurrent problems.

Cases 1 and 3 provide illustrations of the 'system that protects itself': when managers try to break through circular patterns, initially they tend to be pushed back by the

environment they have created by their unilateral control. For example, when a manager changes his behaviour (e.g., instead of unilateral instruction, stimulation of employees to bring in their own ideas), employees push him back into the behaviour they are used to though do not like ('but what is your opinion?'). As a consequence, it is difficult to induce immediate effects and a delay has to be taken into account. Case 2 does not deliver clear examples of this inclination to push the manager back. This could well be explained by the different character of this case. It is not problematic interaction or communication that is the direct cause of this change process. Although the interactions during the process appear to have a high resemblance to case 1 and 3, the patterns are probably less ingrained and self-protective. These findings are related to Senge's 'shifting the burden' systemic pattern in figure 10.1.

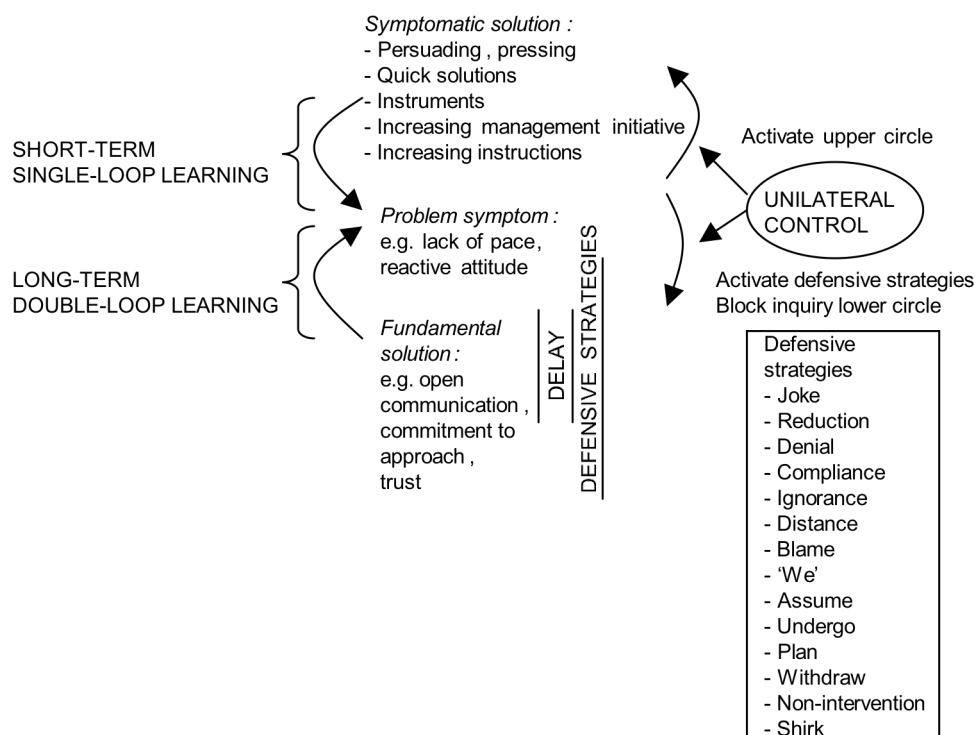


Figure 10.1 Unilateral control stimulates symptomatic solutions and blocks fundamental solutions

Case 3 is distinguished from the other cases by an additional element that blocks change: the thinking in terms of 'parties' and power. Management as well as employees bring in the power issue on a regular basis. In this organization the problems have already a relatively long history and people tend to think in parties (management, staff, employees) who try to maintain or even strengthen their position. This is an important reason why the situation is this strongly fixed.

#### What circular patterns are visible?

All cases illustrate circular patterns that lead to recurrent problems. The circular patterns that are manifest in the cases are summarized in table 10.2.

What circular patterns are visible?	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Manager active; employees reactive	X	X	X
Manager initiates change process, employees (act as if they) follow	X	X	X
Manager feels uncomfortable and takes distance; employees feel uncomfortable and take distance	X	X	X
Manager talks; employees (act as if they) listen	X	X	
Manager instructs, employees wait for next instruction	X	X	
Manager expects resistance and braces himself, employees respond negatively and oppose		X	X
Manager tries to motivate and inspire employees; employees feel lack of motivation and inspiration		X	X
Manager solves problems; employees bring problems in	X		X
Manager acts as if he knows answers; employees act as if they don't	X		
Manager pushes to speed up progress; employees are passive and wait for their turn		X	
Manager implements control instruments; employees resist management initiatives			X

*Table 10.2 Circular patterns*

All circular patterns are different manifestations of the same Subject-Object perspective. Three circular patterns have been observed in all cases. The different characters of the cases partly explain the differences regarding the other manifestations. In case 3, just as in cases 1 and 2, employees tend to respond to management's initiative reactively and dependently. However, unlike cases 1 and 2, they do not listen passively or wait for a next instruction. Instead, they respond negatively and resist management initiatives. In this light, the difference between the last two circular patterns is interesting. In both instances the manager keeps enlarging his control, though as a response to (and cause of) opposite employees' reactions. The manager's reasoning in these cases must be different. In case 2 the manager probably thinks: 'they take no initiative, so I have to act firmly to make things happen'. The manager in case 3 might well think: 'they tend to resist my initiatives, so I have to act firmly to keep things under control'. Unlike the reasoning, the manifestations of these managers' strategies are identical.

All these circular patterns have a repetitive character and lead to self-fulfilling prophecies as long as one does not reflect on one's own contribution to the recurrent problems. With defensive strategies people succeed in keeping these patterns undiscussable. That way, learning is blocked and the current reality is preserved.

#### *What defensive strategies are visible?*

All cases illustrate defensiveness, in this study indicated as so-called 'defensive strategies'. Defensive strategies are considered to be specific behaviours and actions that block the lower circle of Senge's 'shifting the burden' system and thus block fundamental solutions. Defensive strategies aim at making sensitive issues undiscussable. Or, in Argyris' terms, defensive strategies cover sensitive issues up

and undermine learning and changing. This way, defensive strategies support preservation of the current reality without making debatable the way they do this. Table 10.3 summarizes the defensive strategies that have been observed in the cases.

What defensive strategies are visible?	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Compliance	X	X	X
Ignorance	X	X	X
Distance	X	X	X
Blame	X	X	X
Shirk	X	X	X
Withdraw	X	X	X
Assume	X	X	X
Undergo	X	X	X
'We'	X		X
Joke	X		
Reduction	X		
Denial	X		
Non-intervention	X		
Plan			X

*Table 10.3 Defensive strategies*

This overview illustrates that eight defensive strategies are visible in all cases. Some strategies have been observed in only one or two cases. These will be discussed now. The 'we' strategy is typically visible in situations amongst peers, e.g. in a management team. Unlike cases 1 and 3, the management team discussions in case 2 tend to focus on the 'linear part' of this change process (working processes improvement), which is less threatening than discussions about 'our interactions and communication'. Therefore, there is less reason to act 'as if we are going to change, however in reality we won't'.

Just like the 'we' strategy, the joke, reduction, denial and non-intervention strategies are typical for a relation between peers, for example in a management team. Case 1 has a relatively strong focus on the management team and the way managers maintain the current reality. It is these circumstances where these defensive strategies seem to flourish.

As to the plan strategy, it is difficult to find a tenable explanation why this strategy is only visible in the last case. It probably could have been observed in the other cases as well, though it was not.

In this analysis it should be noticed that the undergo strategy resembles the compliance strategy greatly, though it is more passive. While the latter is visible in situations in a management team (a direct report says he complies but does not really), the undergo strategy typically relates to less direct relationships (a group of employees towards management just hear the message and undergo management interventions passively and without a sense of responsibility). Or, more concretely, with a compliance strategy one says 'yes' (as one is not permitted to say nothing) and thinks 'no', and with an undergo strategy one says nothing and thinks 'no'. In both instances unilateral control leads to invalid information.

A further analysis leads to the insight that the defensive strategies do not seem to be applicable to all situations. Some strategies are typically displayed by subordinates towards superiors, others by superiors towards subordinates, peers towards peers, or actors towards interventionist (outsider). Table 10.4 depicts an overview of the observed defensive strategies and the social relations in which they are activated in the case studies.

<b>What defensive strategies are visible?</b>	Subordinates towards superiors	Superiors towards subordinates	Peers towards peers	Actors towards interventionist (outsider)
Compliance	X			
Undergo	X			
Plan	X		X	
Blame	X		X	
Assume	X	X	X	
Withdraw	X	X	X	
Ignorance		X	X	X
Reduction		X	X	X
Denial		X	X	X
Distance			X	X
'We'			X	
Non-intervention			X	
Joke			X	X
Shirk				X

*Table 10.4 Defensive strategies related to specific relationships*

In section 11.3 these outcomes are discussed more elaboratively. All these defensive strategies help to block learning, changing and organizing as they block public inquiry and reflection.

#### *How do leaders contribute to de-blocking changing and learning?*

Analysis of the cases leads to the outcome that it is far from easy to help leaders to change their ingrained routines that are governed by a unilateral control model. This is not surprising; the next section shows that it is difficult for the interventionist as well. Although not easy, the directors in all cases have succeeded to make behavioural shifts after repetitive feedback of circular patterns and their own contribution to the problems, as well as many illustrations of an alternative approach. The role of the interventionist is discussed in the next section.

The transcripts of all cases have been encoded, based on the operational translations in table 5.1. Appendix 4 'Cross-case analysis' summarizes how often each expression of (mutual) learning is noticed in the cases. The empirical study shows that some alternatives, particularly regarding 'Interventions', are strongly interrelated and difficult to separate. In the Interventions category, the blocking actions all relate to the upper cycle in Senge's 'shifting the burden' structure. The de-blocking alternatives are different ways to refer to inquiry into underlying patterns that produce the problem symptoms and defensive routines. Table 10. 5 summarizes the

most transparent and convincing expressions of de-blocking perceptions, behaviours and interventions that have been observed in the cases.

How do leaders contribute to de-blocking changing, organizing and learning?	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Perceiving circular patterns, including one's own contribution	X	X	X
Reflection and experimentation	X	X	X
Making circularity visible	X	X	X
Self-disclosure and public reflection upon the way one contributes to lack of learning	X	X	X
Being proactive	X	X	X
Making sensitive issues debatable	X		X
Sharing valid information that one fears to share	X	X	
Confronting defensive strategies	X		
Inquiring into underlying patterns		X	

*Table 10.5 How leaders de-block changing, organizing and learning*

All cases illustrate how leaders adopt the concept of circularity. The concept appears to be relatively accessible, as it shows how the leader contributes to the problem he faces in a way that is not very threatening: his behaviour is both cause and effect. This way, the concept reduces blaming of individuals and/or groups. Feedback of circular patterns by the interventionist, in all cases, leads to leaders' reflection and experimentation: what could they do to break through the vicious circle? Initially, leaders tend to think up new strategies privately, with the interventionist or with peers. However, this would block mutual learning, as they are not open about the new strategy towards the other actors. Cases 1 and 3 in particular provide some illustrations on what happens if a person changes behaviour unilaterally without being open about the underlying reasoning. In these situations the employees try to push the managers back into their usual behaviour. Or, in other words, the system protects itself. In the second instance and after feedback from the interventionist, the leaders in all cases discuss circular patterns with the relevant parties openly. As they are part of the circular pattern themselves, it appears to be only a small step to self-disclosure and public reflection upon the way they contribute to blocked changing, organizing and learning. This way one is proactive, as one does not expect the other to start changing.

Unlike these relatively 'safe' strategies, the cases do not all illustrate some other ways to de-block changing, organizing and learning. In case 1 leader and managers show the most convincing change, as illustrated by the way they start confronting defensive strategies and sensitive issues. Typical illustrations are  
*'Let's not focus on other parties. Let's start with our own role' (distance strategy).*  
*'Gentlemen, we are changing the subject by making jokes' (joke strategy).*  
*'Communication and safety is a sensitive subject, as we have just announced that X will have to leave.'*

In this case the interventionist has been most explicit of all the cases in his feedback of defensive strategies. This probably explains why they have learned to confront

these strategies themselves. Furthermore, in some instances people try to share valid data that they had feared to share before. Two examples:

*'Well, I see that changing the atmosphere in this organization really requires us to change. The question is, do we really want to change and are we able to change? We should take more time for our people. Do we want that?'*

*And: 'I thought it was all logical and clear. Now I see your opinions differ from mine. Apparently, it was my logic and clearness.'*

In case 2 it is especially the change of one manager and his team who succeed in taking a large step forward, after a difficult session that illustrated painfully that he did not come any further with unilateral control. The manager convincingly illustrates how to share valid information: *'I don't want yes-men. Let's be honest, it would be easy if you just followed. However, I appreciate you being honest about your thoughts and feelings. Still, it is not always easy to deal with. I expect you to take responsibility as well. Can you imagine?'*

The leader in case 3 has a great deal of difficulty in changing and being pro-active. Finally, he succeeds in discussing circular patterns and his own contribution and dares to address the sensitive subject in this organization: *'I know that there is too large a distance between employees and management. [...] We do not communicate enough and effectively. I personally don't.'*

All cases illustrate positive effects:

- Subordinates (managers, team leaders or employees) open themselves up and make their contribution to blocked changing discussable (case 1, 2, 3).
- Subordinates confront circularity and/or defensiveness in the team (case 1, 2, 3).
- Employees talk positively about director/managers who are more open to them (case 1, 2, 3).
- Managers copy the behaviour towards their own employees (case 1, 3).

### **10.5 Cross-case analysis research question 3:**

#### ***How do interventions contribute to (de-)blocking changing, organizing and learning?***

The aim of this research question is to develop an intervention perspective that contributes to de-blocking changing, organizing and learning.

The outcomes of each case illustrate that the interventionist contributes to blocking as well as de-blocking of changing, organizing and learning. The cases illustrate how the interventionist, just like managers, activates the upper circle of Senge's 'shifting the burden' system, activates circular patterns and defensiveness. Beside these blocking contributions, the cases illustrate how interventions support changing, organizing and learning. The findings are elaborated below.

#### ***Circumstances that stimulate the interventionist to activate a unilateral control model***

The interventionists tend to activate a unilateral control theory-in-use in situations they perceive as threatening or embarrassing. The cases describe a number of



specific circumstances, as summarized below. The circumstances are accompanied with the reasoning that leads to activation of a unilateral control model and the case that illustrate them.

- The interventionist's role, approach, findings and/or added value are at stake (*cases 1, 2 and 3*).  
*Reasoning:* there are signals that might relate to reducing confidence in my role, approach, findings and/or added value, so I have to (re-)establish my position.
- It is a major opportunity that has to succeed (*case 2*).  
*Reasoning:* this is a new client and the business unit of a large company. This project has to be successful in the eyes of the client, as it might lead to new opportunities.
- The relationship with the client is difficult (*case 2*).  
*Reasoning:* it is difficult to get contact with the client. This does not feel comfortable and I should try to get in touch with him in order to work together.
- The client is critical (*case 2*).  
*Reasoning:* the client seems to perceive us as 'suppliers'. He takes distance, seems not to accept a personal relationship and tends to be rather critical. I have to please the client and deliver quality, which means I have to organize things very well, should contribute to quick visible results and should keep things under control.
- The relationship must be (re-)established (*case 3*).  
*Reasoning:* the relationship with some managers seems not to be optimal, so I have to work on the relationship. This means I have to support these persons and I cannot confront painful issues (anymore).

#### *Expressions of unilateral control by the interventionist*

The cases provide illustrations of the interventionist who activates a unilateral control model. The perceptions, behaviours and interventions that are governed by this unilateral control model typically fit the upper circle of Senge's 'shifting the burden' system. The cases that explicitly illustrate a specific expression are put in brackets.

- Proving one has everything under control (*cases 1, 2 and 3*).
- Proving one's added value through (immediate) answers, analysis and solutions (*cases 1, 2 and 3*).
- Persuading others how they could act more effectively (*cases 1, 2 and 3*).
- Taking distance and not involving one's own role (*cases 1, 2 and 3*).
- Confirming the manager who expects resistance and helping him to think up strategies to break through this resistance (*case 2*).

These expressions have in common that they are based upon beliefs and reasoning that are not being publicly tested, which blocks learning and lead to circular patterns.

#### *Circular patterns between interventionist and client*

The cases illustrate some examples of circular patterns between the interventionist and the client system, which are summarized below.

- Interventionist is active (takes initiative), participants are passive/dependent (*cases 1, 2 and 3*).
- Interventionist feeds back, participants wait, see and keep their feedback private ('that is an interesting analysis!') (*cases 1, 2 and 3*).

- Interventionist participates, manager directs difficult issues to interventionist (*case 1*).
- Interventionist talks with employees about their role, manager feels less responsible (*case 1*).
- Interventionist acts as a 'partner-in-business' with manager and helps to break through supposed resistance, employees perceive interventionist as a partner of management and respond negatively to both (*case 2*).
- Interventionist persuades managers to accept outcomes, managers resist them (*case 3*).
- The most fundamental one: Interventionist is present, participants feel less responsible (take distance) (*case 1*).

The first and second pattern can be observed in all cases and seem to be most dominant. These patterns disclose a strong bias by the interventionist towards giving feedback. In the course of the cases, the interventionist moves in the direction of feedback in combination with inquiry. In the first case, most feedback takes place at the end of meetings. This leaves relatively little time for public testing and inquiry. As a consequence, the emphasis is on feedback of the interventionist's subjective reflections. In the relationship the interventionist is the active Subject who is able to understand what happens, and the actors in the client system are dependent Objects. Similar to managers and employees, this illustrates that the interventionist and actors in a client system can easily hold a Subject-Object perspective. In case 2 the interventionist often shares his feedback during the meeting, which leaves room for reactions. Still, in reflection, the interventionist seldom asks if he is missing something. Thus, he does not advocate his beliefs in a way that invites public testing (Argyris, 1992; Noonan, 2007, Schwarz, 2002). In the third case there is much more interactive reflection between interventionist, managers and employees during the sessions. This is partly because the interventionist is learning and partly because participants are more explicit in their defensiveness.

The similarity in the relation between management and employees on the one hand and interventionist and management on the other hand is striking. Just as employees tend to respond dependently to active management, management respond dependently to an active interventionist in case 1. And while employees tend to respond resistantly to active management in case 3, management respond similarly to an active interventionist. Based on these observations, the circular patterns between management and employees in an organization seem to be identical to circular patterns between the interventionist and management and/or employees.

Some circular patterns have not been illustrated in all cases. Case 1 illustrates some patterns that relate to the very presence of the interventionist that makes the others feel less responsible. The more active the interventionist is, the more dependent and passive the other participants are. This dependency is probably less visible in the other cases because the interventionist has been more explicit in his role towards participants: not to take over the responsibility, but to support learning. This makes participants less expectant and stimulates them to take their own responsibility. In case 2, the interventionist initially tends to take a role as a 'partner-in-business' and to help management to 'implement their strategic ambitions'. In this role, it is not

surprising that this case demonstrates the circular consequences of being associated with (the unilateral control of) management.

Case 3 illustrates how interventionist and managers become stuck in a circular way, as the interventionist thinks he has to persuade management to reflect upon their own role. As he presents employees' views as conclusions (that managers have already heard several times), he stimulates the defensiveness that he wishes to reduce.

These circular patterns recur as long as interventionist and actors in the client system do not reflect on these patterns including their own contribution to them, do not openly share their beliefs and reasoning and make sensitive but crucial issues undiscussable.

#### *Interventionist's defensive strategies*

Just like managers and employees, the interventionist in these cases blocks inquiry and learning by defensive strategies from time to time. Although there are no illustrations of active attempts to make issues undiscussable, such as the joke or reduction strategy, the interventionist does not openly share his beliefs and reasoning several times. In these cases the interventionist demonstrates three defensive strategies.

- Ignorance strategy: although the interventionist perceives an inconsistency he does not openly address this observation, as he is not sure if he and/or others can manage the consequence (*cases 1, 2 and 3*).
- Distance strategy: while the interventionist does not effectively contribute to changing himself, he distances himself from the situation and focuses on the role of other parties, e.g. employees, middle management, or 'the organization' (*cases 1, 2 and 3*).
- Self-censoring strategy: the interventionist keeps his beliefs and thoughts that could contribute to his own or other's learning private, in order to save faces (*cases 1 and 3*).

All strategies aim at keeping things calm and not creating painful situations for the interventionist or others. By doing so, the interventionist blocks his and others' learning and contributes to the preservation of the current situation.

#### *Interventions that contribute to de-blocking of changing, organizing and learning*

The emphasis of the interventions is not on methods or instruments, but on interactions with director, managers and employees, or the process of intervening (see section 4.4). The aim of the interventions is to support reflection on how one contributes to recurrent problems and how one could facilitate changing, organizing and learning. Table 10.6 summarizes the interventions that are demonstrated in the cases.

Interventions that contribute to de-blocking of changing	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Share circularity and help managers/ employees to reflect upon their contribution to the problem	X	X	X
Confront inconsistency neutrally	X	X	X
Invite to share valid information	X	X	X
Reduce (time) pressure	X	X	X
Openly share what one fears to share regarding the effect of the leader's actions	X	X	X
Make defensive strategies debatable (make the undiscussable discussable)	X	X	
Stimulate inquiry into beliefs and actions		X	X
Share alternatives and make them actionable			X
Teach the concepts			X
Share valid information about how one contributes to the problems		X	

*Table 10.6 Interventions that de-block changing, organizing and learning*

The overview shows that six interventions were demonstrated in all cases. The interventions regarding the feedback of circularity and inconsistency, as well as the invitation to share valid information and the reduction of pressure, are relatively easy. These interventions are not very threatening for either the interventionist or the actors in the client system. Interventions regarding self-disclosure are more difficult, because the personal effect of the other party on the interventionist is at stake. In all cases, this intervention appears to have a strong effect on the leader's behavioural shift. Especially in case 1, and fewer times in case 2, defensive strategies have been addressed.

Interestingly, in all cases the director shares circularity, shows self-disclosure and confronts defensiveness towards subordinates only after the interventionist did so. And direct reports of the director did so only after the director did. These observations seem to justify the conclusion that the client system learns by copying the interventionist's interventions.

During the course of the cases, the interventionist develops his knowledge about how to support learning, changing and organizing. This is illustrated by his growing ability to share alternatives and make them actionable and to teach the concepts. It is only case 3 that demonstrates these interventions.

Finally, the sharing of valid information about how the interventionist contributes to the current reality is the most difficult one. The blocking assumption is that the interventionist should add value and – thus- should not contribute to recurrent problems. In case 2 and (less) in case 3 the interventionist has openly reflected on his own role. For example: *'To be honest, in the first session I tended to perceive you as a 'difficult team'. I really appreciate if one is open, however one can easily label real openness as 'resistance'. I did.'*

## PART III CONCLUSIONS



## 11. Conclusions and discussion

### 11.1 Introduction

In this chapter the outcomes of this study are described. Subsequent to an overview of the theoretical exploration, the conclusions regarding the research questions are summarized. The next section describes additional results of this study that cannot directly be linked to the research questions. Subsequently, the problem statement and research objectives are addressed. The subsequent section summarizes the methodological conclusions of this study. At the end of this chapter the limitations of this study are described, followed by recommendations for future research.

### 11.2 Overview of the theoretical exploration

In change projects, most attention is paid to the approach and method: what steps and interventions lead from the current to the desired situation (see Werkman, 2005). In practice, blocked change processes often have their roots in daily interactions that evolve regardless of the selected change approach (Argyris, 1990, 1994, 2000, 2004; Weick and Quin, 1999). The focus of this study is on daily interactions between leaders/managers, employees and consultants and how these interactions relate to the (de)blocking of change processes. The study aims at gaining knowledge about if and how interactions contribute to recurrent problems.

Senge (1990) introduces the concept of dynamic complexity. "When obvious interventions produce nonobvious consequences, there is dynamic complexity" (Senge, 1990, p. 71). Typical examples are laborious attempts to develop entrepreneurship and ownership, recurrent patterns of resistance, and problematic relations between management and employees.

The problem statement of this study is:

*How do leaders and their consultants contribute to (de)blocking of dynamically complex change processes?*

This study builds on the scientific tradition of organizational learning and systems thinking and particularly on Argyris' contributions about the effects of unilateral control on changing, organizing and learning. Several authors confirm a dominance of this unilateral control model, especially in case of threat or embarrassment (e.g. Senge, 1990; Boonstra, 2004; Campbell et al., 1994; McCaughan & Palmer, 1994; Putnam, 1999; Georgesen & Harris, 1998; Drukker & Verhaaren, 2004; Robinson, 2001; Noonan, 2007).

In the theoretical exploration it becomes clear that the expressions of managers' unilateral control go much further than only keeping the reins short and forcing obedience. Unilateral control by managers becomes manifest in their

1. perception of (organization) problems;

2. interactions with people in the environment;
3. interventions in change processes
4. design of organization
5. change of organization.

In all these areas managers contribute to blocked changing by subtle and sophisticated interactive patterns that mostly are recognized only with a delay (if recognized at all), as these patterns seem so obvious in the first place. The theoretical exploration leads to a diagnostic model that summarizes the expressions of unilateral control and the consequences for changing, organizing and learning (figure 2.20).

A unilateral control model stimulates us to think in terms of episodic change, which is a period of (planned) instability between the current stable organization and the desired stable organization (Weick & Quinn, 1999). The theoretical exploration leads to the insight that, regardless of the selected change approach, our daily perception, behaviours and interventions tend to be governed by a unilateral control model and can lead to blocked changing, recurrent patterns and defensiveness (Argyris, 1990, 2004).

According to Argyris (1983), three-quarters of all problems that emerge in organizations can be solved with a unilateral control model. These situations can be described as routine and single-loop issues that do not threaten individuals, groups, inter-group relations, or organizations. In other situations the expressions lead to blocked changing, recurrent patterns and defensiveness (Argyris, 1990, 2004). In order to de-block changing, organizing and learning, Argyris introduces a 'mutual learning model', which other authors have recently elaborated on (Argyris, 1990, 2004; Schwartz, 2002; Noonan, 2007). The governing values of a mutual learning theory-in-use are valid information, informed and free choice, and (personal) commitment to effective implementation. Schwartz (2002) adds a fourth governing value: compassion.

There is quite some evidence that a majority of consultants tend to hold the same unilateral control model as their clients and have a strong bias to a Management Serving or 'partner-in-business' model that stimulates them to support their clients in creating processes that reinforce circular processes and stifle learning (Argyris, 2000; Noonan, 2007; Drukker & Verhaaren, 2002; Rubinstein & Verhaaren, 2002; Strikwerda, 2004). The theoretical exploration illustrates that by far the greater part of mainstream literature on the role of consultants (or interventionists) focuses on methods and techniques. Here, there is a similarity with leaders who either contribute to or block changing with their daily interactions, regardless of the selected change method. Regardless of their selected intervention methods and techniques, interventionists contribute to (de)blocked changing, organizing and learning in (daily) interaction. After all, they are as vulnerable to a unilateral control model as their client, are a part of the system from the moment they enter the door and might show behaviour that bypasses defensive routines or even activates defensiveness. As a consequence, they might contribute to the problems that the client experiences. This can only be observed in action. Action leads to observable data from which the theories-in-use can be inferred (see Argyris, 1983, 1990, 2004).



The empirical study is a combination of longitudinal case studies (Yin, 1994; Eisenhardt, 1989; Van der Zwaan, 1990) and action research (Eden & Huxham, 1996). The study aims at developing evidence-based knowledge on the effects of unilateral control on changing, organizing and learning, and on which interventions (interactions) help to de-block changing in the longer run. This study thus tries to respond to Argyris' call for direct observable data during entire change projects and valid information (Argyris, 1973, 1990, 2004) and Rousseau's call for evidence-based management (2006).

By collecting directly observable data (daily interactions) in three longitudinal case studies, one can observe what managers, employees and their consultants say and do, whether and how these interactions are governed by unilateral control, how they contribute to (de)blocking of changing, organizing and learning, and how interventions affect interactions in the longer run. These data contribute to concrete and actionable recommendations (see Argyris, 1990). The process of ongoing interactions is 'slowed down' in order to understand patterns, recognize important moments, and their meaning for effective changing: moving moments.

### 11.3 Conclusions

In this section the conclusions regarding the research questions are summarized. These conclusions are based on the cross-case analysis that was described in chapter 10.

#### *Research question 1:*

*To what extent are the expressions of unilateral control visible in interactions?*

The aim of this research question is to develop and validate a diagnostic model that helps to recognize and understand expressions of a unilateral control model in day-to-day practice.

The theoretical exploration has led to a diagnostic model that summarizes the expressions of unilateral control and illustrates the circular relation with blocked change and threat/embarrassment (see figure 2.20). The empirical study provides numerous illustrations of the expressions Perception (reductionism, distancing, blaming, linear perception and S-O relations), Behaviour (controlling circumstances, repeated behaviour, stronger control in case of threat and reactive behaviour) and Interventions (focus on symptoms, cover-up of underlying patterns, quick wins and focus on impersonal instruments). However, there are only few illustrations of Design of organization (positional organization, variety reduction, S-O relations and organization/change as separated entities) and Change of organization (goal-oriented and planned process, step-by-step, episodic and top-down, rational) (see appendix 4 'Cross-case analysis').

Design and Change of organization are of a different order than the other expressions. Expressions regarding Perception, Behaviour and Interventions are visible in daily interactions. Expressions related to Design of organization and

Change of organization are particularly visible at the start of an (episodic) change process<sup>17</sup>. This conclusion corresponds to Argyris' distinction between espoused theory and theory-in-use. In the Board Room one might discuss alternative approaches for planned change and positional organization, inspired by a book, a course or a person (consultant). However, this is espoused theory. As this study demonstrates, if perception, behaviour and interventions are still governed by a unilateral control model, managers tend to show inconsistent behaviour as soon as they are confronted with other views, unexpected behaviour or anything else that puts them in an uncomfortable position. This way they sift out unintended effects and will be captured in circular processes that block change. In short, even if one selects alternative change methods and organization approaches one is still vulnerable to the same risks of a unilateral control model that appears to be very persistent. This puts contingency models in a different light: one could choose any change approach one desires (espoused theory); after all, the effect will depend greatly on daily interactions that are highly vulnerable to a unilateral control model (theory-in-use). This is a strong argument for involving daily interactions explicitly in reflections on processes of changing, organizing and learning.

These findings have consequences for the diagnostic model. There are still five expressions of unilateral control. Observations regarding Design of organization, Change of organization and sometimes Interventions refer to the macro level (Weick and Quinn, 1999). At this level, there is a strong inclination to consider organization as something that one can produce and change from a central position (Hosking, 2004; Homan, 2005). It is particularly these expressions that are visible at the beginning of (episodic) change processes. The diagnostic model facilitates reflection on the beliefs that decisions are based upon. At a micro level (Weick and Quinn, 1999) one can recognize expressions regarding Perception, Behaviour and sometimes Interventions that relate to daily interactions (Argyris, 1990, 2000, 2004). It is particularly these expressions that relate circularly with blocked change and threat/embarrassment, as depicted in the diagnostic model (figure 2.20). Observations regarding Interventions can relate to both micro level and macro level. Some interventions are well-discussed (and espoused) decisions at policy level, others can be characterized as daily decisions that are based upon interactions. As a consequence of these findings, the diagnostic model needs to be adjusted. The five expressions can be maintained, however the circular relation with recurrent patterns, blocked changing and threat/embarrassment does not seem to fit all expressions.

Figure 11.1 depicts a diagnostic model of the expressions of unilateral control that excludes the circular pattern. This pattern is still applicable to the expressions Perception, Behaviour and Interventions and is described as an outcome of research question 2.

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<sup>17</sup> The distinction between two types of expressions seems to relate to the different schools that describe the dominance of unilateral control (see 1.2 Theoretical positioning). The (organizational) culture school argues that a dominant unilateral control model is region and time-related; besides, this school focuses strongly on what is culturally accepted (Kamsteeg & Koot, 2002). This implies the possibility that these assumptions will change over time. Argyris (1990, 2000, 2004)) focuses particularly on the theories-in use and argues that these are neither region nor time-related. Equally, spoken preferences for methods of changing and organising can change over time. However, the way one perceives, behaves and intervenes when things become threatening seems to be much deeper ingrained and less sensitive to (cultural) change.

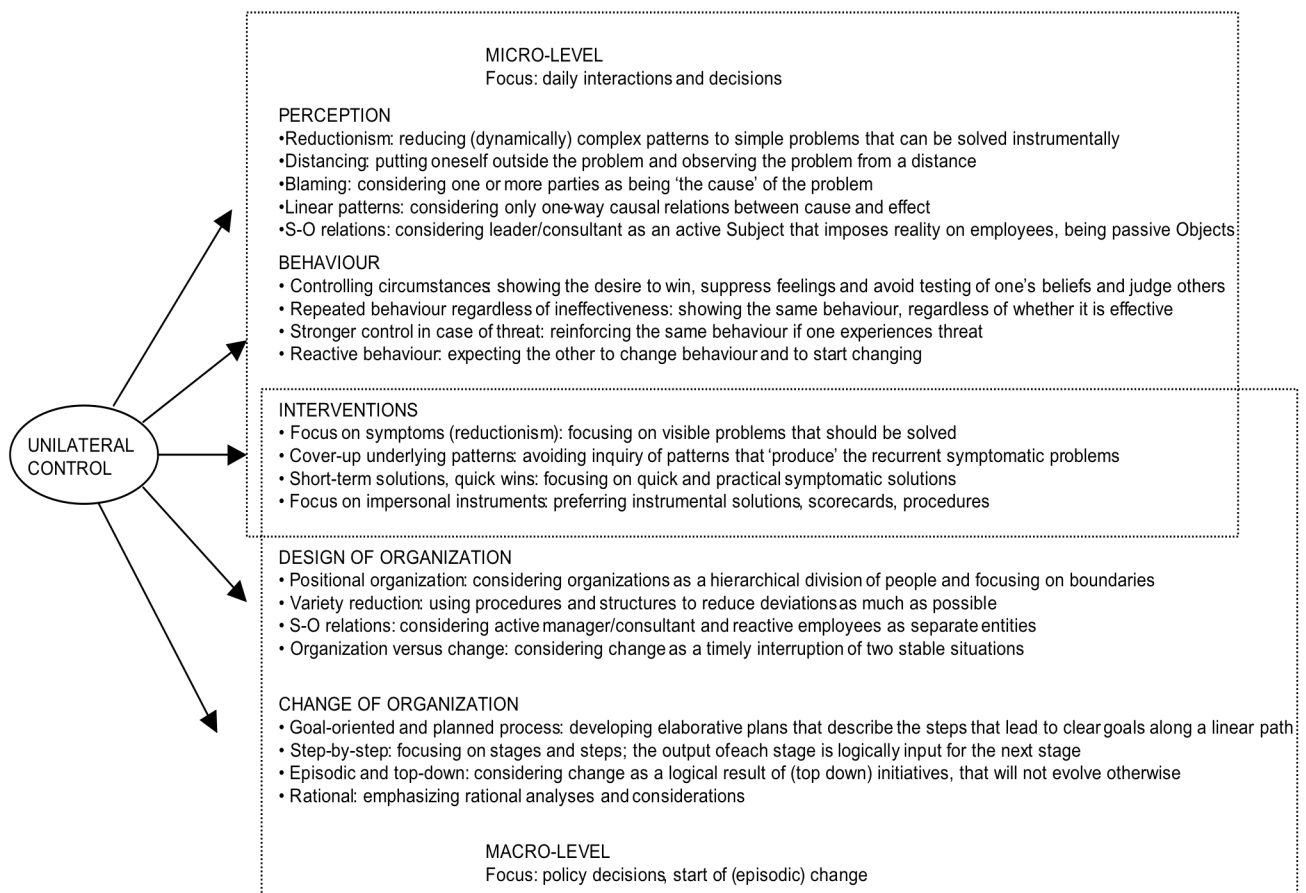


Figure 11.1 Expressions of unilateral control

### Research question 2

*How does unilateral control relate to (de-)blocking of changing, organizing and learning?*

The aim of this research question is to obtain evidence-based insight into consequences of a unilateral control model on changing, organizing and learning.

The research question is translated into four specific questions:

- How do expressions of unilateral control contribute to recurrent problems?
- What defensive routines are visible?
- What circular patterns are visible?
- How do leaders de-block changing, organizing and learning?

The conclusions regarding these questions are summarized in headers, followed by a further explanation.

*Unilateral control is especially problematic in dynamically complex situations*

As the empirical study illustrates, unilateral control is effective in a diversity of situations. All cases demonstrate meetings that are effective, until the subject turns to

a sensitive issue. In line with Senge (1990), two types of situations can be distinguished: (dynamically) simple and complex situations. In this study, these situations are described as summarized in table 11.1.

	<i>Dynamically simple situations</i>	<i>Dynamically complex situations</i>
Focus	Stability, Contents, Facts	Change, (inter)personal issues, interpretations
Type of problems	Relatively routine and linear	Non-routine and circular
Goals and interests	Shared	Conflicting
Neutral versus sensitive	Neutral	Threatening, embarrassing and/or sensitive

*Table 11.1 Characteristics of dynamically simple and complex situations*

Typical examples of dynamically simple situations in the cases are the procurement of a new photocopier, the design of a planning system, and the financial analysis of budgets (though these situations can have a high detail complexity (Senge, 1990)). Typical examples of dynamically complex situations in the cases are discussions on change, personal contribution to change, tense relationships between management and employees, personal and team effectiveness.

Unilateral control is effective for dealing with (dynamically) simple situations. This conclusion is in line with Argyris' remark that three-quarters of all problems that emerge in organizations can be solved with a unilateral control model (1983). However, in dynamically complex situations a unilateral control model leads to stagnation of changing, as will be explored in this section.

*Unilateral control stimulates symptomatic solutions and blocks fundamental solutions*

In this study, the effects of unilateral control have been related to Senge's (1990) 'shifting the burden' archetype. Senge describes this systemic archetype as follows: "An underlying problem generates symptoms that demand attention. But the underlying problem is difficult for people to address, either because it is obscure or costly to confront. So people 'shift the burden' of their problem to other solutions – well-intentioned, easy fixes which seem extremely efficient. Unfortunately, the easier 'solutions' only ameliorate the symptoms; they leave the underlying problem unaltered. The underlying problem grows worse, unnoticed because the symptoms apparently clear up, and the system loses whatever abilities it had to solve the underlying problem" (p. 104). Figure 11.2 illustrates the 'shifting the burden' structure.

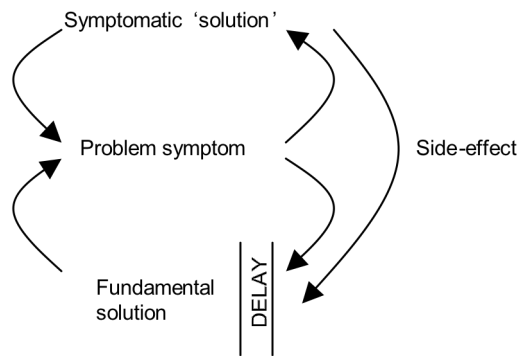


Figure 11.2 Shifting the burden (Senge, 1990, p. 380)

In this study, the 'shifting the burden' structure has proven its value to understanding the relation between unilateral control and blocked changing, organizing and learning. In line with this structure, this study leads to some outcomes.

1. *Unilateral control activates symptomatic solutions.*

Unilateral control leads to activities in the upper circle. Typical examples are quick (instrumental) solutions, linear thinking and in case of difficulties, increasing pressure and persuasion. These activities are supposed to keep things under control. In the short run, this leads to reduction of the symptoms. In this study, activities in the upper cycle have been related to single-loop learning (Argyris and Schön, 1974; Argyris, 1990, 2000).

2. *Unilateral control activates defensive strategies that block fundamental solutions.*

Unilateral control activates defensive strategies that aim at making sensitive or delicate issues undiscussable. This way, unilateral control blocks inquiry into the underlying problems and –thus- blocks learning. In the longer run, the underlying problems produce the same symptoms. In this study, activities in the lower cycle have been related to double-loop learning (Argyris and Schön, 1974; Argyris, 1990, 2000).

3. *Confrontation of the underlying fundamental problems is characterized by delayed effects.*

This study demonstrates that interventions that aim at inquiry into and change of the underlying problem are characterized by delay. Defensive strategies defend the current situation. Besides, inquiry into the underlying problem requires insight into complex (systemic) patterns and one's own contribution to the problems. As the empirical study illustrates, this takes more time than relatively pragmatic solutions in the upper cycle.

4. *Symptomatic solutions and lack of learning lead to repetitive patterns and recurrent problems.*

If leaders focus on symptomatic solutions and do not inquire into the way they contribute to underlying fundamental problems, they reinforce circular patterns and recurrent problems.

Figure 11.3 summarizes these conclusions. The circular patterns, as well as defensive strategies, are further explored in the next sections.

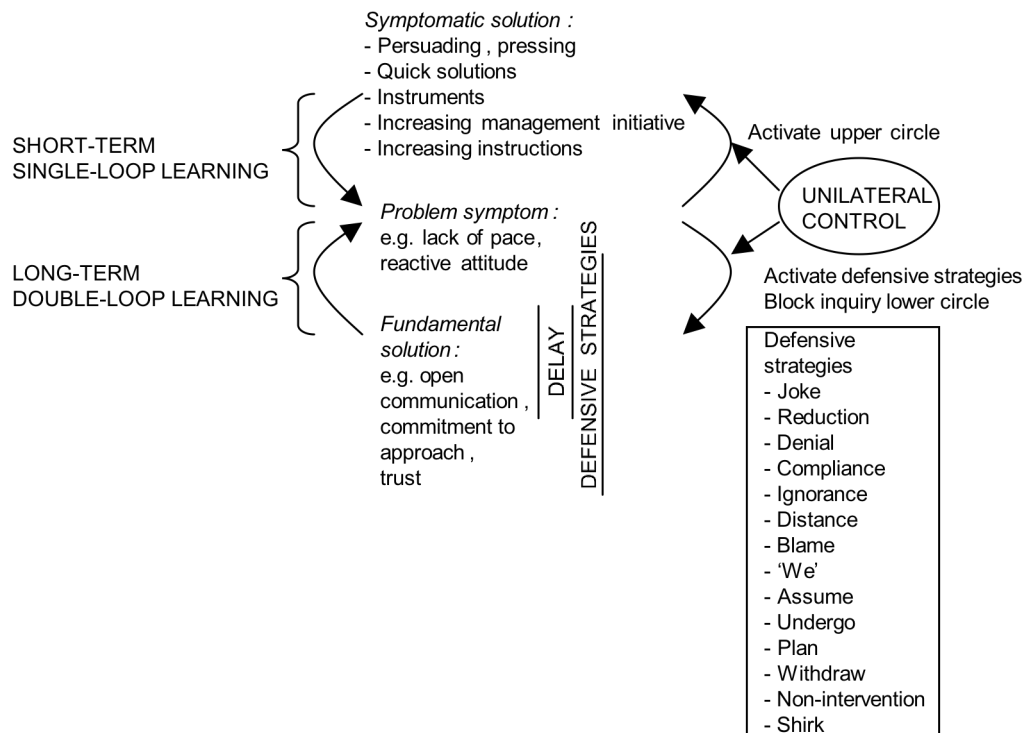


Figure 11.3 Unilateral control activates symptomatic solutions and blocks fundamental solutions

#### Unilateral control leads to circular patterns and self-fulfilling prophecies

This study illustrates that leaders tend to hold a dominant Subject-Object perspective of relations. In this view, organizational leaders and their consultants are assumed to be the ones who inquire, develop knowledge and design and, based on this knowledge, implement necessary changes upon employees (Hosking, 2004). This perspective presupposes the employees as being dependent and reactive. The cases in this study illustrate the self-fulfilling character of a Subject-Object perspective, since it leads to actions that push employees into a dependent role, which in turn confirms the leader's belief that he should initiate change. This study delivers clear evidence that employees contribute to this circular pattern as well by perceiving themselves as dependent on management actions and behaving reactively. The circular pattern, including the meaning that managers and employees attribute to each other's actions, is depicted in figure 11.4.

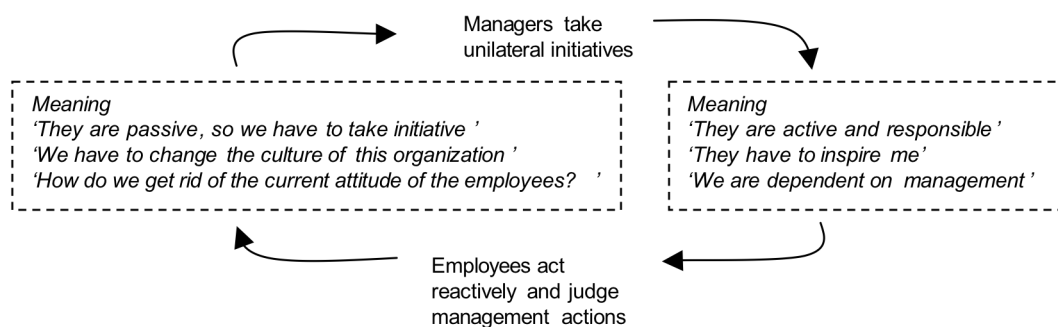


Figure 11.4 Subject-Object perspective in action

As the research findings show, a dominant Subject-Object perspective of relations directly influences the decisions that are being made regarding the change approach, as well as daily interactions. From a Subject-Object view, management take initiative to (episodic) change. With or without the help of consultants, they set goals and define the steps to be followed. Subsequently, they communicate these decisions to the rest of the organization. This way, middle management and employees are pushed into a reactive mode from scratch. This reactive and dependent attitude, in turn, reinforces management to take more initiative in daily interactions.

The consequences of a Subject-Object perspective become problematic if the very aim of the change process is to stimulate ownership, entrepreneurship and pro-activity and if the process needs ownership, commitment and pro-activity to be effective. The paradox is that if management perceives lack of ownership, entrepreneurship and pro-activity, their first inclination is to act in such a way that they reinforce the problems they perceive. This leads to inconsistency between their intention and their actual behaviour.

This study illustrates 11 circular, or systemic, patterns between (active) management and (dependent) employees that are all different manifestations of a Subject-Object definition of the relationship between them. Box 11.1 summarizes these patterns (appendix 5 'Circular patterns' visualizes these circular patterns, including the meaning that actors attribute to the actions of the other 'party'). Although these patterns are described as if they start with the manager, by and large it is not clear where the cycle starts. However, it is clear that the cycles are self-propelling (behaviours stimulate each other) and self-protective (if managers try to change their behaviour unilaterally, they tend to be pushed back by employees).

#### **Circular patterns**

- *Manager active, employees reactive: the more initiative managers take (executing change actions, organizing meetings, chairing meetings, stressing the need for change), the more reactive and dependent employees behave, the more initiative managers take, etcetera.*
- *Manager initiates change process, employees (act as if they) follow: the more managers consider themselves as subjects who can impose changes upon employees, the more employees (act as if they) follow, the more managers are confirmed in their belief they should impose changes, etcetera.*
- *Manager talks, employees (act as if they) listen: the more managers talk (about 'the change approach', their opinion, the need for change) the more employees (act as if they) listen, the more managers direct, etcetera.*
- *Manager solves problems, employees bring problems in: the more managers solve problems that employees bring in, the more employees bring in their problems (instead of solving them themselves), the more managers solve their problems, etcetera.*
- *Manager instructs, employees wait for next instruction: the more managers instruct, the more employees wait for the next instruction, the more managers instruct, etcetera.*
- *Manager acts as if he knows answers, employees act as if they don't: the more managers act as if they know the answers (even if they do not), the more employees act as if they don't, the more managers act as if they know the answers, etcetera.*

- *Manager feels uncomfortable and takes distance, employees feel uncomfortable and take distance:* the more uncomfortable managers feel, the more distance they take, the more uncomfortable employees feel, the more distance they take, the more uncomfortable managers feel, etcetera.
- *Manager expects resistance and braces himself, employees respond negatively and oppose:* the more managers expect employees will show resistance, the more they tend to brace themselves and persuade, the more employees respond negatively and develop resistance, the more managers brace themselves, etcetera.
- *Manager pushes to speed up progress, employees are passive and wait for their turn:* the more managers increase pressure to speed up progress, the more employees become reactive, the more managers increase pressure to speed up, etcetera.
- *Manager implements control instruments, employees resist management initiatives:* the more managers enlarge control, the more employees believe managers are not a positive role model and resist management initiatives, the less management influence, the more managers enlarge control, etcetera.
- *Manager tries to motivate and inspire employees, employees feel lack of motivation and inspiration:* the more managers try to motivate and inspire their employees, the less employees feel responsible for their own motivation and the more they feel dependent on the manager's capability to motivate and inspire, the more managers need to motivate and inspire, etcetera.

**Box 11.1**      *Circular patterns as manifestations of a Subject-Object perspective*

These circular patterns have a repetitive character and lead to self-fulfilling prophecies. These findings are in line with authors on systemic patterns (Senge, 1990, McCaughan and Palmer, 1994, Campbell et al., 1994). Argyris (1990) argues that unilateral control leads to unintended effects like self-fulfilling prophecies and escalating errors. As long as one holds the other party responsible for the recurrent problems, attributes negative intentions to the other party and keeps one's beliefs private, one protects oneself from information that could be of value to test one's beliefs and line of reasoning. This way, there is little reflection upon one's own contribution to the recurrent problems and little learning. In other words, one defends the current reality and blocks changing and learning.

*Unilateral control activates defensive strategies*

According to Argyris (1990, 1999, 2004) unilateral control leads to defensiveness: "[...] whenever human beings are faced with any issue that contains significant embarrassment or threat, they act in ways that bypass, as best they can, the embarrassment or threat. In order for the bypass to work, it must be covered up." (1990, p. 25).

This study illustrates specific examples of defensiveness that are visible in different situations. Here, these are called *defensive strategies*. Defensive strategies aim at making sensitive issues undebatable and, as a consequence, block learning and changing. Typical illustrations of sensitive issues in this study are:

- subordinates do not really commit to the change goals of their superior,
- the team atmosphere is unsafe,
- a manager has difficulties to communicate with this team,
- employees do not trust their manager and vice versa,
- the director has difficulties to listen to his managers,
- managers and employees say that they want to change but do not make any step forward.



This study illustrates how defensive strategies block inquiry into the lower circle in Senge's 'shifting the burden' structure (see figure 11.3). Or, in Argyris' terms, defensive strategies cover sensitive issues up. For example, the director in one case firmly introduces his approach and asks for commitment. Everyone says 'yes'. However, since 'no' seems not to be an option, this 'yes' might be invalid information. If one says 'yes' and thinks 'no', one has to cover this up in order to save face. A first defensive strategy is activated: the compliance strategy.

The 14 defensive strategies that are illustrated in the empirical study are described in box 11.2. All strategies are activated in case of threat or embarrassment. The titles of these strategies have not been based upon existing literature; they have been developed and introduced in this study.

#### **Defensive strategies**

- Compliance strategy: if your superior persuades you to commit, say that you comply regardless of whether you really do ('O.k., I'll commit').
- Undergo strategy: if your superior initiates a change process, just undergo the interventions passively and do not make debatable that you don't think this is going to work ('Let's see what happens').
- Plan strategy: agree to make a plan and act as if you comply with the plan; this way you contribute to change and stay in your comfort zone ('Let's make a plan and put it on the agenda next month').
- Blame strategy: if changing does not succeed, blame others and attribute negative intentions to them ('Employees just don't want to change'; 'Our managers just doesn't want to listen to us').
- Assume strategy: keep your negative assumptions about other individuals' intentions and situations private.
- Withdraw strategy: in case of difficulties in the communication, do not make this debatable with the persons who are involved; rather, withdraw and think up a new initiative or discuss the difficulties with peers ('What am I going to do to break through their resistance?').
- Ignorance strategy: if you observe patterns that are difficult to deal with, e.g. that your employees are not really committed, do not inquire; rather, increase pressure ('You have to keep your appointments').
- Reduction strategy: if things become threatening or embarrassing, reduce the problem until it is controllable again ('we should not overstate the problem').
- Denial strategy: if things become threatening or embarrassing, deny the problem ('In my department there are no problems').
- Distance strategy: if the discussion comes too close, change the subject to other parties or general observations, such as employees, middle management, or 'the organization' ('The organization needs clear core values').
- 'We' strategy: talk in terms of 'our responsibility' and what 'we should do'; as a consequence, nobody has to feel personally responsible ('We should pay attention to the problems').
- Non-intervention strategy: do not confront others' dysfunctional behaviour (e.g. not keeping an appointment), so that others will not confront yours ('I know he is very busy, so I can hardly blame him for not keeping his appointment').
- Joke strategy: if things become threatening or embarrassing, make a joke and change the subject ('Don't worry, you are just much too old to be able to change').
- Shirk strategy: shift the responsibility to an 'outsider' and avoid sharing your own opinion about the process or colleagues ('I would have expected that you had made a remark about my passive colleagues').

**Box 11.2**      *Defensive strategies*

These defensive strategies are powerful as long as one does not make them debatable. They aim at covering sensitive issues up and are effective as long as they are covered up themselves. Or, as Senge (1990) puts it, “to retain their power, defensive routines must remain undiscussable” (Senge, p. 255).

A further analysis leads to the insight that the defensive strategies are not manifest in all situations. Some strategies are typically shown by subordinates towards superiors, others by superiors towards subordinates, peers towards peers, or actors towards interventionist (outsider). Table 11.2 depicts an overview of the observed defensive strategies and the relationships in which they are typically activated.

What defensive strategies are visible?	Subordinates towards superiors	Superiors towards subordinates	Peers towards peers	Actors towards interventionist (outsider)
Compliance	X			
Undergo	X			
Plan	X		X	
Blame	X	X	X	
Assume	X	X	X	
Withdraw	X	X	X	
Ignorance		X	X	X
Reduction		X	X	X
Denial		X	X	X
Distance			X	X
'We'			X	
Non-intervention			X	
Joke			X	X
Shirk				X

Table 11.2 Defensive strategies related to specific relationships

These defensive strategies lead to ‘games’ (compare Scott-Morgan, 1994) that do not sound unfamiliar. If a superior introduces a change, he can ignore that subordinates seem not to commit really (*ignorance*), as an open discussion could lead to an embarrassing and difficult situation. Employees can act as if they comply (regardless of whether they really do), work on plans and just undergo the process without feeling responsible (*compliance*, *plan*, *undergo*). If the superior notices lack of active involvement, he is in a difficult position: he could inquire into why the subordinates do not contribute, though it is safer to ignore the real reason (*ignorance*), say it is not that bad (*reduction*) or even deny (*denial*) the underlying problem and just increase pressure. In the meantime, the superior blames subordinates for the problems (*blame*). The subordinates might blame others and/or circumstances (*blame*). If they don’t come any further, both subordinates and superiors might hold strong beliefs about why the other is responsible (*assume*). However, they do not openly share and check these beliefs, but withdraw (*withdraw*) and share them with peers: subordinates find someone to talk to about superiors who would not listen and superiors discuss subordinates’ low commitment and loyalty with other superiors.

In (management) teams in this study people show defensive strategies that seem to be less related to hierarchy. These strategies partly aim at avoiding concrete actions that would be obliging, by making plans (*plan*), discussing general and abstract subjects (*distance*) and talking in terms of 'our responsibility' and 'problems we should pay attention to' and as a consequence nobody has to feel personally responsible (*we*)<sup>18</sup>. If, in practice, it becomes visible that one or more individuals do not keep their appointments or do not contribute to change, one can just ignore (*ignorance*), agree not to intervene without saying (*non-intervention*), reduce the seriousness of the problem by putting things into perspective (*reduction*) or even deny the problem (*denial*). If this doesn't help and things seem to get really embarrassing, one can save face by the use of humour: everybody laughs and the issue has gone (*joke*).

This study provides some illustrations of defensive strategies towards the interventionist. In some instances the interventionist is asked to bring in his findings, followed by the statement that the analysis is interesting. Still, this analysis is free of obligations and could be a defensive strategy (*shirk*). At several moments, when the interventionist gives specific feedback, the listener tends to ignore, reduce or even deny the problem and/or blame circumstances and others (*ignorance, reduction, denial, blame*).

The effect of defensive strategies cannot be separated from the context in which they are expressed. For example, one could not claim that it is ineffective to use humour. On the contrary, humour could help to release tension. Jokes become a defensive strategy if they are being used to make difficult issues undebatable. Defensive strategies lead to blocked changing and learning, as they cover up lack of personal commitment, lack of contribution to changing, and ineffective contribution to learning. As a consequence, circular patterns and recurrent problems remain undiscussed and lead to inconsistency: although managers say they want to change, they block changing and learning effectively and maintain the current situation. This study demonstrates that managers and employees are very good at putting defensive strategies into practice, though are often not aware of doing this. Argyris (1990) calls this 'skilled incompetence'.

In figure 11.5 the preceding findings are summarized. Here, the 'black box' of research question 2 is filled in.

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<sup>18</sup> The 'we' strategy helps to reduce pressure for individuals, as there is diffusion of responsibility (Latané and Darley, 1970). This strategy corresponds to another social psychological phenomenon as well, the so-called 'group think' phenomenon. Janis and Mann (1977) describe eight main symptoms of group think, including self-censorship (members withhold their dissenting views and counter-arguments) and illusion of unanimity (members perceive falsely that everyone agrees with the group's decision). Or, in other words, we have a dissenting view, do not bring this in (as our reasoning is that this will bring us in a difficult position) and act as if we are committed. This way, group think can be considered as an expression of defensiveness.



### **Leaders' de-blocking perceptions, behaviours and interventions**

#### *Reflection upon the way one contributes to recurrent symptomatic problems*

- Perceiving circular patterns, including one's own contribution
- Reflection and experimentation
- Making circularity visible
- Self-disclosure and public reflection upon the way one contributes to lack of learning
- Being proactive

#### *Active inquiry into underlying problems*

- Confronting sensitive issues
- Confronting defensive strategies
- Inquiry into underlying patterns
- Sharing valid information that one fears to share

*Box 11.3      Leaders' de-blocking perceptions, behaviours and interventions*

### **Perceiving circular patterns, including one's own contribution**

There are numerous illustrations in this study of how leaders adopt the concept of circularity. The concept appears to be relatively easy to adopt, as it shows how the leader contributes to the problems in a way that is not threatening: his behaviour is both cause and effect. This way, insight into circular patterns reduces blaming of individuals and/or groups.

### **Reflection and experimentation**

As soon as leaders recognize circularity, it is a relatively small step to reflection and experimentation: what could I do to break through this vicious circle? Typical illustrations:

- *'I see I contribute to their behaviour.'*

- *'I am learning by experimentation. Last week someone approached me to talk about some problems in project Y. Normally I would have tried to persuade him, but this time I only listened to his concerns.'*

- *'I don't know how I will succeed in this new (behavioural) strategy, but I am going to learn and find out.'*

Initially, when leaders have insights into their own contribution to the problems, they tend to think up new strategies privately, with the interventionist or with peers. This study demonstrates that in these situations the employees try to push their leader back into the behaviour they are used to though do not like. Actually, this way of private learning has still a unilateral character, as one is not open about the new strategy towards the other actors.

### **Making circularity visible**

In the second instance and after feedback from the interventionist, all leaders in the cases discuss the circular patterns with relevant parties openly. This way, they create the opportunity for mutual learning. Just like their directors, middle managers and employees easily adopt the circular concept. They recognize circular patterns relatively easily and see that blaming the other party and saying the other party has to start changing will keep things as they are.

One leader shares circularity in his quarterly presentation to all employees:  
*'We keep a tight grip on each other, e.g. management talk and employees listen ('watch this meeting'), management instruct and employees keep their ideas to themselves, first line management prepare this session and have foreknowledge while second line management and employees wait and see. That is what we stimulate and wish to change.'*

Still, this study illustrates that employees expect management to start changing their behaviour, as 'they have more influence.' This is a reasonable expectation. Argyris (1984, 1990) argues that one should start with the top. In the next section this subject is further explored.

#### **Self-disclosure and public reflection upon the way one contributes to lack of learning**

When leaders discuss the circular patterns openly, it is only a small step to self-disclosure and public reflection upon the way they contribute to blocked changing, organizing and learning. Typical illustrations:

*- 'I have learned that I tend to take distance in difficult situations. As a consequence, I lose contact, which stimulates you to be offended. I really want to keep in touch better. Please help me to do that.'*

*- 'We do not communicate enough and effectively. I personally don't.'*

*- 'The more we, management, have the feeling that employees don't pick up things, the greater our inclination to enlarge control, the more defensiveness from employees, the more control... And I take responsibility for my part.'*

#### **Being proactive**

As soon as leaders have publicly shared how they contribute to blocked changing and learning, they cannot hold employees fully responsible any longer. As a consequence, they naturally will take initiative to start changing. This study demonstrates how leaders pro-actively initiate further steps. Some examples:

*- 'When management prepare the sessions, we push employees into a dependent role. I don't think that is effective. What would you think about preparing the next session together?'*

*- 'I want to organize sessions with employees in order to share mutual feedback. We have to find out together how we can communicate and work better.'*

*- 'I wonder, for example, if you think I take you seriously and if I take enough time to involve you. I really want to hear your personal and constructive feedback.'*

#### **Confronting sensitive issues**

An important aim of defensive strategies is to make sensitive issues undiscussable. Unlike circular patterns, it seems to be fairly difficult for leaders to make sensitive issues debatable, as they do not know if they can manage the effect. An illustration: Interventionist: *'My assumption is that you experience the whole process as a top-down initiative and that the safest way to behave is acting as if you find it valuable and keeping the discussion on the surface.'*

Employee: *'To be honest, your assumption is right. I felt a strong top-down pressure that forced me to comply.'*

Manager: *'I am glad you are so candid. I had the same feeling as the interventionist. However I did not know how to deal with the situation.'*

However, after (repetitive) feedback from the interventionist, there are some illustrations of leaders who make difficult issues about relationships and personal effectiveness debatable.

- *'I know that there is too large a distance between employees and management. [...] We do not communicate enough and effectively. I personally don't.'*
- *'Communication and safety is a sensitive subject, as we have just announced that manager X will have to leave. Lately another manager left this team as well. Do you think this is the right moment to discuss this subject now?'*

#### **Confronting defensive strategies**

Circular patterns are easier to confront than defensiveness. Circular patterns have a relatively neutral character: nobody is specifically to blame. The problem of defensive strategies is that they are designed to defend and are difficult to confront without activating them. If interventionists confront defensive strategies repetitively, leaders are capable of recognising and confronting these strategies as well. Some illustrations:

- 'Let's not focus on other parties. Let's start with our own role'* (distance strategy).
- 'Gentlemen, we're changing the subject by making jokes'* (joke strategy).

#### **Inquiry into underlying patterns**

Instead of symptomatic solutions in the upper cycle in Senge's 'shifting the burden' system, mutual learning requires inquiry into fundamental solutions in the lower cycle: what underlying problems keep producing the symptoms? Argyris (1990) describes numerous questions that lead to inquiry, when he suggests a CEO could say to the people who successfully developed some improvement actions: "I would like to reflect on what has happened to see if there is more that we can learn. What is it that I do or the company does that makes it necessary for me to take the initiative to identify the barriers, and to design a workshop to reduce them, when you knew the barriers and you knew how to reduce them?" (p. 126-127).

This kind of inquiry appears to be difficult to put into practice. Still, this study shows that some managers succeed in inquiring into the underlying patterns that block changing and learning. The way one manager confronts the process between him and his employees is illustrative: *'P, I see you want to ask a question. That is what I expected, because that is the pattern we always follow: I tell you my vision and you ask a critical question. Often you have an opinion about the subject yourself. In turn, I pretend that I know the answer and share another story with you. Then, after the session, you will evaluate my answer. You may disagree, but won't share your disagreement with me. I may not know the answer, but I won't share that with you. That is a strange game, isn't it?'*

#### **Sharing valid information that one fears to share**

What this typically means is sharing valid information that one normally tends to cover up and that leads to mutual learning. Defensive strategies stifle sharing valid information and thus block learning and changing: people think 'no' and say 'yes', people think 'no' and say nothing, people say they find changing important and know they will not really change their behaviour. This study demonstrates how managers and employees learn to share valid information and contribute to changing. Some illustrations:

- A manager to his peers in the management team: *'Well, I see that changing the atmosphere in this organization really requires us to change. The question is, do we really want to change and are we able to change. We should take more time for our people. Do we want that?'*
- A manager to the director: *'The opinions of my second line managers appeared to differ from yours. I considered stopping them, but I didn't. After all, we try to share valid information.'* The director agrees.
- The director to his managers: *'I thought it was all logical and clear. Now I see your opinions differ from mine. Apparently, it was my logic and clearness.'*
- A manager to his team leaders who have responded critically to his change initiative: *'I don't want yes-men. Let's be honest, it would be easy if you just followed. However, I appreciate you being honest about your thoughts and feelings. Still, it is not always easy to deal with.'*

These examples are visible in the cases only after some months of feedback, illustrations of circularity and defensiveness and inquiry by the interventionist. Besides, in this study managers share this kind of valid information when they realize that they cannot attain their goals by persuasion and cover-up of sensitive issues.

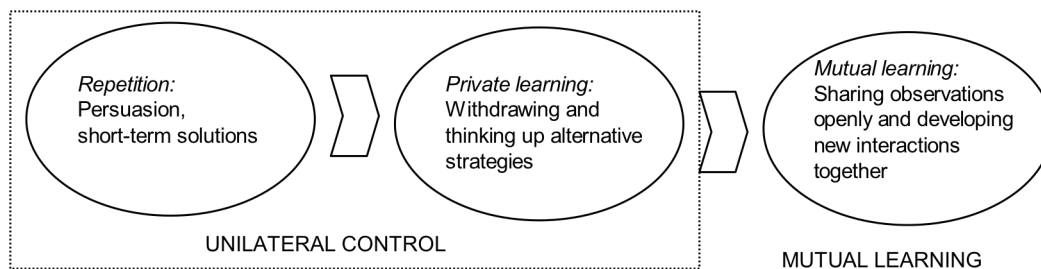
The findings in this study justify the conclusion that leaders are able to bring several expressions of a mutual learning model into practice. Summarized, the concept of circularity appears to be a concept that is relatively simple to adopt, as it is neutral about (who is) cause and effect. Subsequently, it is a logical process to move to private reflection upon one's own contribution to the recurrent problems, followed by public discussion of circular patterns (with employees) and the way one contributes to lack of learning. In turn, this is a good starting point to discuss how one could change these patterns together.

This study shows that managers find it more difficult to make sensitive issues debatable and share valid information that would not be shared normally. Nevertheless, as soon as they see they cannot realize their goals through 'upper cycle' actions, this study delivers examples how managers adopt these behavioural changes.

Another conclusion is that the learning process of managers seems to develop from unilateral control via private learning to mutual learning. First, managers tend to hold a unilateral control model that instructs them to persuade and implement short-term linear solutions. Second, if they do not realize their goals (e.g. they get critical response in a meeting), they tend to withdraw and try to think up alternative strategies on their own, with peers or with an outsider (e.g. a coach). Subsequently, they try a different strategy towards their subordinates, though keeping their considerations private. This is private learning and is still unilateral control. After all, they still try to impose a new strategy upon employees from a Subject-Object perspective and do not share openly what they have observed and why they adopt a different strategy. As a consequence, employees tend to push their manager back into the behaviour they are used to though do not like. Or, in other words, the system protects itself. This way of unilateral change of behaviour seems to play an important role in most, if not all, systemic patterns that are described by Moeskops (2004) and Werkman (2006).



A third step in the learning process is to stimulate mutual learning that requires sharing one's observations, one's reasoning and what one might change in one's approach (*'I see that I tend to persuade more and more and that you tend to be more and more critical. What do you see? How could we make these sessions more productive?'*). Subsequently, employees can respond, add missing information and feel responsible for mutual learning. Figure 11.6 summarizes this learning process.



**Figure 11.6** From repetition, via private learning to mutual learning

This study illustrates that the leader's development from persuasion to mutual learning influences the development of his environment. All cases illustrate positive effects that contribute directly to de-blocking of changing, organizing and learning.

- Subordinates (managers, team leaders or employees) open themselves up and make their contribution to blocked changing discussable.
- Subordinates confront circularity and/or defensiveness in the team.
- Managers copy the director's behavioural shift towards their own employees.
- Employees talk positively about director/managers who are more open to them.

As a consequence, the learning process that starts at the top has clear consequences for the process of changing, organizing and learning at organizational level.

As the empirical study illustrates, the learning process of managers and employees involves much copying of the interventionist's interventions. The interventionist, however, has his own defensive patterns and learning process.

### **Research question 3**

*How do interventions contribute to (de-)blocking changing, organizing and learning?*

The aim of this research question is to develop an intervention perspective that contributes to de-blocking changing, organizing and learning.

The conclusions regarding research question 1 and 2 illustrate how leaders can contribute to (de-)blocked changing, organizing and learning in their daily interactions (micro-level), regardless of their selected change approach (macro-level). These findings call strongly for a micro level intervention perspective that contributes to de-blocking changing, organizing and learning. As discussed in section 4.3, continuous changing (Weick and Quinn, 1999) is characterized by a micro level of analysis and a long-term perspective. A long-term perspective, in this study, would contribute to a shift in attention from the upper circle to the lower circle in Senge's 'shifting the burden' structure (Senge, 1990). As opposed to episodic change, an intervention

perspective that contributes to continuous changing follows the order 'freeze-rebalance-unfreeze'. Freezing would suggest making visible how one contributes to blocked changing. Rebalancing would mean to stimulate learning and reflection on the way one contributes to recurrent patterns and to stimulate free and informed choices. Unfreezing would mean helping to put committed choices into practice and resume (mutual) learning.

As described in section 4.4, this study distinguishes 'interventions' from 'the process of intervening'. The outcomes of this study demonstrate how interventions by a third party can de-block changing, organizing and learning. These interventions are described below. The subsequent conclusions describe how unilateral control by the interventionist can lead to circular patterns, defensive strategies and blocked changing. These findings illustrate that the process of intervening can undermine the effectiveness of the interventions. This argues for an intervention perspective that incorporates the interventionist's defensiveness.

*Specific interventions contribute to de-blocking of changing, organizing and learning*

Unlike the mainstream literature on episodic change that focuses on blocking factors and conditions for effective change (Weick and Quinn, 1999; Werkman, 2006), the intervention perspective in this study focuses on 'understanding how we preserve the current situation, unlike our spoken desire to change'. This is in line with Weick and Quinn (1999), who argue that to understand organizational change one must first understand organizational inertia.

Figure 11.7 integrates the interventions in this study into the intervention order 'freeze-rebalance-unfreeze'. This order is depicted as a circular process, as opposed to a linear process. This visualisation emphasizes three essential characteristics of the intervention perspective. First, the order 'freeze-rebalance-unfreeze' is related to continuous changing, organizing and learning. A linear intervention process would suggest an episodic interruption and would – thus – be inconsistent.

Second, an intervention does not interrupt changing, organizing and learning, but is an expression of changing, organizing and learning in itself. As a consequence, and in contrast with traditional (episodic change) views, intervening can be considered as a continuous process. This intervention perspective could be expressed in the words 'continuous changing, organizing, learning and intervening'.

Third, in this view interventions cannot be related exclusively to (third party) interventionists, for a practical as well as a fundamental reason. For a practical reason, since the (third party) interventionist cannot always be there. For a fundamental reason, since such a situation would confirm a Subject-Object perspective that stimulates active-dependent relationships. The interventions that are described in this section, however, are related to the interventionist.

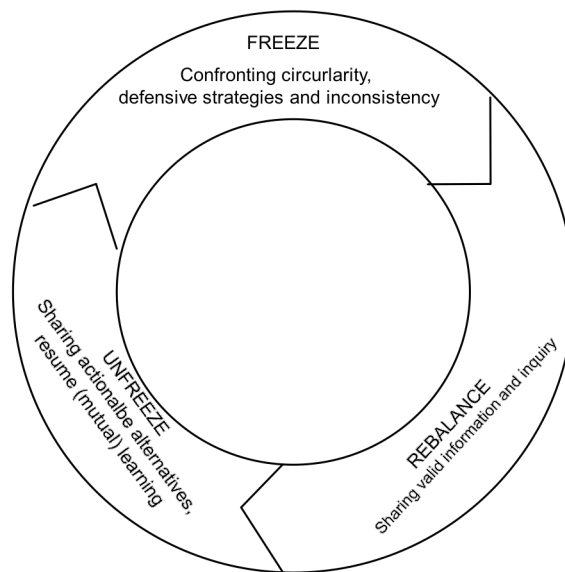


Figure 11.7 Intervention wheel: continuous freezing, rebalancing and unfreezing

The interventions that are demonstrated in this study are described in box 11.4 and subsequently elaborated. In the elaboration the interventions are illustrated with literal quotes from the empirical study, in order to serve Argyris' call for actionable advice: "the advice should contain the action strategies (e.g. advocate your position in a way that encourages inquiry). Second, it should be accompanied with actual statements that illustrate what you would have to say and do" (p. 87).

The interventions are related to the order 'freeze-rebalance-unfreeze'. The emphasis of the interventions is not on methods or instruments, but on interactions with director, managers and employees. The aim of the interventions is to support reflection on how one contributes to recurrent problems and how one could facilitate changing, organizing and learning.

#### De-blocking interventions that stimulate changing, organizing and learning

##### Freezing

- Sharing circularity and helping managers/ employees to reflect upon their contribution to the problem
- Confronting inconsistency neutrally
- Making defensive strategies debatable

##### Rebalancing

- Stimulating inquiry into one's beliefs and actions
- Inviting to share valid information that one fears to share
- Sharing the concepts
- Sharing what one fears to share regarding the effect of someone's actions
- Sharing valid information about how oneself contributes to the problems
- Reducing (time) pressure

##### Unfreezing

- Sharing alternatives and making them actionable

#### Box 11.4 Interventionists' de-blocking interventions

**Sharing circularity and help managers/ employees to reflect upon their contribution to the problem**

By sharing observations regarding circularity and asking questions about the way people perceive their own role in the circular patterns, the interventionist supports learning and changing. The underlying assumption is that by stimulating awareness of how people contribute to the recurrent patterns, it will be difficult to repeat these actions on purpose. This finding is in line with Edmondson and Smith (2006): "By mapping the dynamic, with help, management dyads or teams can see how it works, why they are not making progress in resolving their conflicts, and how they might interrupt the vicious cycle" (p. 23). As discussed before, managers understand the circular concept relatively easily, as it is a relatively neutral way to understand the situation.

An illustration:

Team leaders: *'To be honest, we don't like to be labelled as 'the difficult team' time after time.'*

Interventionist: *'What is the effect of being labelled this way?'*

Another team leader: *'We feel unhappy with it. Actually I get angry. It de-motivates me when the organization talks this way, just because we are not yes-men.'*

Interventionist: *'If you are labelled this way time after time, you should think together why people would do that. You might be in a vicious circle: you get angry, which leads to more negative labels, which make you even angrier, etcetera. Try to find out together how you could stop this recurrent pattern.'*

**Confronting inconsistency neutrally**

Confront inconsistency between espoused theory and theory-in-use neutrally, present possible consistent choices equally and invite to make conscious and free choices so that one can feel responsible. This way, managers are helped to be consistent and reduce defensiveness.

An illustration:

Interventionist to the director: *'What you wish (proactive behaviour, entrepreneurship) is not consistent with what you do (stimulating reactive behaviour). You could either leave your actions as they are and accept your managers' reactive behaviour or change your actions and contribute to their proactive attitude. Both options are consistent; it is up to you.'*

These findings are in line with Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory (1957). By sharing inconsistency, the person experiences dissonance between what he says (and wants) and what he does in action. To relieve this dissonance, he might choose one of two options: either changing his assumptions or changing his attitude and/or behaviour.

**Making defensive strategies debatable**

In order to strengthen the fundamental solution (the lower cycle in Senge's 'shifting the burden' structure) one has to deal with the defensive strategies that block this lower cycle. Or, in other words, de-blocking changing, organizing and learning requires reducing the defensive strategies that block changing, organizing and learning. These defensive strategies, however, are built to defend themselves and

can be characterized as ingrained routines. Feedback of defensiveness leads to activation of this defensiveness in the first instance, as illustrated below.

Interventionist: *We doubt how open people can be. We see some patterns that keep team members from being open. It appeared to us that you can say fairly hard things to each other. Each time this happens some one makes a joke, releases tension and changes the subject. Difficult or personal issues remain undebatable this way and - contrary to the desired effect- an unsafe climate is created. Let's call this a joking strategy. Another strategy with the same effect is the reduction strategy: you tend to make problems smaller if the situation might become difficult or embarrassing.*

HR manager (joking): *Then you must not make any jokes about my roots anymore (both laugh).*

Interventionist: *This is what we mean ....*

Director: *Now you are exaggerating. It is not that bad.*

While confrontation leads to activation of defensive strategies in the short run, it leads to reduction of defensiveness in the longer run. In all instances in this study the client readdresses defensiveness after a period: *'you spoke about these defensive strategies; could you tell me more about them?'* Apparently, there is a delayed effect. This is in line with Senge (1990), who argues that inquiring into the lower cycle in the 'shifting the burden' structure is characterized by delay. Subsequently, the findings of this study demonstrate that defensive strategies in teams become weaker after repetitive open confrontation. After a period (with a delay), team members recognize and address defensive strategies in action.

This seems to be an argument for confronting defensiveness openly and repetitively. This conclusion seems to contradict McCaughan and Palmer (1994) and Moeskops (2004), who emphasize caution. However, the conclusion is in line with Argyris (1990), who argues that if the source of the defensive feelings is to avoid learning, defensive feelings should not be bypassed. Senge (1990) argues that in order to retain its power, defensiveness must remain undiscussable. The underlying assumption is that after repetitive confrontation of one's defensive actions, it will be difficult to repeat these actions unnoticed.

Recognising the limitations of this study, the empirical evidence of this study lends support to the conclusion that confrontation of defensiveness is easier as the number of persons decreases. Individual confrontation has had the strongest effects in this study. This finding supports the strategy of starting with the manager, and subsequently addressing defensiveness in the team.

Two additional types of interventions contribute to weaken defensiveness in this study:

- Using humour  
Using humour can help to make defensive strategies debatable, e.g. 'You are very good at keeping the situation as it is.' Compare Argyris' concept of 'skilled incompetence': 'You are very skilled in being incompetent ...'
- Confronting defensive strategies just before they will be activated  
Confronting defensive strategies before they are activated supports individuals to

inquire into their defensiveness 'in action': 'I will mention some defensive strategies that keep you from effective change processes; you will probably feel them being activated while I talk about them. That is how they work; so don't worry. Try to listen and understand what I say and what you feel.'

#### **Stimulating inquiry into one's beliefs and actions**

Unchecked beliefs play a major role in blocked changing and learning. In fixed situations, managers and employees tend to hold negative beliefs about the other party that, in turn, lead to circular patterns and recurrent problems. In a partner-in-business or management-serving model, interventionists tend to take the manager's beliefs for granted and help him to control the situation and block changing and learning.

By asking questions about the effects of one's beliefs and actions, the interventionist stimulates reflection on one's own contribution to blocked changing and learning.

This study delivers many illustrations of questions that stimulate inquiry into one's beliefs and actions:

- Confront unchecked beliefs: *'How do you know that you are right? What did you exactly perceive that makes you stick to these beliefs?'*
- Share the effect of one's beliefs: *'By holding these assumptions without inquiring into them, they tend to turn into self-fulfilling prophecies as they filter what you perceive'.*
- Inquire into the effect of one's beliefs on one's actions: *'What is the effect of this belief on your actions?'*
- Inquire into the effect of one's actions: *'What exactly is the effect of your behaviour?'*
- Explore to what extent one is satisfied with these effects: *'Are you satisfied with the effects of your actions? Do you succeed in changing the situation this way? If not, how can you continue saying that you are doing the right things?'*
- Share how one contributes to one's own problems: *'I am afraid you produce your own problems: you have beliefs about him, you assume it does not help to share these beliefs, you take his responsibility away, you think this will make him less secure and you are busier and busier.'*

This inquiry leads to self-reflection and learning. Subsequently, as this study illustrates, this learning might lead to public reflection upon one's contribution to blocked learning and changing.

#### **Inviting to share valid information that one fears to share**

What this typically means is sharing valid information that one normally tends to cover up and that leads to mutual learning. By inviting to share valid information (*'What do you really think about this change approach?'*) and creating room for free choice, the interventionist contributes to learning. In one case the interventionist asks the director whether one is allowed to say 'no' to his proposal, as a 'yes' might only be valid information if a 'no' is allowed as well. Another illustration:

When a manager says he complies with the group norm (unlike what he seems to think), the interventionist inquires into what is happening. The manager responds. Manager: *'It does not feel pleasant; I feel I have to defend myself.'*

Interventionist: *'But it works, right? After all, you say that you comply. Does it feel this way?'*

Manager: *'Well, actually I believe my way also works. But I see I need to change my belief.'*

Interventionist (to all): *'Is that what you want?'*

Another manager: *'No, I think you are right. We should not try to convince him, but I think we have to take time to find out how we wish to contribute to the change process.'*

Sharing valid information also refers to the ladder of inference (Argyris, 1990, 2000; Noonan, 2007; Schwarz, 2002). Instead of talking about abstract interpretations (*'Regardless of what we do, employees are anti-management'*), the interventionist asks for valid and directly observable data: *'How do you know that you are right?'* *'Have you got an example?'* *'What exactly happened?'* *'What did you do?'* *'How could your actions relate to employees' reactions?'*

#### **Sharing the concepts**

In just one case in the empirical study the interventionist conducted workshops on the concepts regarding unilateral control and mutual learning. These workshops actually contributed to experimentation with the mutual learning model in daily interactions, as illustrated by an employee, one day after he joined the workshop: *'I want to try something that I have learned from A (interventionist). My belief was that if we asked for more information and bring in our frustration time after time, we would reach our goal. But I doubt if this assumption is valid.'*

Although based upon only one case study, these observations lead to the tentative conclusion that sharing the relevant concepts supports learning and changing.

#### **Sharing what one fears to share regarding the effect of someone's actions**

Unlike the preceding interventions this intervention, as well as the next one, involves the role of the interventionist. As a consequence, the interventionist cannot be a distant observer any longer. This study illustrates that being open about the effect of the leader's behaviour on the interventionist contributes importantly to the leader's learning process. The difficulty is that sharing sensitive information presupposes a certain level of comfort, while discomfort might be exactly the effect of the leader's behaviour. As a consequence, intervening in these kinds of situations is not comfortable by definition. This finding strongly corresponds to Argyris' (2004) description of 'honesty' in a mutual learning model: "Encourage yourself and other people to say what they know, yet fear to say. Minimize what would otherwise be subject to distortion and a cover-up of the distortion" (p. 398).

An illustration:

Interventionist: *'Let me present this from my personal perspective. In my experience you can be very unpredictable: from one moment to another you can be very dissatisfied about things, which you communicate verbally or nonverbally (interventionist gives some examples). Sometimes I think we have built a relationship, but the next moment it seems to be not there at all. As a consequence, I am on the alert and act very cautiously. I don't think I give you what you deserve, then. Do you recognize what I say?'*

Director (positively aroused): *Yes, I can follow you. Go on.*

Interventionist: *After all it is my own responsibility to deal with you and my feelings. However, it becomes important if your behaviour has the same effect on your managers. Might they be cautious because they cannot predict your reaction?*

#### **Sharing valid information about how oneself contributes to the problems**

As illustrated by the circular patterns between interventionist and client system the interventionist is part of the situation and –thus- can be part of the problem. This is a difficult issue to address for several reasons. First, client and interventionist tend to perceive the latter as an outsider. Being a neutral outsider is often one of the reasons why he is hired. Second, the interventionist is vulnerable to distance from the situation as if he is not a part of it. Third, the idea that the interventionist might well contribute to the stagnation of processes is difficult to accept for all parties. After all, he is hired to solve problems, not to contribute to them. For these reasons, it is difficult for the interventionist to see, accept and share his own role in blocked changing. This study illustrates only a few instances of the interventionist sharing valid information about his own contribution. Afterwards, however, all cases were thoroughly discussed with the client, including the reflection on the interventionist's role. An important finding is that in none of these situations did the client accuse the interventionist of not being effective. Instead, involving the interventionist's role in understanding how changing, organizing and learning is being (de-)blocked contributed directly to learning.

An illustration of the interventionist confronting his own role publicly: *'To be honest, in the first session I tended to perceive you as a 'difficult team'. I really appreciate if one is open, however one can easily label real openness as 'resistance'. I did. In turn, I started helping J (manager) to persuade you and took distance. This way I stimulated you precisely in your behaviour, didn't I?'*

#### **Reducing (time) pressure**

This study demonstrates that as pressure tends to activate a unilateral control model, it is effective to reduce pressure by slowing down. The more pressure, the more automatic behaviour and the less freedom to choose behaviour. Taking time helps all participants, including the interventionist, to inquire into the patterns and the way one contributes to them. This way the interventionist supports individuals to inquire into their own 'moving moments'.

#### **Sharing alternatives and making them actionable**

This strategy corresponds strongly with Argyris (1990), who argues that proper advice "should contain the action strategies (e.g. advocate your position in a way that encourages inquiry). Second, it should be accompanied with actual statements that illustrate what you would have to say and do" (p. 87).

An illustration:

*'What if you shared your dilemma openly with him? Such as: I am hesitating. I would like to give you the opportunity to take this responsibility. However, I feel insecure because I get no signs that you're working on it. How shall we organize this situation?'*

*Interventionists' unilateral control contributes to blocked changing and learning*



The interventions as described are espoused theory. The way interventionists put them into action, the process of intervening, is governed by their theory-in-use. A sole description of interventions regarding blocked learning and defensiveness would neglect the interventionist and presuppose the latter as not being defensive. Noonan (2007) involves his own defensiveness as an interventionist, while Argyris (1996) describes his own defensive reasoning as a scholar. This study demonstrates that the interventionist can be defensive, can activate a unilateral control model and – thus – can contribute to circular patterns, defensive strategies and blocked changing and learning.

Certain circumstances in particular stimulate the interventionist to activate a unilateral control model. Table 11.5 summarizes these circumstances (as perceived by the interventionist), the interventionist's reasoning, his actions and effects.

<b>(Perceived) circumstance</b>	<b>Reasoning</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Effect</b>
<i>The interventionist's role, approach, findings and/or added value are at stake.</i>	There are signals that might relate to reducing confidence in my role, approach, findings and/or added value, so I have to (re-)establish my position.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasising I have everything under control.</li> <li>• Proving my added value through (immediate) answers, analyses and solutions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little contribution to long-term solutions and learning by client.</li> <li>• Little learning by interventionist.</li> <li>• Reduced ability to recognize defensive patterns.</li> <li>• Distance between interventionist and client.</li> </ul>
<i>The relationship with the client is weak or uneasy.</i>	The relationship with some managers does not seem to be optimal, so I have to work on the relationship. This means I have to support them and I cannot confront painful issues (anymore).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirming and pleasing the client.</li> <li>• Keeping my beliefs and thoughts regarding the client's effectiveness private, in order to save face.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little learning by client.</li> <li>• Little added value from interventionist.</li> <li>• Weak (not open) relationship with client.</li> <li>• Reduced sensitivity to ineffective patterns.</li> </ul>
<i>It is a major opportunity that has to succeed</i>	This project has to be successful in the eyes of the client, as this might lead to new and attractive opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being a 'partner-in-business'</li> <li>• Confirming the client, e.g. if he expects resistance, helping him to think up strategies to break through this resistance.</li> <li>• (Supporting client to) be in control, no surprises.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little learning by client.</li> <li>• Little added value from interventionist, as he does the same as this client.</li> <li>• Weak (not open) relationship with client.</li> <li>• Reinforcement of client's unilateral control and anti-learning dynamics.</li> <li>• Reduced sensitivity to ineffective patterns.</li> </ul>

**Table 11.5** *Circumstances that activate unilateral control by interventionist*

As table 11.5 demonstrates, unilateral control leads precisely to the effects the interventionist wishes to avoid. Furthermore, the study illustrates the counterproductive effects of a 'partner-in-business' model. This finding is in line with Drukker and Verhaaren (2002), who use the term 'management-serving' and argue that this role can be effective only if the problem is known and relatively simple and a proper solution is within reach. In case of dynamically complex problems, this role does not work out effectively.

As long as the interventionist is not aware of his beliefs and reasoning in action and he does not publicly test them, he contributes to blocked learning and circular patterns.

*Interventionists' unilateral control leads to circular patterns between interventionist and client*

This study demonstrates a striking similarity regarding the relation between management and employees on the one hand and the interventionist and the client system on the other hand. As soon as the interventionist enters, client and interventionist tend to create a relationship in which the interventionist is the active Subject who is able to understand what happens, and the actors in the client system are dependent Objects. Similar to managers and employees, this observation illustrates that the interventionist and actors in a client system have an inclination to develop a Subject-Object relationship.

Just like managers and employees, this Subject-Object perspective leads to circular patterns. Box 11.6 summarizes the patterns that are illustrated in this study.

**Circular patterns between interventionist and client system**

- *Interventionist is active (takes initiative), participants are passive/dependent:* the more active the interventionist is, the more passive and dependent the participants become, the more active the interventionist is, etcetera.
- *Interventionist feeds back, participants wait and see:* the more the interventionist gives feedback about patterns, the more participants keep their feedback private ('that is an interesting analysis!!'), the more the interventionist gives feedback, etcetera.
- *Interventionist participates, manager directs difficult issues to interventionist:* the more actively the interventionist participates, the more managers tend to direct difficult issues to the interventionist, the more the interventionist participates, etcetera.
- *Interventionist acts as a partner-in-business, employees behave critically:* the more the interventionist acts as a partner-in-business with the manager, the more employees perceive interventionist as a partner of management and responds negatively to both, the more the interventionist acts as a partner-in-business with the manager, etcetera.
- *Interventionist persuades managers to accept outcomes, managers resist them:* the more the interventionist thinks managers resist his outcomes, the more he persuades managers, the more they resist these outcomes, the more he persuades them, etcetera.

The most fundamental one:

- *Interventionist is present, participants feel less responsible:* if the interventionist is present, participants feel less responsible, the interventionist becomes more active (in order to help), participants feel even less responsible, etcetera.

**Box 11.6**      *Circular patterns between interventionist and client system*

These circular patterns illustrate that the interventionist is part of the organizational situation. This means that he cannot distance himself from the situation, as if he is not part of the process. These findings are in line with McCaughan and Palmer (1994): "We talk about a consultant being 'outside' the problem situation, but there are no insides and outsides in this kind of systems thinking. Feedback loops are no respecters of conventional boundaries" (p. 75).

These circular patterns recur as long as interventionist and actors in the client system do not reflect on these patterns including their own contribution to them, do not openly share their beliefs and reasoning and make sensitive but essential issues undiscussable.

### *Interventionists' unilateral control activates defensive strategies*

Just like managers and employees, interventionists can block inquiry and learning by defensive strategies from time to time. This study demonstrates four defensive strategies, as summarized in box 11.7 <sup>19</sup>

#### **Defensive strategies by interventionist**

- Assume strategy: keep one's beliefs and thoughts regarding the client's effectiveness private, in order to save face.
- Withdraw strategy: in case of difficulties in the communication, do not make this debatable with the persons who are involved; rather, withdraw and think up new initiatives or discuss the difficulties with peers ('What am I going to do to make them understand?').
- Ignorance strategy: if one observes patterns that are difficult to deal with, e.g. that employees are not really committed, do not inquire ('Some employees seem to bear heavy negative experiences; please share your concerns frankly in a conversation with a manager').
- Distance strategy: in case of blocked changing and learning, neglect one's own role and focus on other parties ('There was a distance between you and your team').

*Box 11.7 Defensive strategies by the interventionist*

Although there are no illustrations of active attempts to make issues undiscussable, such as the joke or reduction strategy, the interventionists in this study do not openly share their beliefs and reasoning several times. Most persistent is the interventionist's inclination

- not to involve his own role and perceive himself as an outsider, and
- not to test his own beliefs, but take them for granted.

All defensive strategies aim at keeping things calm and not creating painful situations for the interventionist or others. By doing so, the interventionist blocks his and others' learning and contributes to preservation of the current situation.

### *Some commonly used intervention methods work out as cover-up of underlying problems*

As this study illustrates, some generally accepted intervention methods appear to work out as a cover-up of underlying problems. Although these intervention methods fit dynamically simple situations, they are not appropriate for dynamically complex situations (also see Argyris, 1994).

<sup>19</sup> These defensive strategies have been displayed by the interventionist in this study. This selection cannot automatically be generalised to other consultants. The overview mainly illustrates how interventionists (consultants) can block learning through defensive strategies.

### **Interviews in order to analyse the situation bypass the underlying problem**

This study illustrates the limitations of interviews in order to gain insight into one's perceptions and beliefs regarding the current reality.

Individual interviews normally presuppose anonymity of the interviewees, in order to stimulate individuals to share information one would not share otherwise. However, what is the added value of information that employees would not share with their manager and the interventionist cannot share with their manager? The interventionist becomes a bypass of the communication problems between management and employees. In effect, this methodology does not support learning and changing. For this reason, direct communication between managers and employees is to be preferred in such situations. The interventionist can help them to create an atmosphere that supports mutual learning.

### **Presentations of a diagnosis can contribute to preservation of the current reality**

In some instances the interventionist presents his diagnosis to a management team or a group of employees. What is the effect of this methodology? The diagnosis could be a bypass of the problems, as employees and management can take distance, saying that this is interesting and subsequently wait and see what happens. Besides, the diagnosis could make them defensive; this could be uncomfortable for the interventionist who, in turn, might respond with persuasion. Presenting a diagnosis however, can stimulate awareness of

- how changing is (possibly) blocked,
- how one contributes to the recurrent problems,
- how one could contribute to de-blocking of changing.

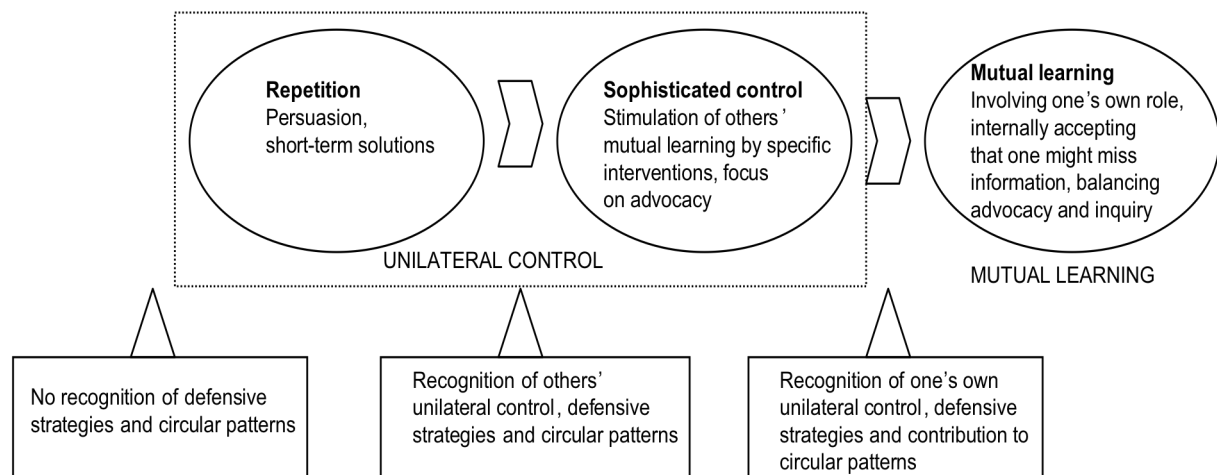
This could contribute to learning, as long as this is not presented as 'the truth' but only a possible explanation (*'It is the best I could think up. Have you got something else in mind?'*) and as long as the interventionist leaves room for free choice and personal commitment (*'I do not expect you to do anything. But whatever your choice is, try to be consistent. Either keep acting the same and accept some tensions and discomfort -and do not complain about it-, or contribute to changing by reflection on your own role. For me it is a free choice.'*).

### ***A consistent intervention perspective on changing, organizing and learning involves the interventionist's defensiveness.***

Based on this study, three development phases of the interventionist can be distinguished. If the interventionist does not recognize expressions of unilateral control, defensive strategies and circularity, he cannot address them either. In effect, he does not contribute to the de-blocking of changing, organizing and learning. The overviews in this chapter regarding unilateral control (figure 11.1), circular patterns (box 11.1) and defensive strategies (box 11.2) are more specific than existing descriptions and can contribute to one's sensitivity to recognize these blocking patterns. Subsequently, the interventionist can contribute to changing and learning by addressing these patterns and make them debatable (see box 11.4 'Interventionists' de-blocking interventions'). This way, the interventionist puts the interventions into practice in order to stimulate mutual learning by others, though without involving inquiry into his own contribution to the patterns. In other words, these interventions are built upon a Subject-Object perspective.

Being consistent requires the interventionist to contribute to mutual learning in a mutual learning way. In order to do this, the interventionist has to recognize his own unilateral control, defensive strategies and contribution to circular patterns as well. Subsequently, he has to be prepared to involve his own role and to accept that he might miss relevant information or might make a mistake in his reasoning. Now, the interventionist not only shares his analysis in a way that can be tested publicly (advocacy), but he also explores what other people see and understand that may be in conflict with his point of view (inquiry) (Noonan, 2007). This study provides some illustrations of the interventionist who does involve his own role and does openly accept he might miss relevant information. These illustrations contributed to learning not only by the interventionist, but also by clients who take the interventionist's behaviour as an example.

In short, there seems to be a development process from unilateral control via contributing to mutual learning in a unilateral control way to mutual learning by the interventionist. Figure 11.8 summarizes this development process.



**Figure 11.8** *Development of the interventionist: from repetition, via sophisticated control to mutual learning*

## 11.4 Additional results

The empirical study leads to some outcomes that cannot be linked directly to the research questions. In this section these outcomes are presented and discussed.

### *Episodic change initiatives stifle entrepreneurship, pro-activity and ownership*

In all cases in the empirical study, management call for entrepreneurship, pro-activity, and ownership. This seems to be illustrative of numerous companies nowadays. The problem is that just by presenting a change process as something that starts now, one introduces an episodic change that is being imposed on people because management think it is important now. This clearly reveals a Subject-Object perspective. Basically, this means that just the start of the process can stifle the opportunity to realize one's goals. Employees will wait and see (*'They find it necessary that we develop entrepreneurship; let us wait and see'*). This situation uncovers a management dilemma: how to take initiative without stifling employees' initiative?

Typical approaches that stimulate mutual learning from the beginning:

- Management combine advocacy with inquiry (Argyris, 1990; Noonan, 2007; Schwarz, 2002): 'As we have only worked for the same clients with the same services last year, we think we might lose our position in the longer run. That is why we think we have to develop new services and attract new clients. In short, we think we should develop entrepreneurship. Might we be missing relevant information?'
- Management share the dilemma: 'We are aware that just by taking initiative we might stifle yours. We do not like that effect. Let us start finding out how we can organize a process that helps us to improve things together.'

### *Controlling leaders lead to followers and resisters; learning leaders lead to learners*

The empirical evidence of this study lends support to the conclusion that unilateral control leads to dependent and/or resistant employees. This study also illustrates that unilateral control is effective in (dynamically) simple situations, but is not in dynamically complex situations. In the latter situations, unilateral controlling leadership leads to blocked changing, organizing and learning. Here, leaders need to make consistent choices: either hold their beliefs, repeat their actions and accept this leads to recurrent problems (conflicts, resistance, reactivity), or not accept recurrent problems and change their beliefs and actions. If they choose the last option, they have to be able and willing to invest in mutual learning.

There is an interesting relation with Zaleznik's famous article 'Managers and leaders, are they different?' (2004). According to Zaleznik, "managers embrace process, seek stability and control and instinctively try to resolve problems quickly – sometimes before they fully understand a problem's significance. Leaders, in contrast, tolerate chaos and lack of structure and are willing to delay closure in order to understand the issues more fully" (p. 74). This distinction greatly resembles the distinction between unilateral control (aiming at short-term and instrumental solutions) and mutual learning (aiming at inquiry into fundamental problems and long-term solutions). However, whereas this study inquires into managers' development from unilateral

control to mutual learning, Zaleznik considers managers and leaders to have different personalities and organizational positions. Apparently, he makes a sharp separation between managers and leaders.

If one combines the outcomes of this study with Zaleznik's insights, one can argue that management refers especially to the three-quarters of all organization problems that can be solved with a unilateral control model (Argyris, 1983). Leadership is needed for effective changing, organizing and learning, and requires individuals to have the ability to reflect upon their own contribution to recurrent problems, to test their beliefs publicly, to accept they might miss relevant information, to disclose themselves, and to be consistent. This perspective on leadership does not leave room for Zaleznik's separation of managers and leaders, as managers sometimes have to deal with changing and leaders have to (be in) control as well (Van der Vossen, 2007). Apparently, management and leadership can be perceived as different concepts, while managers and leaders are difficult to separate. This perspective on leadership is worth studying in more detail.

#### *Leaders start learning*

The outcomes of the empirical study confirm the insight that leaders have to start changing their contribution to recurrent problems, before they can reasonably expect subordinates to do so. Although the circular patterns show that leaders and subordinates keep recurrent problems alive, all cases illustrate that subordinates start changing their behaviour only after their manager has started. Espoused theories that are inconsistent with theories-in-use stifle management's credibility as employees focus on what managers do, not on what they say. This finding is in line with Argyris (1984, 1990), who argues that one should start with the top, and Weick & Quinn (2004), who argue, "most top managers assume that change is something that someone with authority does to someone who does not have authority. [...] When deep personal change occurs, leaders then behave differently toward their direct reports, and the new behaviours from followers" (p.190).

Still, one could question this line of reasoning, as it seems to be a unilateral perspective in itself and confirms a positional organization and Subject-Object perspective: subordinates will change only if their superior takes initiative (at first). If managers share their reasons to change their behaviour openly with employees, they immediately involve employees in their learning and changing. This way, they stimulate mutual learning that involves employees as well.

#### *'Resistance to change' and 'sense-of-urgency' are top-down beliefs that lead to self-fulfilling prophecies*

This study illustrates the effects of managers' beliefs that employees will show resistance. By labelling behaviour as 'resistance' and 'difficult to manage', one creates circumstances of discomfort and pressure and activates a unilateral control model ('we have to keep things under control'): the manager takes distance, braces himself, persuades, and makes difficult issues undiscussable. This, in turn, leads precisely to the behaviour one is afraid of and activates circular patterns: keeping things under control and making other opinions undebatable leads to 'difficult behaviour', leads to unilateral control, etcetera.

The question is, what is it that one calls resistance? This study focuses on what people openly say and do when their opinion differs from their manager's. Here is where the inconsistency with mutual learning starts. The espoused theory is that we would like valid information, especially about a thing as fundamental as commitment. However, if this valid information is unpleasant and even threatening, this information tends to activate a unilateral control model.

The difficulty in action is to deal with valid information if one perceives this information as threatening. It is easier to manage people who say 'yes' and think 'no', even if a 'yes' is invalid information. Generally, 'positive' (and neutral) persons tend to be perceived as constructive, while critical persons are usually perceived as not constructive. Labelling critical notes as resistance, however, stimulates people to go underground: 'we say yes or we say nothing and after all we just don't do what they expect' (compliance and undergo strategy). This way, management stimulates defensiveness.

This study provides some insights that might be helpful for dealing with these difficult situations from a mutual learning perspective.

First, descend the ladder of inference and make the concept of resistance more concrete:

- why do you expect resistance?
- what exactly do you mean by resistance?
- what examples do you have in the past?
- what exactly happened and how did you act?
- what is the effect of your belief (they will have resistance') on your behaviour?
- what is the effect of that behaviour and are you satisfied with that effect?
- might they have information that you are missing?
- could you explain why they act as they do?
- how do you contribute to their behaviour?
- how could you create an open dialogue instead of unilateral control?

Second, make a consistent choice. One can either keep acting the same as one does and accept some commitment problems, or contribute to changing by reflection on the way one contributes to the situation and discuss the situation openly.

Third, if one wishes to contribute to mutual learning, one has to be open about one's ideas in a way that is testable and accept that employees might have information that is valuable for effectively realizing one's goals. Instead of persuading, one could better share the data that have persuaded oneself in order to give others the chance to persuade themselves. Afterwards, there might still be a conflict of interest or views. A mutual learning approach would be sharing valid information: *'I know we do not all agree now and I know I will disappoint some of you and might even make you defensive, but now I will have to take a decision. I will not ask you to agree and I understand your defensiveness, though I expect you to respect this decision.'*

Related to the resistance to change, mainstream literature argues that change requires a sense of urgency (e.g. Kotter, 2002). The underlying assumption is that individuals will not be willing to change if there is no clear sense of urgency. Just like resistance to change, this seems to be a top-down belief: individuals only change if top management take initiative and put pressure on them through a notion of urgency. Pressure stimulates managers to control their environment and to

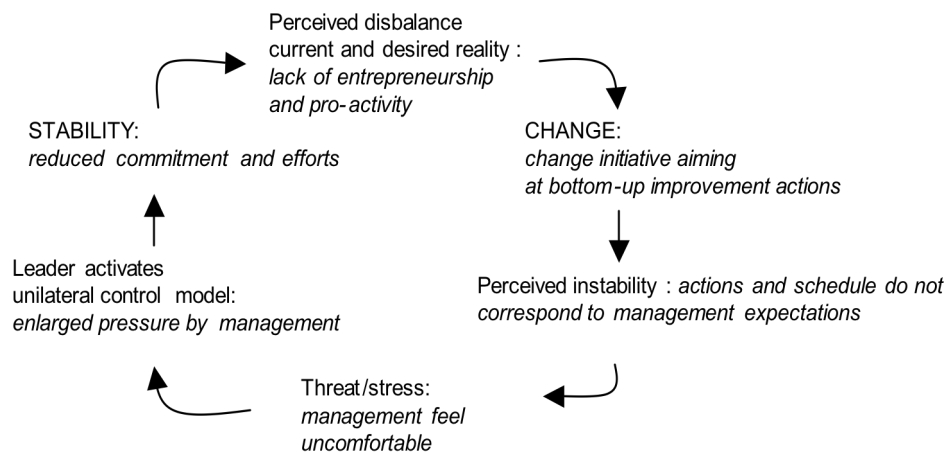


implement instrumental single-loop solutions. From this perspective, a sense of urgency might even have an opposite effect (as well), as this study demonstrates how unilateral control can block changing.

Inquiry into underlying problems that produce symptoms would be hard or even impossible under circumstances of urgency. The concept of urgency seems to fit with unilateral control and single-loop learning; managers might feel comfortable if they can make use of clear urgency. Mutual learning and double-loop learning require a notion of importance.<sup>20</sup> An odd side effect of the concept of urgency is that changing and learning would only be possible if it is (nearly) too late.

### *Episodic change initiatives lead to stability*

The empirical evidence of this study supports the paradox that episodic change initiatives can lead to stability (see figure 2.17). This paradox holds true in change initiatives that relate to behaviour, attitude and interaction (summarized as ‘culture’) as opposed to structure and systems. The empirical study delivers illustrations of top management initiating a change project (e.g. improving entrepreneurship and pro-activity), leading to middle managers taking initiatives (e.g. developing improvement actions and a schedule to implement these actions together with their employees), leading to top management’s discomfort (e.g. they neither like the improvement actions nor the time schedule), leading to controlling actions by management (e.g. putting pressure on the time schedule), leading to stability (e.g. team leaders and employees do not feel committed to the actions and schedule and reduce their efforts). This pattern is summarized in figure 11.9.



**Figure 11.9** *Change leads to stability*

### *Argyris’ organizational learning approach has some challenges*

The theoretical insights of this study heavily rest upon Chris Argyris’ work (e.g. 1990, 2000, 2004). These insights contribute greatly to an understanding of the relation between unilateral control and blocked changing, organizing and learning. Section 3.4 describes a critical reflection upon Argyris’ insights. The empirical study demonstrates three additional challenges. First, the mutual learning model is

<sup>20</sup> The distinction between importance and urgency is borrowed from literature on time management and personal effectiveness. See, for example, Covey, 2004.

challenged by 'power' and 'parties'. This study illustrates that blocked changing can be both cause and effect of thinking in terms of 'parties'. Management talk about 'the employees' and employees about 'management'. Thinking in terms of parties leads to ignorance of individual differences, de-personification (it is relatively easy to say bad things about a party) and a struggle for power. Phenomena like power and parties do play a role in Argyris' work: they are strongly related to unilateral control. However, mutual learning supposes the willingness to learn, while the struggle for power may lead to parties just not willing to learn, not willing to have a dialogue and just wanting the other party to lose or leave. The issue of power is thoroughly discussed by Mastenbroek (1991), who presents an integrative perspective on system and power thinking, and Bradshaw and Boonstra (2004), who introduce four perspectives on power in organizations.

A second challenge concerns the effect of slowing down. Mutual learning presupposes slowing down automatic behaviour. As demonstrated several times in the empirical study, this leads to secondary, non-spontaneous behaviour. It would not be desirable to create a world that is characterized by only this behaviour. A mutual learning model is not only not always required; it seems to be not always desired. A third challenge of Argyris' organizational learning approach is the focus on error and mismatch as a source of learning. As depicted in figure 2.13, Argyris describes single-loop and double-loop learning as corrective loops that start with a mismatch. In line with insights regarding appreciative inquiry (e.g. Cooperrider, 1995, 1997), one could argue that learning can also start with positive results. Conscious reflection on these positive outcomes can contribute to reproduction in other situations. From this perspective, learning is a feedback loop from positive effects to actions and/or governing values that lead to these positive effects. Figure 11.10 combines Argyris' familiar model of single-loop and double-loop learning with 'appreciative learning loops'.

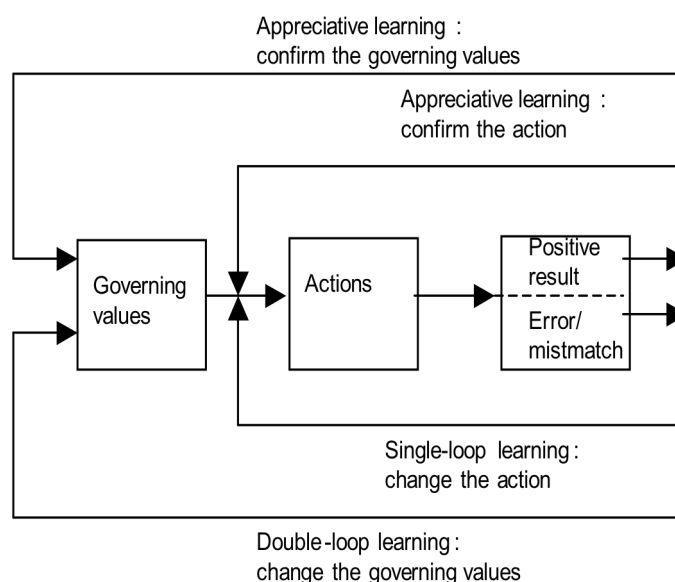


Figure 11.10 Single-loop and double-loop learning combined with 'appreciative learning'

## 11.5 The problem statement and research objectives addressed

The problem statement of this study is formulated as follows:

*How do leaders and their consultants contribute to (de)blocking of dynamically complex change processes?*

Subsequently, this problem statement is translated into six specific objectives. These objectives are addressed below.

**Objective 1.** Collect data and evidence of a dominant unilateral control model by managers (and their consultants).

The theoretical exploration cites many authors who have illustrated a strong inclination of managers to activate a unilateral control model that is characterized by the desire to win, suppress feelings, to avoid testing one's own assumptions, to judge others and to be rational (e.g. Argyris, 1973, 1974, 1982, 1983, 1990, 1991, 1999, 2000, 2004; Argyris, Putnam, McLain Smith, 1985; Drukker, 1999; Drukker & Verhaaren, 2002; Kamsteeg & Koot, 2002; Koot & Sabelis, 2000; Wierdsma, 2004; Werkman, 2006; Senge, 1990).

The collected empirical evidence lends support to this insight. Especially in situations that are threatening or embarrassing, managers as well as their consultants (interventionists) tend to hold a unilateral control model.

**Objective 2.** Develop insight into the expressions of a dominant unilateral control model.

In the theoretical exploration the expressions of a unilateral control model are described thoroughly, leading to a summarising diagnostic model (see figure 2.20) and an operational translation of the expressions (see table 5.1).

The empirical study has been used to validate the diagnostic model. The adjusted model is depicted in figure 11.1.

**Objective 3.** Create insight into the relation between a dominant unilateral control model and blocked changing.

The theoretical exploration describes a number of concepts that are relevant to understand the relation between unilateral control model and blocked changing, organizing and learning. These concepts are

- systems thinking and circular patterns (Senge, 1990; Campbell, Coldicott, Kinsella, 1994; McCaughan, Palmer, 1994; Moeskops, 2004; Werkman, 2006).
- lack of learning and defensiveness (e.g. Argyris, 1990, 2000, 2004).
- self-fulfilling prophecies, self-sealing processes, escalating error (e.g. Argyris, 1990, 2000, 2004).

These concepts contribute to recurrent problems. The empirical study further explores the relation between unilateral control and these recurrent problems. The empirical evidence leads to a number of conclusions, as summarized under research question 2. In short, these conclusions concern

- a description of how management (and consultancy) focus on symptomatic and short-term solutions and block fundamental solutions;
- an overview of typical circular patterns and self-fulfilling prophecies that stem from a dominant Subject-Object perspective of relationships;
- an overview of so-called defensive strategies that block learning and inquiry into the underlying problems that produce the recurrent problems.

The findings confirm the insight that unilateral control is effective in dynamically simple situations and leads to problems in dynamically complex situations. Under the latter circumstances, unilateral control leads to reduction of control. This finding corresponds to Senge (1990): “The illusion of being in control can appear quite real. In hierarchical organizations, leaders give orders and others follow. But giving orders is not the same as being in control. Power may be concentrated at the top but having the power of unilateral decision making is not the same as being able to achieve one’s objectives” (p. 290).

*Objective 4.* Create insight into the practical attainability of employing alternative behaviour in interpersonal interactions.

The theoretical exploration involves a reflection upon Argyris’ theory on organizational learning (section 3.2) that addresses the question of the extent to which managers are able to put mutual learning model (Model II) into practice. Generally, this is perceived as an important issue regarding Argyris’ work (see Ardon and Wassink, 2008). In this reflection it becomes clear that even Argyris is not consistent in his reports regarding this issue, varying from “It will take as much time to learn Model II as it takes to play a middling game of tennis” (1990, p. 95) to “even highly advantaged, graduate-educated, organizationally high-ranking adults have a great deal of difficulty mastering – or simply cannot master - what it is he is teaching” (personal remark, Kegan, 1994, p. 321).

The empirical study demonstrates that managers are able and willing to develop mutual learning skills, if they recognize this will help them to realize their objectives. This is demonstrated by the outcomes regarding research question 2. Still, it is quite fragile, especially because these skills are not enough. In order to contribute to real mutual learning, one has to accept that one really might miss relevant information or one might make a mistake in one’s reasoning. Changing this belief requires double-loop learning and is much more difficult than ‘only’ developing learning skills, especially under circumstances that are threatening or embarrassing. This way, the leader’s development from unilateral control to mutual learning is identical to the interventionist’s development, as depicted in figure 11.7.

This study delivers many illustrations of managers who put the skills into practice and fewer illustrations of managers who openly accept that they might miss information: *‘I thought it was all logical and clear. Now I see your opinions differ from mine. Apparently, it was my logic and clearness.’* These findings demonstrate that managers are able to develop a mutual learning model. Still, the empirical evidence illustrates that it is far from easy for managers and highly dependent on the interventionist’s role. After all, as discussed in section 11.3, most behavioural changes become visible only after specific interventions by the interventionist.

*Objective 5.* Create insight into the interventionist's role in (de-)blocking of changing. The empirical study describes how the interventionist contributes to blocked changing, organizing and learning by holding a unilateral control model. Particularly when the interventionist takes a partner-in-business or management-serving role (Drukker & Verhaaren, 2002), he is vulnerable to unilateral control. The study also gives insight into the specific interventions that contribute to de-blocking changing, organizing and learning.

*Objective 6.* Develop an intervention perspective that supports de-blocking of changing.

The study leads to an overview of interventions that contribute to de-blocking changing, organizing and learning, as summarized in section 11.3. The insights are accompanied by illustrative quotes that are derived from the empirical study. This is in line with Argyris (1990), who argues that advice "should contain the action strategies (e.g. advocate your position in a way that encourages inquiry). Second, it should be accompanied by actual statements that illustrate what you would have to say and do" (p. 87).

In summary, recognising the methodological limitations that are embedded in this study (see section 11.7), all research objectives have been addressed in this study.

## **11.6 Methodological conclusions**

The research methodology of this study is a combination of longitudinal case studies and action research. This combination leads to two main characteristics:

- the interventionist and the interventions are part of the process and part of the study;
- the cases are described during a longer period.

This section addresses a number of conclusions regarding the research methodology.

*Action research is particularly suitable to develop a scientifically based intervention perspective*

According to Eden & Huxham (1996) "it is difficult to justify the use of action research when the same aims can be satisfied using approaches (such as controlled experimentation or surveys) that can demonstrate the link between data and outcomes more transparently. Thus in action research, the reflection and data collection process - and hence the emergent theories - are most valuably focused on the aspects that cannot be captured by other approaches" (p. 536).

Does this study justify the use of action research? The answer seems to be positive. The line of reasoning is as follows. This study confirms Argyris' insight that managers' espoused theory and theory-in-use are often not consistent. Surveys could have worked, if managers' espoused theories regarding their actions had been compared with their subordinates' observations. However, this study aims at

understanding processes instead of instances. This argues for longitudinal case studies with observation of the processes. This research method would have been sufficient if the researcher was considered to be a non-participative observer. However, this study also aims at developing an intervention perspective, which means that the researcher is an interventionist at the same time. The interventionist can no longer act as if he is not playing a role in the process. It is precisely this research aim that justifies the use of action research. Although this research method has some challenges, it seems to be the most appropriate to this study. As Glaser (1992) puts it, the value of action research can be seen in developing and elaborating theory from practice. Or, as a variation of Lewin's famous dictum one could say *'there is nothing so theoretical as a good practice'* (Jaap Boonstra, personal comment, 2008).

*Being both interventionist and researcher requires a thorough learning process and objective checks of data and interpretations*

In action research the interventionist is not a distanced observer. Instead, action research appreciates that the researcher is visible and is expected to have an impact on the experiment (Eden & Huxham, 1996). Or, in other words, the interventionist and interventions are part of the observed process. The empirical study strongly confirms this conception, as illustrated by the circular processes between interventionist and clients. McCaughan and Palmer (1994) say about this circularity: "We talk about a consultant being 'outside' the problem situation, but there are no insides and outsides in this kind of systems thinking. Feedback loops are no respecters of conventional boundaries" (p. 75).

Being both interventionist and researcher requires the ability to describe what happens, including the ineffectiveness of one's interventions, one's own contribution to recurrent problems and one's own defensiveness. As described in this study, a unilateral control model instructs people to defend their position and their line of reasoning, especially under circumstances that can be embarrassing. If one follows this line of reasoning, it is quite plausible that the researcher tends to cover up his ineffective actions as an interventionist and covers up this cover-up. Knowing that these case studies will be published discourages openness about his own defensive reasoning. In order to control this inclination, which would undermine the reliability of the outcomes, four conditions appear to be of great importance:

- the raw data (the narratives) are preferably based on notes by a neutral observer;
- the raw data have to be checked by the client;
- the interpretations have to be checked by an informed expert, who has not participated in the process;
- the researcher has to take distance from the contents of the cases.

In this study, most data are based on literal notes by assistants. Furthermore, clients have studied each case and have confirmed that these narratives correspond with their view. The experiences in this study illustrate that the informed expert has to be very critical of the researcher: *'Are you defending your case? As a researcher, you have to take distance from what you did as an interventionist.'*

*Being part of the process limits the possibility to describe 'objective phenomena'*

The director in one case raises the point that he finds it unpleasant that the research assistant makes notes during meetings. In his perception he becomes too aware of what he says and what he does, which reduces his effectiveness. This view relates directly to an interesting methodological issue: what is the effect of observing on the observed? From a modernist perspective, one can say that observing may lead to a change of the observed phenomena. And in action research one not only observes, but acts directly upon the observed. This view relates to the Hawthorne studies (Mayo, 1933) that led to the finding that observing worker performance leads to short-term improvements. Observing, apparently, leads to a change of the observed<sup>21</sup>. From a postmodernist view (e.g. Boje, 1994) the observer problem seems to dissolve. The question would be whether objective phenomena do exist outside the observer and actor. In this view, by definition, meaning is subjective and is created in interaction.

This study illustrates that the researcher can contribute to a reduced awareness of the fact one is observed. First, in longitudinal case studies the observer's effect seems to become weaker, as people become less aware of the observer (it becomes 'normal' that the interventionist is there). Second, no recorder is used during conversations and meetings, as this way people would become even more aware of what they are saying (see Edmondson, 1996).

### 11.7 Limitations of this study

This study is subject to the common limitations inherent in actions research and (longitudinal) case studies as well as some specific limitations. General limitations and conditions are discussed in section 6.4 'Research design'. In reflection, some additional remarks can be made, which are discussed in this section.

*Unlike the process of exploration of the data, the collection of data is not repeatable*  
The collection of the data in this study is only replicable in the sense that one could use other unique situations to validate the theoretical concepts and explore the research questions. After all, the study consists of three independent cases in different contexts that have all contributed to the research outcomes with a similar research method (Eisenhardt, 1989). The specific interventions, however, cannot be replicated identically, as each situation is unique. This corresponds with findings of Eden and Huxham (1996): "By its very nature, action research does not lend itself to repeatable experimentation; each intervention will be different from the last" (p. 532). It is exactly this reason why criticism has been expressed against action research: lack of repeatability and, thus, lack of rigour (Eden and Huxham, 1996). Other

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<sup>21</sup> In quantum mechanics there is a famous similar phenomenon, the so-called double slit experiment (Feynman, 1988). This experiment illustrates that if electrons - which are considered to be matter - are sent through two slits in a plate, they show an interference pattern that corresponds to waves. In order to understand this result, scientists have tried to observe how pieces of matter can behave like waves. However, as soon as one tries to measure what exactly happens, the interference pattern disappears and the electrons behave like matter. The very act of measuring changes the pattern that is observed, as if matter knows that it is being observed.

scientists argue that action research contributes to rich and in-depth insight that could not be gained in other ways (Whyte, 1991).

Unlike the collection of data, the process of exploration of the data in the development of theory is replicable and capable of being explained to others (Eden and Huxham, 1996). The process from observations to conclusions has been structured as clearly as possible, in order to enlarge the chain of evidence (Yin, 1994) and follows Argyris' ladder of inference (1990): from raw data (transcripts) to interpretations (reflections, single-case analysis) and conclusions (cross-case analysis and conclusions).

*This study proves association between actions and effects, not causality*

This study focuses on the effects of unilateral control and interventions on changing, organizing and learning. By literally describing managers' and interventionists' actions and the responses of others in a large number of specific situations, the relations between action and effects have been explored. However, these relations are not isolated from other influences as in an experimental setting. This way, relations are made plausible, but causal relations are not 'hard'. This study proves association, not causality. These insights correspond to the internal validity of the study (Yin, 1994). Although this is a serious limitation, it should be put into perspective. Causality is difficult to prove, as besides statistical association one has to meet two additional conditions: the one variable must precede the other and other reasonable causes for the effect should be excluded (De Groot, 1981).

*A researcher-interventionist combination challenges external validity and reliability*

As this study aims at exploring processes instead of instances, theories-in-use instead of espoused theories and interactions between interventionist and actors instead of a distanced observer and actors, the preferred research method is a combination of longitudinal case study and action research. Although this seems to be the most effective research method in relation to this subject, there are some challenges.

External validity refers to the extent to which outcomes can be generalized to other situations. Although there are three cases, each case involves a large number of specific situations (mini-cases). Besides, although the cases are characterized by different contexts and histories, the cross-case analysis leads to outcomes that are in line with existing theory. It seems to be plausible that the outcomes can be generalized to other situations (Eisenhardt, 1989). Glaser & Strauss (1967) even argue that theory development does not require many cases. Even one case is sufficient to generate conceptual categories and some cases can be used to confirm the temporary assumptions.

A specific characteristic of this study is the researcher and interventionist being one and the same individual. This leads to the question of the extent to which the outcomes of the intervention perspective can be generalized. By describing the interventions and the effects literally, there is an attempt to separate the individual characteristics of the interventionist from his interventions and their effects. Still, there seems to be a limitation of this study here. A specific issue in relation to the researcher-interventionist combination is the degree to which the data collection and



exploration are without bias, which refers to reliability of the study (Gill & Johnson, 1997). As discussed before, some critical conditions have been met to control a possible bias in observations and interpretations as much as possible. The point of view is that this has been done sufficiently to ensure reliability.

*The scope of this study only partly includes long-term effects*

This study addresses long-term effects of behavioural change and interventions. As this study illustrates, the effects of actions that fit the lower cycle of Senge's (1990) 'shifting the burden' structure are characterized by delay. This argues for a research design that involves longitudinal case studies. All cases are studied during a period of about a year. This appears to be long enough to explore the degree to which one can develop a mutual learning model and to study the effects of adjusted behaviour and interventions. Still, after this period the observed phenomena and processes go on. It seems to be reasonable to suppose that there will be longer-term effects that are beyond the scope of this study. Effects may, for example, relate to sustainability of behavioural shifts and new interactive patterns. This argues for another period of study after a year or two.

*The process of data analysing is subjective and reflective rather than interactive*

In this study the interventionist mainly analyses the data during or after meetings. Sometimes he shares the analysis during the process, sometimes at the end of a session, and sometimes in a following session. In this study, unlike defensive strategies, presenting circular patterns does not lead to resistance by the actors (Werkman, 2006, p. 440). However, it does contribute to a dependent and reactive attitude of actors as the expert role of the interventionist is being emphasized. At this point, the empirical study does not fit the conditions of Research in dynamically complex situations, as summarized in table 6.1: the study can be characterized as unilateral and Subject-Object rather than mutual learning and Subject-Subject. In order to be more consistent with the concept of mutual learning, the intervention method could have involved more elements of interactive analysis like group model building (Vennix, 1998; Rouwette, 2003, Vermaak, 2006, Werkman, 2006). In this method interventionist and actors within the organization build the circular patterns together.

*This study starts from an organizational learning perspective and excludes other perspectives*

The focus of this study is on changing, organizing and learning as opposed to change and organization. This perspective leads to interpretations and conclusions that would not have been found from a different perspective. For example, the outcome 'Resistance to change is a top-down belief that leads to self-fulfilling prophecies' is typically related to an organizational learning perspective. From a power perspective, resistance to change is interpreted quite differently. In the colour approach of De Caluwé and Vermaak (2003) the perspective of this study corresponds most strongly to white change. Inevitably, as with any perspective, this leads to a bias in the line of reasoning.

*Opportunities for triangulation have not been fully exploited*

In table 6.2 the fifteen characteristics of action research, as described by Eden and Huxham (1996) are summarized. Eden & Huxham argue that these standards are hard to achieve, however “what is important is having a sense of the standards that make for good action research and evaluating the research in relation to them” (p. 538-539). Almost all characteristics have been met in this study and are at least publicly testable. The 13<sup>th</sup> condition could have been met more strongly: ‘In action research, the opportunities for triangulation that do not offer themselves with other methods should be exploited fully and reported. They should be used as a dialectical device which powerfully facilitates the incremental development of theory’. In addition to the methods that were used, interviews and/or questionnaires could have been used to test (temporary) conclusions.

## **11.8 Recommendations for future research**

Partly based on the limitations of this study, in this section recommendations for future research are provided.

First, a worthwhile avenue is to further validate the outcomes of this study by a larger number of interventionists. As the diagnostic model and the circular patterns and defensive strategies as well are based upon the observations of one interventionist and researcher, further study could contribute to the question whether these insights are recognisable and actionable in daily practice by other interventionists, and the degree to which they are transferable. Similarly, further research could validate the interventions as described in this study. This way, the outcomes of this study can be separated scientifically from the specific observation and intervention biases of one interventionist.

Second, the outcomes of this study could be verified in a larger number of cases. Although based upon a large number of ‘mini-cases’ (specific situations within the cases), the external validity could be further enlarged this way. Some outcomes, e.g. the defensive strategies, cannot be checked in existing literature, as they have not been described before. This recommendation could well be combined with the first one.

Third, in line with the mutual learning model it is highly recommendable to further explore possibilities to interactively diagnose the recurrent patterns within the organization. Instead of an active subject (interventionist) and passive object (organization members), a Subject-Subject approach of relationships seems to be preferable. An interesting question would be how to involve the guiding principles of mutual learning in an interventionist-client system relationship. This way, the focus would shift from subjective reflective to interactive diagnosing, learning, changing and organizing.

Fourth, although causality is difficult to prove, it would be worthwhile to conduct more in-depth study in order to further isolate the relation between unilateral control and blocked changing. In order to realize this, other possible factors should be analysed

that influence the dependent variable and the relation between the independent and dependent variables (Kerlinger, 1999). Such a study would be an important contribution to the understanding of blocked changing.

Fifth, as the effects of interventions that aim at changing fundamental problems (the lower cycle in Senge's 'shifting the burden' structure) are characterized by delay, further longitudinal data may help understand the effects of interventions and/or leaders' behavioural shifts on changing, organizing and learning in the longer run. Although this empirical study is characterized by longitudinal case studies, it is recommendable to study processes and effects for an even longer period with repetitive interventions.

Sixth, further study is also possible into the specific ways in which leaders could be helped to make a shift from unilateral control to mutual learning. It is not the application of specific skills that appears to be the most difficult step, but the internal acceptance that one might miss information. What specific conditions could interventionists create to facilitate this mental shift? Without doubt, this would require incorporating insights from psychological therapy, coaching and counselling.

Seventh, the new model of organization learning that combines single-loop and double-loop learning with appreciative learning is a basis for further study. How would the concept of appreciative learning be described exactly? What would be the effect on changing, organizing and learning? And how would this kind of learning relate to patterns of organizational defensiveness?

Eight, concepts regarding organizational dynamics and complexity (e.g. Stacey, 2007) could further help to understand patterns that keep organizations from effective changing, organizing and learning. There seem to be several relations between this field of research and the tradition of organizational learning that would be worth exploring.



## 12. Learning to be a reflective practitioner

### 12.1 Introduction

“Action scientists assume that learning is the first and overarching objective for the researcher, the clients and the system in which they are embedded” (Argyris, 1983, p. 16). This assumption is highly applicable to this study. In this chapter I personally reflect on my own learning process as a researcher and interventionist during the course of this thesis.

The empirical study is partly a report of my development as an interventionist and researcher. As a consequence, the outcomes are a reflection of the level that I have reached at the moment I finished. This makes this study a learning study for me in the first place. Learning to be a reflective practitioner.<sup>22</sup>

In the next section I describe the main insights regarding my learning process. This learning process refers strongly to my ability to bring a mutual learning model into practice as an interventionist. The process might be illustrative of what I expect my clients to learn. Most insights became clear when I slowed down the process and became aware of my role at critical moments: my moving moments. In the last section I look forward to the continuation of this process.

### 12.2 Reflections regarding my own role: my moving moments

#### *Learning started with the decision to conduct Ph. D. research*

The very start of my thesis was strongly influenced by my desire to learn. I took a relatively long period to find a research question that I really wanted to know the answer to. The subject of this study gave me much energy from scratch, although I knew that it would appeal strongly to my dedication and energy. Understanding the consequences of Argyris' insights on organizational learning takes time and requires a thorough learning process. Learning to act consistently upon these insights is probably never finished. And, according to Schön (1983), our knowing is *in* our action. The focus of this reflection is on what I have learned in action.

#### *As soon as I enter, I contribute to (blocking) interactive patterns*

The decision to conduct action research contributed strongly to my learning process, as this research approach considers the interventionist to be as much a part of the process as the other parties. I have learned that I hold a deeply embedded belief that a client hires a consultant because he is an objective outsider, who has specific (process) expertise, makes a right analysis and supports a practical solution. This belief corresponds to a unilateral control model and fits routine and single-loop issues that do not threaten individuals, groups, inter-group relations, or organizations.

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<sup>22</sup> See Schön (1983), who describes the challenge for professionals to reflect while they are acting: reflection in action.

However, in other situations unilateral control leads to blocked changing, organizing and learning (Argyris, 1990, 2004), regardless of whether it concerns a manager, employee or interventionist.

More than once, my supervisors stimulated me to involve my own role. Jaap Boonstra reported that he initially found my case descriptions too distanced: *'I miss you and your reasoning.'* Lisa van de Bunt asked me more than once: *'Have you analysed your role in this situation?'* The initial comments of Ernst Drukker, the informed expert who evaluated my cases, were: *'The analyses are good, but boring. Something is missing. [...] You describe situations as an observer who is outside the text. It is too objective, as if you were not involved in the case.'*

*Inquiry into my defensiveness as an interventionist starts with accepting it.*

With the internal acceptance that I am part of the process, my ability to reflect upon my own role in critical situations grew. This reflection gave me insight into my own inconsistency and defensiveness when things become embarrassing or threatening. Most insights came up when I looked at my role as an interventionist from the perspective of researcher. In other words, I needed to take distance to my role as an interventionist to recognize that I took distance to the critical situation. For example, only afterwards did I recognize that I gave feedback to a manager about his distant behaviour during a critical session and his inclination to neglect his own role in the blocked process. While doing so, I took distance as well and didn't involve my own role either. This way, I literally defended my own position.

Another illustrative situation was this manager who assumed he could not be open to his employees about his observations because his employees would lack the competence to reflect. I suggested inquiring into this belief, since it blocks learning and changing. At the same time, I thought this was not going to work, as I believed he would not be able to reflect on his own role. However, I did not share this belief because I did not think this was going to help. In reflection, I learned that I had exactly the same defensiveness as the manager and thus blocked learning and changing. Besides, I learned how complex it is to put into practice what I expect managers to do.

Initially, I did not like the insight that I might contribute to blocked learning and changing. After all, the client hires me to contribute to improvement and as a professional I find it difficult to act ineffectively (see Argyris, 1991). Ernst Drukker has been of great help: *'It is okay to be defensive. Accept defensiveness as something normal, also for you as an interventionist in the cases. However, try to find out what the effects are and how you could contribute to your and others' learning.'* Later, I found out that this advice is completely in line with Argyris (1990, 2000, 2004). Judgements like 'wrong' or 'right' do not contribute to learning. It is better if one inquires into the effects of one's actions and how they contribute to learning. These insights helped me to accept my own defensiveness and, subsequently, inquire into the effects.

*Being vulnerable makes me defensive as a researcher*

Initially, sharing the effects of my interactions in this thesis made me feel vulnerable. After all, I would like to show that I am effective under all circumstances. This aspect of my study has been quite challenging. In my role as a researcher who has described the analysis and effects, I sometimes have felt a tendency to cover up my contribution to blocked learning by not paying too much attention to it or by explaining why this action was understandable under these circumstances. In other words, when I saw, by reflection, ineffective effects of my unilateral control I activated a unilateral control model again and tried to cover these effects up. This way, I protected myself from information that might contribute to my personal learning.

Accepting that defensiveness is 'normal' helped me forward. As to my role as an action researcher, the informed expert has played a pivotal role. Ernst Drukker confronted me with my defensiveness during one of our sessions: *'Are you defending your case? As a researcher, you have to take distance from what you did as an interventionist. Information becomes valid when you can make free choices. That means you need a distance from the cases now. As a researcher, you have to feel responsible only for the analyses, not for what happened in that room. That will help you to look critically and free to your own role as an interventionist.'* After this session I switched the button and succeeded to describe how I sometimes have contributed to blocked learning and changing by my self-censoring, my urge to support my client (being ineffective), and my inclination to defend my position like an (active) expert who is able to impose his analysis on (dependent) others.

*Reflection plays a pivotal role in recognition of unilateral control, defensive strategies and circular patterns*

During this study I have personally followed the learning process as depicted in figure 11.8. Working intensively on the contents of this thesis, my sensitivity to others' unilateral control, defensive strategies and circular patterns grew. Not only in this study, but also in my daily practice as a management consultant, I have experienced a growing ability to address these patterns in action. However, since these patterns often come across as obvious, I sometimes recognize them only in reflection afterwards. I have learned that it is possible and effective to reflect immediately after a specific session and make the reflections debatable in a subsequent session. This is what I call 'delayed feedback'. This experience emphasizes the importance of regular reflection moments.

A next step in the learning process is to recognize my own unilateral control, defensive strategies and contribution to circular patterns. The empirical study, which involves intensive reflection upon my own role, has supported my sensitivity to my own defensiveness. Still, it is far from easy to catch myself in action. Often, I recognize my defensiveness only afterwards. And I probably still miss information regarding my own role. Here, moments of reflection in between sessions are even more important. And, since this would be a way of private learning, the challenge is to inquire into the effects of my actions together with the client.

In the course of this study, I have experienced the difference between developing the skills to help others to inquire into their unilateral control, defensive strategies and

circular patterns on the one hand and to bring mutual learning into practice on the other hand. Mutual learning requires not only the intervention skills, but also the internal acceptance that I might miss relevant information or might make a mistake in my reasoning and therefore my conclusions might be wrong. As a consequence, I have learned that what I expect managers to do is difficult. My own learning process made me less judging and more understanding towards managers who have difficulties in putting a mutual learning model into practice.

#### *Writing and practising contribute to my learning process*

Noonan (2007) writes that, although he is an experienced workshop leader on organizational defensiveness, each time someone talks about this theme he learns again. Just because someone else uses different words or presents the insights from another perspective. I recognize this immediately. Each conversation about this theme delivers new pieces of the jigsaw puzzle. A special learning experience was a master class with Chris Argyris during a Sioo-conference in 2007. Actually seeing and experiencing how he puts his insights into practice was impressive. This session inspired me to write a paper on what he really does in action (Ardon and Wassink, 2008). Furthermore, I have used some of his literal questions in daily practice as a consultant. Some of them were brilliant in my eyes, for example 'How do I know your conclusion is right?', 'How do you know my conclusion is right?', 'What theory do you use that leads you to this conclusion?' and 'I am trying to find data to disbelieve you; could you help me?'

I have learned that some activities contribute greatly to my development process. First, each time I read and write about this theme I gain better insight into the concepts and how they *could* work out in action. Second, my daily practice as a consultant is a rich source of inquiry into defensiveness, and offers a great opportunity to find out how the concepts *do* work out in action. Third, I am very glad I joined a supervision group on Argyris' work. Practicing with other professionals has a high impact on my learning process.

### **12.3 Path forward**

This thesis is a reflection of where I am now regarding my cognitive comprehension of and contribution to the field of organizational learning, my development as a practitioner who tries to put these insights into practice and my role as a researcher. This thesis represents a milestone in my ongoing learning process.

As a researcher, I have the ambition to contribute further to the field of organizational learning and particularly the role of the interventionist. I would like to contribute to bridging the gap between scientific knowledge and daily management practice. As a practitioner, my challenge is to further develop my sensitivity to others' and my own defensiveness in action and my skills to craft effective interventions. This will require the ability to slow down in action and recognize the moments that are important to learning: *moving moments*.



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## Samenvatting (Summary in Dutch)

### **Moving moments<sup>23</sup>**

#### *Leiderschap en interventies in dynamisch complexe veranderprocessen*

**In veranderprocessen gaat doorgaans veel aandacht uit naar de aanpak: met welke stappen gaan we van de huidige naar de gewenste situatie? In de praktijk blijken stagnaties in veranderprocessen hun oorsprong echter vaak te hebben in de dagelijkse interacties die zich onafhankelijk van de veranderaanpak voltrekken. Zo komt bijvoorbeeld van versterkt ondernemerschap weinig terecht als mensen met afwijkende ideeën steevast van hun ongelijk worden overtuigd. De focus van dit proefschrift is op de dagelijkse interacties tussen managers, medewerkers en adviseurs en hoe deze samenhangen met het (de)blokkeren van veranderprocessen.**

### **Probleemstelling**

Dit proefschrift gaat niet over routinematige veranderingsprocessen, maar over situaties waarin veranderingen maar niet van de grond komen en waarbij steeds dezelfde moeilijkheden terugkeren ondanks goedbedoelde interventies. Senge (1990) spreekt hier van dynamische complexiteit. Typische voorbeelden zijn moeizame pogingen om ondernemerschap en persoonlijke verantwoordelijkheid te stimuleren, terugkerende weerstandspatronen en hardnekkige problemen in de communicatie tussen management en medewerkers. De studie analyseert hoe deze problemen zich in dagelijkse interacties ontwikkelen en in stand worden gehouden.

De probleemstelling van deze studie is:

*Hoe dragen leiders en hun adviseurs bij aan het (de)blokkeren van dynamisch complexe veranderprocessen?*

### **Theoretische verkenning**

#### *Eenzijdige beheersing als dominant model*

Deze studie bouwt voort op de wetenschappelijke traditie van organisatieleren en systeemdenken. In dagelijkse interacties gaat veel invloed uit van het door Argyris beschreven eenzijdige beheersingsmodel en het effect daarvan op veranderprocessen. Argyris (1990, 1995, 2000, 2004) heeft veelvuldig geschreven over de inconsistentie tussen wat managers zeggen (over verandering) en wat ze

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<sup>23</sup> Deze titel laat zich niet vertalen zonder verlies van de dubbele betekenis. *Moving moments* verwijst naar de kleinste analyse-eenheid van deze studie. Om kenmerkende patronen in de interacties te herkennen, wordt het proces vertraagd totdat kenmerkende momenten langzaam voorbij komen. Dit zijn vaak belangrijke en aangrijpende momenten voor de effectiviteit van de interacties: *moving moments*.

werkelijk doen (in dagelijkse interacties). Argyris maakt onderscheid tussen praattheorie (*espoused theory*) en gebruikstheorie (*theory-in-use*). Eerstgenoemde theorieën worden manifest wanneer we praten over intenties, wanneer we plannen bespreken of opschrijven. Gebruikstheorieën kunnen worden beschouwd als programma's die ons daadwerkelijke gedrag aansturen en manifest worden 'in actie'. Volgens Argyris zijn onze praattheorieën en gebruikstheorieën vaak niet consistent. Volgens Argyris volgt verreweg de meerderheid van de mensen eenzelfde gebruikstheorie, namelijk die van het eenzijdig beheersingsdenken. Deze gebruikstheorie instrueert individuen eenzijdig te beheersen, te winnen en mensen niet overstuur te maken. Het zet aan tot overtuigen en overreden en, indien nodig, tot het voorkomen van gezichtsverlies.

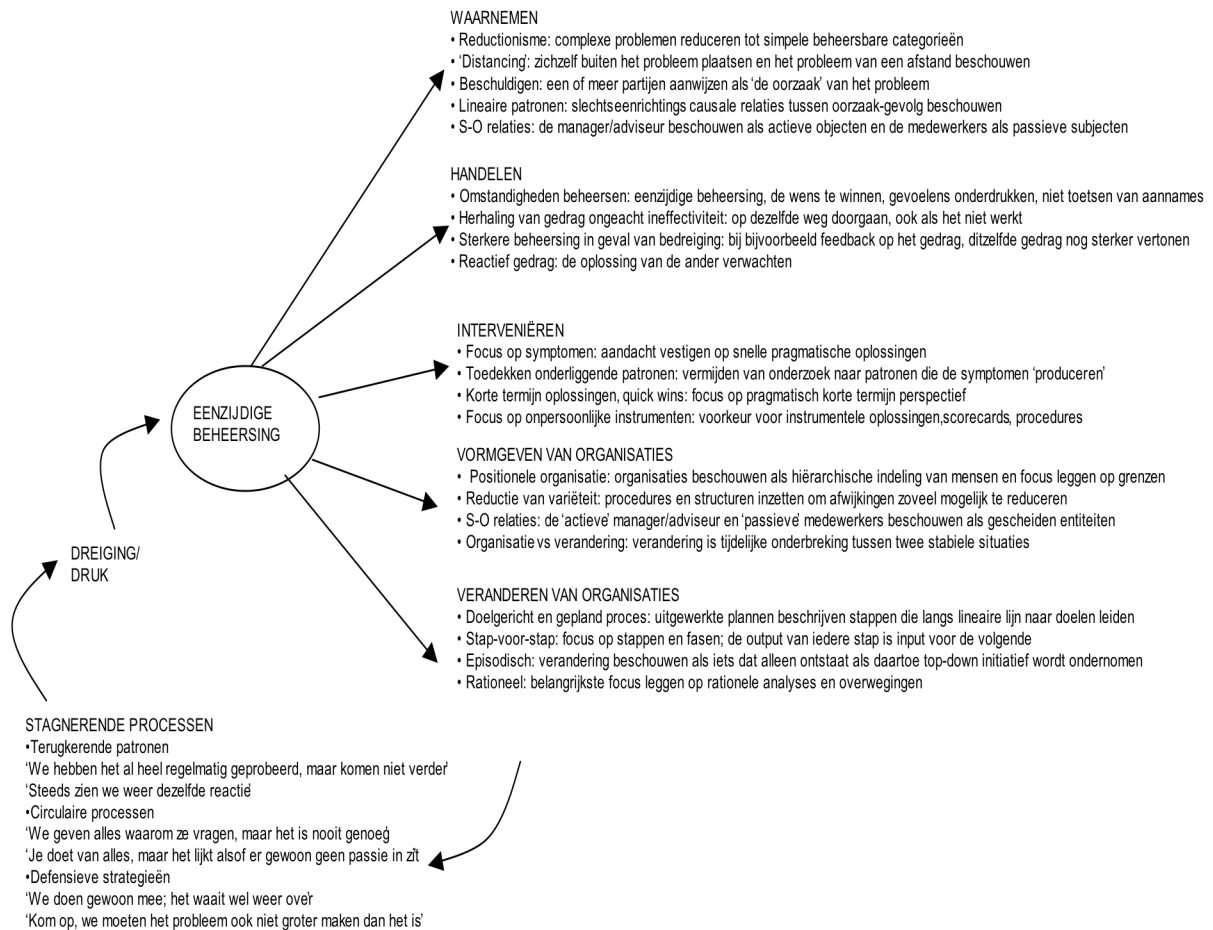
Het belangrijkste doel van het beheersingsmodel ligt voor de hand: de zaak in de hand houden, ofwel 'in control' zijn. De theoretische verkenning in dit proefschrift leert dat de consequenties van een dergelijk model veel verder gaan dan het eerst voor de hand liggende gedrag van 'de touwtjes strak houden' en 'gehoorzaam gedrag' afdwingen. Eenzijdig beheersingsdenken van managers uit zich in hun manier van

- waarnemen van (organisatie)problemen
- handelen in interactie met de omgeving
- interveniëren in veranderprocessen
- vormgeven van organisaties
- veranderen van organisaties.

Bij de verkenning van deze uitingen en hun invloed op veranderprocessen komen twee aspecten van stagnerende veranderprocessen regelmatig terug. Het eerste aspect is zogenaamde circulariteit (zie bijvoorbeeld Senge, 1990). Er is sprake van een circulair patroon indien bepaald gedrag van een persoon leidt tot bepaald gedrag van een ander, dat op zijn beurt weer het gedrag van de eerste versterkt.

Bijvoorbeeld: een manager neemt veel initiatief, wat ertoe leidt dat zijn medewerkers zich afwachtend opstellen, wat ertoe leidt dat de manager nog meer initiatief neemt. Men blijft hangen in een dergelijk circulair patroon zolang men niet leert hoe men er zelf aan bijdraagt. Zo ontstaan terugkerende problemen. Een tweede aspect van stagnerende veranderprocessen, zogenaamde defensiviteit, blokkeert dat leerproces. Defensieve routines (Argyris, 1990, 2000, 2004) zijn acties die erop gericht zijn te voorkomen dat een of meer individuen in een organisatie dreiging of schaamte ervaren. Tegelijkertijd weerhouden ze mensen ervan om de oorzaken van mogelijke dreiging of schaamte aan te pakken. Bijvoorbeeld, als je ineffectief hebt gehandeld, probeer je dit onopgemerkt te laten en geef indien nodig omstandigheden of een ander de schuld. En als je ziet dat iemand zijn ineffectiviteit probeert toe te dekken, laat je dit onbesproken. Beide gevallen blokkeren leren; in het eerste geval je eigen leerproces, in het tweede geval dat van de ander.

Figuur 1 vat deze uitingen van een eenzijdig beheersingsmodel en de consequenties voor de veranderprocessen samen. De uitingen van een beheersingsmodel leiden tot stagnerende processen, die te herkennen zijn aan terugkerende patronen en circulaire processen. Doordat dezelfde symptomen steeds weer terugkomen, ontstaat druk voor de manager. Deze druk activeert vervolgens een eenzijdig beheersingsmodel.



**Figuur 1:** Uitingsvormen en consequenties van eenzijdige beheersing

**Alternatieve leidende principes: de-blokkeren van veranderen, organiseren en leren**

Een eenzijdig beheersingsmodel stimuleert ons te denken in termen van episodische verandering, wat een periode van (geplande) instabiliteit is tussen de huidige stabiele organisatie en de gewenste stabiele organisatie. Weick & Quinn (1999) introduceren daarnaast het concept van continu veranderen, dat direct aanhaakt op onze dagelijkse interacties waarin we bijdragen aan organiseren en veranderen van onze omgeving. Waar verandering en organisatie gescheiden entiteiten zijn, kunnen (continu) veranderen en organiseren niet van elkaar gescheiden worden. Het dagelijkse veranderen kan bovendien niet los worden gezien van leren. In plaats van te spreken over verandering en organisatie (macroniveau), richt dit proefschrift zich op interactieve processen van veranderen, organiseren en leren (microniveau). Ongeacht de geselecteerde veranderbenadering, kan eenzijdige beheersing leiden tot geblokkeerd veranderen, organiseren en leren

Volgens Argyris (1983) kan ongeveer driekwart van de organisatieproblemen worden opgelost met een eenzijdig beheersingsmodel. Deze problemen kunnen worden omschreven als relatief routinematige onderwerpen die niet bedreigend zijn voor individuen, groepen, inter-groep relaties of organisaties. In andere situaties leidt

eenzijdige beheersing tot terugkerende patronen en circulaire processen. Om veranderen, organiseren en leren te de-blokkeren, introduceert Argyris het tweezijdig leren model. De sturende waarden van tweezijdig leren zijn geldige informatie, geïnformeerde, vrije keuze en (persoonlijke) verantwoordelijkheid voor effectieve implementatie. Waar eenzijdige beheersing leidt tot het onbespreekbaar maken van informatie, gedachten en gevoelens die niet goed uitkomen, is tweezijdig leren er juist op gericht deze aan de orde te stellen en te onderzoeken (geldige informatie). Op basis van deze informatie kan men openlijk echte keuzes maken, waarvoor men zich ook verantwoordelijk kan voelen.

#### *Rol van de interventionist*

Op basis van de literatuurstudie kan worden geconcludeerd dat ook adviseurs geneigd zijn een eenzijdig beheersingsmodel te hanteren, wat hen stimuleert hun cliënten te ondersteunen in het creëren van processen die leiden tot geblokkeerd veranderen, organiseren en leren. De theoretische verkenning laat zien dat de meerderheid van de literatuur over de rol van adviseurs (of interventionisten) focust op methoden en technieken. Hier lijkt een overeenkomst te bestaan met managers die al dan niet bijdragen aan veranderen met hun dagelijkse interacties, ongeacht de door hen geselecteerde verandermethode. Evenzo, ongeacht de geselecteerde interventiemethoden of technieken, dragen interventionisten al dan niet bij aan veranderen met hun dagelijkse interacties. Zodra een interventionist een 'systeem' binnenkomt, maken zijn interacties er onderdeel van uit. Als gevolg, kunnen zij bijdragen aan de problemen die hun cliënten ervaren.

### **Het empirisch onderzoek**

Op basis van de theoretische verkenning zijn de onderstaande onderzoeksvragen geformuleerd voor het empirisch onderzoek.

1. In welke mate zijn de uitingen van eenzijdige beheersing zichtbaar in interacties?
2. Hoe hangt eenzijdige beheersing samen met (de-)blokkeren van veranderen, organiseren en leren? Deze vraag is vertaald in vier specifieke vragen.
  - Hoe dragen uitingen van eenzijdige beheersing bij aan terugkerende problemen?
  - Welke circulaire patronen zijn zichtbaar?
  - Welke defensieve routines zijn zichtbaar?
  - Hoe dragen leiders bij aan het de-blokkeren van veranderen, organiseren en leren?
3. Hoe dragen interventies bij aan het (de-)blokkeren van veranderen, organiseren en leren?

Het empirisch onderzoek is een combinatie van longitudinale casestudies en actieonderzoek. Door direct observeerbare data (Argyris, 1990, 2000) te verzamelen in drie longitudinale case studies, kan worden geanalyseerd wat managers, medewerkers en consultants zeggen en doen, in hoeverre en hoe hun interacties worden gestuurd door een eenzijdig beheersingsmodel, hoe zij al dan niet bijdragen aan veranderen, organiseren en leren en hoe interventies de interacties op langere termijn beïnvloeden. Kenmerkend van actieonderzoek is dat de rol van alle actoren,



dus ook de interventionist zelf, onderwerp van studie zijn. In de analyse worden de interacties als het ware 'vertraagd', om de patronen te herkennen en begrijpen, belangrijke momenten te herkennen en hun invloed in te zien op het veranderen. Deze langzaam bewegende en vaak aangrijpende momenten zijn de kleinste analyse-eenheid in deze studie: *moving moments*.

## Conclusies

De conclusies van het onderzoek hebben betrekking op de onderzoeksvragen, enkele aanvullende bevindingen en de onderzoeksmethodologie. In onderstaande samenvatting ligt de nadruk op de onderzoeksvragen.

*1. In welke mate zijn de uitingen van eenzijdige beheersing zichtbaar in interacties?*  
Deze onderzoeksvraag heeft tot doel het diagnosemodel (figuur 1) te valideren.

Uit het empirisch onderzoek blijkt dat Vormgeven en Veranderen van organisatie van een andere orde zijn dan Waarnemen, Handelen en Intervenieren. Eerstgenoemde zijn vooral zichtbaar aan het begin van (episodische) veranderprocessen en verwijzen naar macro-niveau, waar beslissingen genomen worden over veranderaanpak en organisatie-inrichting. Waarnemen, Handelen en Intervenieren zijn zichtbaar in dagelijkse interacties (micro-niveau). Het zijn voornamelijk deze uitingen die circulair samenhangen met gestagneerde verandering en dreiging/druk, zoals in figuur 1. In een aangepast diagnostisch model van de uitingen van eenzijdige beheersing is dit circulaire proces verwijderd. De vijf uitingen zijn ongewijzigd.

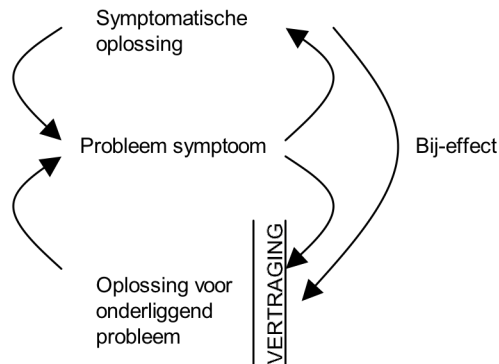
*2. Hoe hangt eenzijdige beheersing samen met (de-)blokkeren van veranderen, organiseren en leren?*

Het doel van deze onderzoeksvraag is evidence-based inzicht te verkrijgen in de effecten van eenzijdige beheersing op veranderen, organiseren en leren.

Onderstaand worden de belangrijkste bevindingen samengevat.

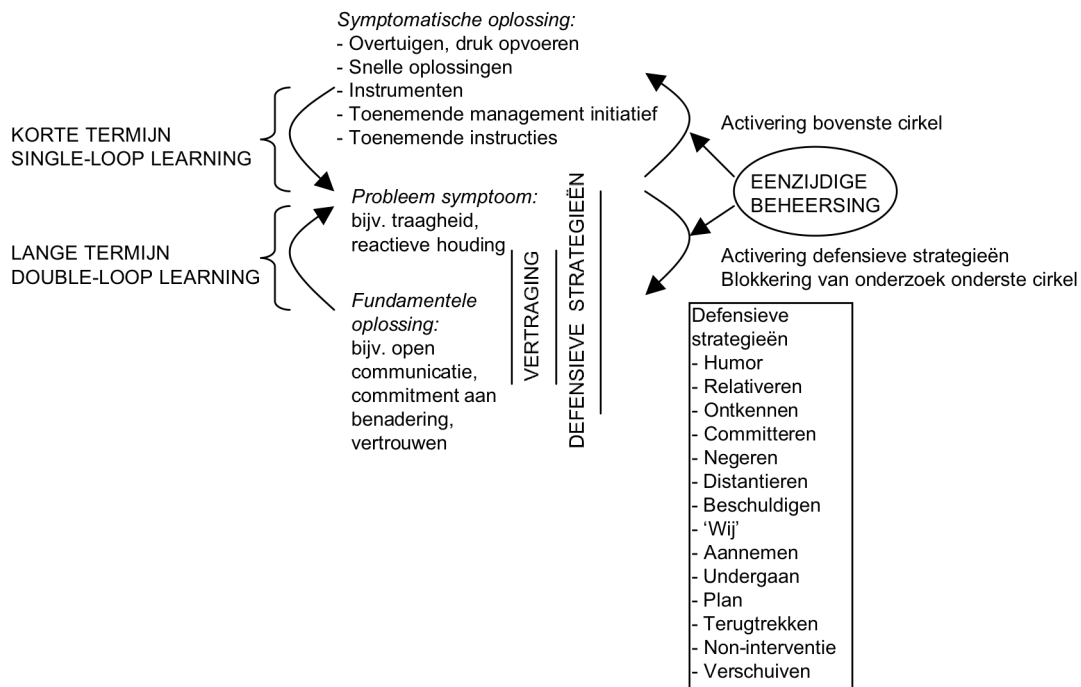
- Eenzijdige beheersing stimuleert symptomatische oplossingen en blokkeert fundamentele oplossingen

Senge (1990) stelt dat als een probleem moeilijk op te lossen is ongeacht vele pogingen en als dezelfde patronen keer op keer optreden, het waarschijnlijk is dat onderliggende 'balancerende processen' verandering blokkeren. Senge introduceert de zogenaamde 'shifting the burdens' structuur: met een symptoom-oplossing wordt op de korte termijn het symptoom gereduceerd (bovenste loop). Hierdoor neemt de noodzaak af om een oplossing te vinden voor het onderliggende probleem (onderste loop); dit onderliggende probleem zal op langere termijn dezelfde symptomen blijven produceren (zie figuur 2).



Figuur 2 'Shifting the burden'

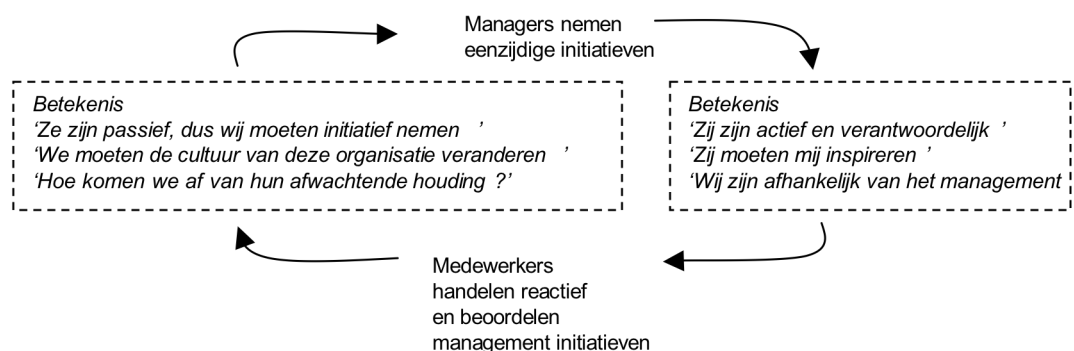
Deze 'shifting the burden' structuur bewijst in deze studie zijn waarde bij het begrijpen van de relatie tussen eenzijdige beheersing en geblokkeerd veranderen, organiseren en leren. Eenzijdige beheersing stimuleert activiteiten in de bovenste cirkel. Typische voorbeelden zijn snelle instrumentele oplossingen en verhogen van druk in geval van moeilijkheden. Eenzijdige beheersing activeert ook defensieve strategieën die oplossingen voor het onderliggende probleem blokkeren. Figuur 3 vat deze bevindingen samen.



Figuur 3 Eenzijdige beheersing stimuleert symptomatische oplossingen en blokkeert fundamentele oplossingen

- Eenzijdige beheersing leidt tot circulaire patronen en self-fulfilling prophecies

Deze studie laat zien dat leiders vanuit eenzijdige beheersing geneigd zijn een Subject-Object perspectief van relaties te hanteren. In dit perspectief beschouwen leiders zichzelf als degenen die op basis van hun positie en hun veronderstelde kennis veranderingen kunnen opleggen aan medewerkers. Om dit effectief te laten zijn, dienen medewerkers zich afhankelijk en reactief op te stellen (Hosking, 2004). Inconsistentie ontstaat als deze houding van medewerker vervolgens als onwenselijk wordt beschouwd. Het empirisch onderzoek toont aan dat dit perspectief leidt tot circulaire processen en self-fulfilling prophecies, zoals weergegeven in figuur 4.



*Figuur 4 Subject-Object perspectief leidt tot circulaire processen*

Het empirisch onderzoek heeft 11 specifieke circulaire processen aangetoond die alle uitingen zijn van het Subject-Object perspectief en bijdragen aan stagnatie van veranderen (bijlage 5 geeft een overzicht).

- Eenzijdige beheersing leidt tot defensieve strategieën

Deze studie illustreert verschillende specifieke voorbeelden van defensiviteit die met enige regelmaat zichtbaar zijn. Hiervoor is de term 'defensieve strategieën' geïntroduceerd. Defensieve strategieën zijn erop gericht gevoelige onderwerpen onbespreekbaar te maken en te voorkomen dat een of meer individuen in een organisatie dreiging of schaamte ervaren. Dit betekent dat ineffectiviteit niet als bron wordt gebruikt om openlijk te onderzoeken en van te leren, maar veeleer onbespreekbaar wordt gemaakt. Als gevolg gaat men door op dezelfde weg waarvan men meer of minder bewust weet dat deze ineffectief is, maar voelt men zich er afnemend verantwoordelijk voor. Typische voorbeelden van gevoelige onderwerpen in deze studie zijn beperkt commitment van medewerkers aan de veranderdoelen van hun baas en de onveilige sfeer in het management team. Zoals uit figuur 3 blijkt, staan defensieve strategieën de oplossing voor onderliggende problemen in de weg. Het empirisch onderzoek heeft geleid tot de vaststelling van 14 specifieke defensieve strategieën. Enkele voorbeelden:

- Committeer strategie: als je baas je overreedt je te committeren, zeg je dat je je committeert ongeacht of het echt zo is ('O.k., ik doe mee').
- Beschuldig strategie: als je handelen/benadering niet effectief is, beschuldig je de omstandigheden en/of anderen ('medewerkers willen gewoon niet veranderen', of 'managers willen gewoon niet naar ons luisteren').

- Relatieve strategie: als de situatie bedreigend of ongemakkelijk is, relativeer het probleem totdat het weer hanteerbaar is ('we moeten het niet erger maken dan het is').
  - Non-interventie strategie: maak andermans ineffectiviteit niet bespreekbaar, opdat zij dat bij jou ook niet doen ('ik weet dat hij erg druk is, dus ik kan het hem niet kwalijk nemen dat hij zich niet aan de afspraak heeft gehouden').
  - Humor strategie: als de situatie bedreigend of ongemakkelijk is, maak een grap en verander van onderwerp ('je kunt het niet helpen, je bent gewoon veel te oud om te veranderen').
- Leiders kunnen gestagneerd veranderen, organiseren en leren weer vlot trekken. Het empirisch onderzoek toont aan leiders in staat zijn eenmaal gestagneerde processen weer vlot te trekken middels specifieke (gedrags)alternatieven. Deels hebben deze te maken met het ontdekken hoe zij zelf bijdragen aan terugkerende symptomen, deels met het actief onderzoeken van oplossingen voor onderliggende problemen. Leiders brengen eerstgenoemde gemakkelijker in praktijk dan laatstgenoemde. In tabel 1 staan enkele gedragingen samengevat.

Reflectie op de wijze waarop men bijdraagt aan terugkerende probleem symptomen

- Herkennen van circulaire processen, inclusief de eigen rol.
- Zichtbaar maken van circulariteit aan andere betrokkenen in het patroon.
- Openlijk reflecteren op de wijze waarop men bijdraagt aan terugkerende problemen.
- Zelf nemen van initiatief tot ander gedrag.

Actief onderzoek van oplossingen voor onderliggende problemen

- Confronteren van gevoelige onderwerpen.
- Confronteren van defensieve strategieën.
- Onderzoeken van onderliggende patronen.
- Delen van valide informatie die men geneigd is voor zich te houden.

*Tabel 1 Leiders' deblokkerende percepties, gedragingen en interventies*

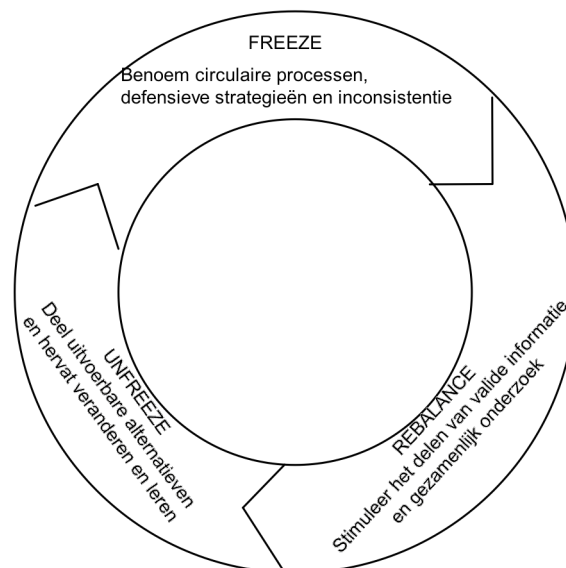
Het empirisch onderzoek laat zien dat bovenstaande gedragingen leiden tot het deblokkeren van veranderen, organiseren en leren. Bijvoorbeeld, ondergeschikten gaan mee in het bespreken van de eigen bijdrage aan terugkerende problemen en maken circulariteit en defensieve strategieën in het team bespreekbaar.

### *3. Hoe dragen interventies bij aan de-blokken van veranderen, organiseren en leren?*

Het doel van deze onderzoeksvraag is een interventie perspectief te ontwikkelen dat bijdraagt aan het de-blokken van veranderen, organiseren en leren.

Bij de analyse van de effecten van de interventies is vastgesteld dat ook de interventionist geneigd is een eenzijdig beheersingsmodel te activeren indien de spanning toeneemt. Typische voorbeelden zijn het benadrukken dat 'alles onder controle is', de eigen toegevoegde waarde bewijzen met (onmiddellijke) analyses and (symptomatische) oplossingen en het onbespreekbaar houden van de eigen gedachten over de ineffectiviteit van de cliënt om diens gezicht te redden. Eenzijdige controle door de interventionist kan, net als bij managers, leiden tot circulaire patronen en defensieve strategieën.

De mainstream literatuur over episodische verandering focust op factoren die verandering blokkeren en condities voor effectieve verandering. Deze studie illustreert hoe managers praten over verandercondities en –methoden terwijl ze tegelijkertijd op zo’n manier waarnemen, handelen en interveniëren dat ze processen van veranderen, organiseren en leren doen blokkeren. Dit leidt tot een interventieperspectief dat zich niet richt op verandermethoden en –aanpakken (macroniveau), maar ingrijpt op het niveau van dagelijkse interacties (microniveau). Daarmee sluit het interventieperspectief aan op de theorie rondom ‘continu veranderen’. Waar episodische verandering stoelt op Lewins dictum van ‘unfreeze, transition, freeze’, zijn interventies inzake continu veranderen gebaseerd op de volgorde ‘freeze, rebalance, unfreeze’ (Weick & Quinn, 1999). *Freezing* betekent in dit verband het zichtbaar maken van hoe men bijdraagt aan stagnerende veranderprocessen. *Rebalancing* betekent het stimuleren van reflectie op de manier waarop men bijdraagt aan stagnatie en van vrije en geïnformeerde keuzes. *Unfreezing* verwijst naar het helpen om deze keuzes in praktijk te brengen en het proces van veranderen, organiseren en leren te herstellen. Daarmee ligt de focus van deze interventietheorie op het opsporen en wegnemen van blokkades. De interventietheorie is samengevat in het zogenaamde interventiewiel, zoals is weergegeven in figuur 5. De figuur laat zien dat interveniëren niet een tijdelijke onderbreking is van het proces van veranderen, organiseren en leren, maar er steeds onderdeel van uitmaakt. Hiermee komen interventies los te staan van de ‘alwetende’ interventionist, die is gebaseerd op een Subject-Object perspectief.



Figuur 5 Interventie wiel: continue herhaling van freeze, rebalance en unfreeze

Onderstaand overzicht vat de interventies samen die in het empirisch onderzoek effectief bleken. De interventies zijn ondergebracht onder de termen *freeze*, *rebalance* en *unfreeze*.

#### Freeze

- Circulariteit delen en manager/medewerkers helpen te reflecteren op hun bijdrage.
- Inconsistentie neutraal confronteren.
- Defensieve strategieën bespreekbaar maken.

#### Rebalance

- Stimuleren tot onderzoek van eigen veronderstellingen en acties.
- Uitnodigen valide informatie te delen die men geneigd is voor zich te houden.
- De concepten rondom wederzijds leren delen.
- Delen wat men geneigd is voor zich te houden omtrent het effect van andermans acties.
- Valide informatie delen omtrent hoe men zelf bijdraagt aan de problemen.
- (Tijds)druk helpen reduceren.

#### Unfreeze

- Alternatieve aanpakken delen en deze actionable maken.

*Tabel 2 Interventies gericht op deblokken van veranderen, organiseren en leren*

Naast de onderzoeksvragen zijn enkele aanvullende conclusies getrokken. Deze hebben onder meer betrekking op de effecten van episodische verandering op ondernemerschap en eigenaarschap van medewerkers, op de vraag of leiders moeten starten met gedragsverandering, op het top-down karakter van concepten als 'weerstand tegen verandering' en 'benadrukken van verandernoodzaak' en enkele beperkingen van Argyris' benadering van organisatieleren.

Ook ten aanzien van de onderzoeksmethodologie is een aantal conclusies getrokken. Alhoewel actieonderzoek de meest passende methode is zodra ook de interventionist en diens interventies zelf onderwerp van studie zijn, kent het een aantal uitdagingen. De combinatie van interventionist en onderzoeker in één persoon vraagt een intensief leerproces en objectieve checks van data en interpretaties. Immers, als de onderzoeker achteraf de effectiviteit van de interventionist onderzoekt, kan sprake zijn van een bias. Het onderzoek leert dat hierop kan worden gecontroleerd door data bij voorkeur door een neutrale observant te laten noteren, deze te laten checken door de cliënt en de interpretaties te laten checken door een welingelichte expert. De onderzoeker zal moeten leren afstand te nemen van zijn rol als interventionist en ineffectiviteit te beschouwen als valide en leerzame informatie. Dit proefschrift sluit af met een persoonlijke reflectie van de onderzoeker op dit leerproces. De reflectie gaat vooral in op de manier waarop de onderzoeker heeft leren omgaan met zijn eigen defensieve patronen in zijn rol als onderzoeker en interventionist. Voor deze reflectie was een vertraging van de geanalyseerde processen onontbeerlijk.

Zo kreeg ik zicht op mijn eigen *moving moments*.

## Appendix 1 Narratives of moving moments 1

### Period 1: start of the study

#### Reflection 1

1.1

#### Approach

Based on the available information and his assumptions, the interventionist develops an approach that he shares with the management team.

##### *Raw data regarding the situation*

- Perceived shortcomings in information exchange between management and employees
- Perceived distance between management and employees
- Experienced fear by employees

##### *Interventionist's assumptions regarding 'the situation'*

- Meaning of observations is unclear as yet: what does 'insufficient information' really mean?
- Perceived problems recur time after time. Parties seem to keep the patterns alive. Typical pitfalls:
  - isolating 'the problem' and introduce a short term solution; it is the patterns that are important
  - covering the communication problems by instruments and further investigation

##### *Interventionist's assumptions regarding 'the approach'*

- As several instrumental approaches did not lead to improvement and considering the outcomes of the interviews with employees, this does not seem to be an instrumental problem and thus an instrumental approach does not fit. In order to gain insight into how management and employees contribute to recurrent problems, a 'learning' approach is needed
- In order to make learning and changing possible, an approach should contribute to taking personal responsibility (by everyone) instead of blaming
- Personal commitments instead of freedom of obligations
- Unlike the director's suggestion, mingling with employees by the interventionist and communication about 'the problems' is a bypass of the communication problems between management and employees. As a consequence, an approach should contribute to direct communication between management and employees
- Improvement requires willingness of management *and* employees to reflect on their own role
- The approach should not confirm existing patterns: instead of covering problems up, they should be made debatable
- Communication (improvement) is a responsibility of the line organization.

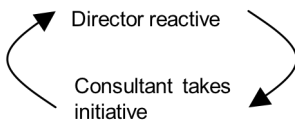
##### *Approach as shared with management*

- Start with top management: discuss approach *and* consequences for their own role (compare Argyris (1984, 1990), who argues that one should start with the top).
- Follow the 'cascade': director and management team, management team members with their teams, etcetera. This approach enables direct communication between managers and their employees and gives the opportunity to organize reflection and learning about the way one contributes to the communication problems.
- Each department gets a team coach, who should support reflection and learning.
- Each manager develops a suitable approach for his/her department in consultation with the team coach, in order to feel responsible for the change process in his/her own department.
- Before and after each session the manager has a feedback session with the team coach about the communication patterns and his contribution. The underlying belief is that the team coach can ask questions and give feedback in order to enable reflection and learning.

- Regular progress meetings with director, individual managers and management teams contribute to keeping things result-oriented.
- Evaluation after a couple of months.

## Reflection 2

### Period 2: further investigation of director and management team

Meeting with director and HR manager: change process as an adventure		1.2
In a meeting, director, HR manager and interventionists elaborate on the process, partly as a preparation of a special two-hour meeting with the management team. The director does not want an instrumental approach.		
<p>Dir: what are we going to discuss? I see that you have prepared this meeting? (joking, watching HR manager's notes)</p> <p>HR: yes, I have prepared. We're going to talk about the communication project. Haven't you prepared?</p> <p>Dir: what have you got there? Oh, the proposal. It is all in my head (then he waits to see who is going to start – looks at the interventionists).</p> <p>Int: I have prepared an agenda.</p> <p>[.....]</p> <p>Int: this process is about communication. How would you like to communicate about the process?</p> <p>Dir: I want no planned communication and no instruments. That is exactly what we have done in the past. I perceive this process as an adventure. At certain moments you and your colleagues will suddenly be there during meetings and say that you are only there to listen a while. People may be confused. That's okay. Let us see what happens.</p> <p>HR: But shan't we bring in more structure?</p> <p>Dir: Let's watch out for another instrumental approach. Let's just start an open process.</p> <p>[.....]</p> <p>Int: We will join meetings and share our observations</p>	<p>C process (D)</p> <p>C planned C step-by-step</p> <p>C process (D)</p>	<p><i>Director behaves reactively. This behaviour is being reinforced by the interventionist in a circular process.</i></p>  <pre> graph TD     A[Consultant takes initiative] --&gt; B[Director reactive]     B --&gt; A   </pre>



<p>with managers regarding communication patterns and their role.</p> <p>Dir: We must have realistic expectations. It is not our aim to change managers. Our main objective is to enlarge understanding. For example, H. is and will always be relatively blunt. People would find it scary if he suddenly changed. Employees should get more understanding for management. It certainly must not be one-way: it is not only management, but also employees who are part of the communication problem. They could have taken initiative to improve the situation as well.</p> <p>HR/Int: This is a two-way process indeed.</p> <p>It is time and parties agree that HR manager and interventionists will take care of further preparation of the management team session.</p>	<p>P distance P blame</p>	<p>Although there seems to be balance in this argumentation, the emphasis is being put on employees' responsibility.</p>
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<p><i>Session with management team: is this team safe?</i></p> <p>In a session with the management team, each manager is expected to tell what he/she wishes to realize regarding communication in their department. The atmosphere seems to be relaxed with many jokes from director and other managers. In turn, each manager presents his/her ideas regarding their own department. Subsequently, the safety in the management team is discussed.</p>			<b>1.3</b>
<p>(1) I believe people have fear indeed. But how can we change that? Have you ever joined a session with all employees together; I don't see much energy and sometimes they are quite cynical. Their body language is passive and reactive. They take little initiative, despite our invitation to bring in ideas. I have heard that some don't feel safe, thinking that ineffective initiatives will be punished. I don't know why they think that. I guess it has something to do with us. But also with them. They are the ones who rely on some stories about colleagues who have tried to bring in criticism and have been punished for that. It is sheer nonsense.</p> <p>(2) I am already working on communication improvement.</p> <p>(3) The main issue in our department is the balance between structure and instability. We are always very busy. That theme is more important than safety or communication.</p> <p>(4) People might feel insecure. More important in my department is that several employees find it hard to communicate clearly.</p> <p>(5) We really have to work on this issue. I know people are afraid in our organization. They don't feel secure. Especially the second line managers need a lot of attention.</p>	<p>P distance P blame P linear</p> <p>P mutual (D)</p> <p>P blame</p>		

<p>(6) I have asked my employees. They think my behaviour and communication is consistent. In our department the atmosphere is open and honest.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>V: I think employees sometimes don't ask questions because they are afraid of the answer.</p> <p>M: Right, there is a lot of insecurity, which must be reduced.</p> <p>P: Some people are afraid to approach W (director).</p> <p>Dir (joking): Well, I don't know what they are afraid of. ... (all laugh, subsequently the subject is changed). Besides, I wonder if it's that bad.</p> <p>[.....]</p> <p>H: It is important that there is reciprocability in this process.</p> <p>M: Yes, one should be aware of being a part of the communication.</p> <p>V: For that reason it is important that we stimulate employees' personal sense of responsibility.</p> <p>H: And we have to let them know that we are open to all subjects they wish to share with us. By the way, we have to be open to each other within the management team as well.</p> <p>M (laughing): Fortunately this is the case in this team.</p> <p>Dir: By the way, we should not give employees the impression that – after all – we agree with their complaints about us. During this process you have to be aware of that. Who is next?</p> <p>[.....]</p> <p>An overview is shared that proposes which manager</p>	<p>B control I cover-up</p> <p>P distance</p> <p>P own role (D)</p> <p>B control I cover-up</p> <p>P distance P blame P linear B control B reactive</p>	<p>It appears that some of the managers argue that this process is important, while others seem to find it less important. However, no one really seems to reflect a high sense of urgency.</p> <p>Although director desired an open process/adventure, he activates a unilateral control model as soon he is confronted with an embarrassing situation (confirms assumption III). Director keeps situation controllable by making embarrassing situation undebatable. Two defensive routines (or strategies) are visible:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Joke strategy: in case of embarrassment, make a joke and change subject.</li> <li>- Reduction strategy: in case of embarrassment, reduce the problem until it is controllable again ('it isn't that bad).</li> </ul> <p>Fundamental problems are being covered up this way. The lower circle of the Senge 'shifting the burden' system (fundamental solution) is blocked by these defensive strategies.</p> <p>'One' refers to employees.</p> <p>Threat (no longer distancing) is blocked by joking strategy -&gt; undebatable situation.</p> <p>Strong model I control perspective.</p>
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Progress meeting with director and HR manager; director wants all managers to commit		1.4
<p>In a meeting, director, HR manager and two interventionists discuss progress regarding the process in the departments. In this stage interventionists have had intake sessions with all separate managers regarding the detailed approach in their department. The main experience is that most managers say they are committed and want to work on it with their team. One manager has said openly that he does not comply with the approach.</p>		
<p>Dir: Is this all there is to tell? Is every single manager positive about the approach?</p> <p>Int: With V. we had a difficult meeting. We did not succeed to get contact with him and he does not seem to find the approach very attractive.</p> <p>Dir: Doesn't he want to comply?</p> <p>Int: He does not like some basic elements of the approach.</p> <p>Dir: Which elements?</p> <p>Int: He is not interested in feedback to his team and his own role.</p> <p>Dir: Why not?</p> <p>Int: We are not sure yet. He says he doesn't need any feedback.</p> <p>Dir: That is not a valid reason. It is an essential element of the approach and I would like you to share your observations with him and his team. And if his resistance grows, I have a subject to discuss with him.</p> <p>Int: The question is, how effective this feedback will be if he is not interested. What about finding out why he acts this way? It would be strong if you had a conversation with him and ask questions. It would be very strong if you could leave some room for him to bring in ideas.</p> <p>Dir: Let's see how he develops. He might change his attitude.</p>	<p>B control↑ B repeat P reduction P distance P blame P linear P subject-object</p>	<p>In fact, this manager had let the interventionists know that in his perception the approach was the director's approach which had been not open for any discussion. In the last MT meeting he (and others??) had acted as if he agreed. This seems to be a defensive routine as a consequence of the leader's unilateral control model: the compliance strategy (we act as if we agree). The control model, thus, leads to invalid information.</p> <p>The interventionist does not share this (valid) information with the director. The underlying belief is that he should protect manager V and should not betray his confidence. However, by acting this way the int covers an important issue up and blocks learning.</p> <p><i>The interventionist feels he has to account for his activities and defends his position strongly, instead of inquiry. In action, he was not aware of this and joined the director in a unilateral control model. A defensive strategy by the interventionist: instead of being vulnerable, convince the client that you are completely in control (convince strategy).</i></p> <p>Although director desired an open process/adventure, he activates a unilateral control model as soon as he is confronted with deviant opinions (confirms assumption III).</p> <p><i>Interventionist suggests the director to inquire. However, this would probably hardly be effective as long as the director is not aware of his reasoning. In this situation, director and interventionist discuss the manager's defensiveness and are both defensive themselves. The conversation focuses on someone else. As a consequence, they hardly learn. Alternative: the interventionist could make director's defensiveness debatable, preferably by starting to discuss his own defensiveness. This requires the interventionist to be aware of his defensiveness in action.</i></p>

Progress meeting with director and HR manager; defensive strategies confronted		1.5
<p>In this meeting (the same as box 1.4) the interventionist confronts the director for the first time with hypotheses regarding defensiveness in the management team. A main challenge is to make defensiveness debatable without producing more defensiveness.</p>		
<p>Int: I would like to share some observations regarding the management team.</p> <p>Dir (joking): That is the most dramatic team (all laugh).</p> <p>Int: I would like to go back to the moment you asked if team members feel safe in the team. After a silence H. said that he felt safe. Some others nodded. However, you could hardly expect another response: if someone felt unsafe, he would probably not say that.</p> <p>Silence ...</p> <p><i>Int: We doubt how open people can be. We see some patterns that keep team members from being open. It appeared to us that people can say fairly hard things to each other. However, each time this happens some one makes a joke, releases tension and changes the subject. Difficult or personal issues remain undebatable this way and -contrary to the desired effect- an unsafe climate is created. Let's call this a joking strategy. Another strategy with the same effect is the reduction strategy: you tend to make problems smaller if the situation might become difficult or embarrassing.</i></p> <p>HR (joking): Then you must not make any jokes about my roots anymore (both laugh).</p> <p>Int: This is what we mean ....</p> <p>Dir: Now you are exaggerating. It is not that bad.</p> <p>It might be possible that managers do not feel safe.</p> <p>Int: Why?</p> <p>Dir: If you're doing a bad job, you will be fired by me. I think humour is important to relieve tension and makes our complex jobs manageable (examples of situations in which they had fun with each other ...). That's part of our work, I think. And if someone has a different opinion, I cannot help it.</p> <p>Int: You asked me to share my observations in the management team tomorrow. How will managers deal with critical notes?</p> <p>HR: They will return feedback to you.</p> <p>Dir: It all depends on your tone of voice.</p>	<p>B control↑ B repeat I cover-up</p> <p>B control↑ B repeat</p>	<p>Joking strategy.</p> <p><i>Sharing observations regarding defensiveness activates exactly the same defensiveness: joking and reduction strategy.</i></p> <p><i>The interventionist decides to reflect on this the first time, however does not the second time. His assumption is that doing so would put too much pressure on the director and lead to stronger defensiveness. The desire to get an (immediate) compliance by the director would reflect a unilateral control model.</i></p> <p>By using these defensive strategies one makes awkward issues undebatable and – in the short run – controllable. In the longer run, however, the underlying producing patterns grow stronger. Compare Senge's 'shifting the burden pattern': a unilateral control model seems to activate the upper circle and block the lower circle consistently.</p>

<i>Session with management team: one manager is forced to feel committed</i>		1.6
<p>In a session with the management team, one of the subjects concerns 'progress communication improvement'. The first subject on the agenda concerns procurement of copy machines (low dynamical complexity). This part of the meeting seems to be quite effective. The second subject is progress on communication improvement. Each manager is asked to present the situation in his/her department. Some managers present positive stories. Others, especially the director, ask some questions. Then it is V's turn, the manager who had let an interventionist know that he does not like the approach.</p>		
<p>V: I have had a meeting with P (one of the interventionists) and the approach in my department will differ from the other departments. I want my employees to be trained in communicative skills.</p> <p>Dir: How are you going to learn yourself; by feedback?</p> <p>V: No, I do not want to involve feedback in our approach.</p> <p>Dir: Why not?</p> <p>V: Well, next Monday I will discuss the approach with my employees.</p> <p>Dir: P (interventionist) will join the session and he will observe. You can't deny observations, can you? If he is there, he will have some observations. And the agreement is that these will be fed back.</p> <p>V (quietly): Whose agreement ....</p> <p>Dir: Just let it happen ...</p> <p>V: But what if my employees are not open to it?</p> <p>Dir: Well, there you have a strong observation, don't you?</p> <p>E (other manager): Why are you pushing so hard?</p> <p>Dir: These guys are professionals. You can only learn from them, can't you?</p> <p>V: Okay, I am with you ...</p> <p>[.....]</p> <p>Another manager's turn.</p> <p>K: Tomorrow I will have a meeting with A (another interventionist). I don't think these communication problems play a role in our department. We're a small team and the atmosphere is okay.</p> <p>H (another manager): Well K, I want to be open with you. This week two employees of yours visited me. They said they do not feel comfortable with you at all. Thus, there is more than you know.</p>	<p>B control↑ B repeat</p> <p>B control↑ B repeat</p> <p>B control↑ B repeat</p> <p>B control↑ B repeat</p> <p>B control↑ B repeat</p> <p>B control↑ B repeat</p>	<p>V informs that he does not comply with 'the method' (a deviant opinion).</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Growing control by director</p> <p>While manager V informs that he has another opinion, the director's control mode grows stronger and stronger. He goes on until V will comply.</p> <p>Direct feedback to director (apparently she feels safe enough to act this way).</p> <p>The unilateral control model leads to a short-term solution: the manager saying that he complies. However, this does not seem to be valid information and will probably not help in the longer run.</p>

<p>Silence .....</p> <p>H: You seem to say things in such a way that they feel insecure.</p> <p>Silence ...</p> <p>Dir: Well, don't we all sometimes say things that appear to be ineffective afterwards? Let's go on....</p> <p>The interventionists are invited to share their observations.</p> <p>This process started with some observations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees are afraid to criticize and feel insecure</li> <li>• Employees feel anxious about approaching managers</li> <li>• Employees behave reactively, as perceived by managers</li> </ul> <p>Is there any relation between communication within the management team and these observations deeper in the organization? Is there room for deviant opinions? Is it safe enough to bring in concerns? How pro-active are managers in relation to the director?</p> <p>There are two types of situations the management team deals with: relatively simple situations and complex situations. The communication patterns differ strongly between these situations.</p> <p>Simple situations (focus on content, relatively routine, low dynamic complexity) The communication can be characterized as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive and relaxed atmosphere: use of humour</li> <li>• Positive feedback to each other</li> <li>• Active listening: listening and asking questions aiming at proper understanding</li> <li>• Polite and respectful conduct: no interruptions</li> <li>• Chairman (director) stimulates active involvement by inviting participants to share their opinion</li> <li>• Chairman leaves room for discussion and conflicting opinions; by active inquiry the most attractive option is selected</li> <li>• Chairman still gives direction by firmness, clear summaries and attention to time.</li> </ul> <p>Complex situations (threatening, conflicting opinions, personal issues) As soon the management team is confronted with complex situations, the communication seems to be less effective.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the last meeting people showed that personal issues are being addressed. However, each time this happens, someone reduces tension by making a joke and changing the subject: the joking strategy. The participants are quite good</li> </ul>	<p>B control I cover-up</p>	<p>Face saving by a reduction strategy. Result: no opportunity to inquire into personal feedback, which results in an insecure situation for K and others.</p>
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<p>at this strategy. How safe is this? Another strategy is the reduction strategy: by reducing the problem, it is made undebatable. An example is K.'s case: the director reduced the problem by saying that we all sometimes say things that appear to be ineffective afterwards.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• And what happens if someone has a deviant opinion? This was shown during this meeting in V's case: pressure is increased until V. complies. We wonder: will V. really feel committed when he leaves this room in a couple of minutes? We call this the comply strategy: tension is reduced, but the 'problem' is still there. Apparently, it is easier and safer to comply in the first place.</li> <li>• In complex situations one loses one's competence to ask questions. On the contrary, one tends to make things undebatable by reducing problems, making jokes, complying and increasing pressure. In other words, just when inquiry is needed, one stops inquiring.</li> </ul> <p>Response to feedback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some are writing</li> <li>• Silence, concentration</li> <li>• No manifest defensive behaviour</li> <li>• Signs of recognition (nodding, humming)</li> </ul> <p>After feedback: silence</p> <p>Director thanks interventionists for their valuable feedback.</p> <p>Some make jokes about the compliments that the interventionists had made regarding the director's meeting skills.</p> <p>And another joke. And a joke about the joke.</p> <p>End of the meeting. Everyone leaves the room; the majority thank the interventionists for their feedback and stress this was valuable for them.</p>		<p>How to interpret the response?</p> <p>This might be positive. However, no one inquires into the observations by asking questions. The response could be a combination of defensive routines/strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- joking strategy</li> <li>- compliance strategy</li> <li>- or: ignorance strategy (act as if it is interesting, however, ignore the information that is difficult to deal with).</li> </ul> <p><i>The interventionist assumes this intervention method is not working very well and more time is needed to inquire into responses. By not being open about his thoughts he establishes an S-O relation: the interventionist thinks he has to find another method to make them learn. As an alternative, in line with a mutual learning model, he might share his considerations with the managers, ask how they evaluate the interventions and think about what interventions would help them to learn.</i></p>
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#### Session with director: feedback to his contribution to defensiveness

**1.7**

In a meeting, the interventionist reflects on the director's role by self-disclosure.

<p>Conversations starts with 'small talk': director tells about his roots, his family and his success in his last job.</p> <p>Int: I would like to share some observations, if you are interested.</p> <p>Dir: Yes, of course.</p>		
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<p>Int: It all began with the observation that employees experience 'fear', they feel insecure and distance from management.</p> <p>Dir: Yes.</p> <p>Int: Our question is still how management team and you contribute to these experiences.</p> <p>Dir nods.</p> <p>Int: In the observations that have been fed back to the management team, you play an important role. We distinguished relatively simple situations without tension and complex situations that are characterized by possible threat or lack of control. You deal effectively with the first category and less effectively with the second one.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simple/neutral situations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- you keep calm, ask questions, summarize</li> <li>- you activate involvement by asking opinions</li> <li>- you use humour and keep things pleasant</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Complex situations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- you make these situations undebatable</li> <li>- you stop inquiring and increase pressure (e.g. in situation with V.), while precisely in these situations inquiry is essential</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Dir confirms by nodding.</p> <p>Int: you make difficult situations undebatable by joking and putting things into perspective (e.g. situation with K.).</p> <p>Dir: I shouldn't have done that. I visited H. and K. and have let them know I should have dealt with the situation either by leaving room for discussion or by asking questions.</p> <p>Int: It looked like saving K., however you created an unsafe situation for him. The feedback could be given, but could not be discussed.</p> <p>Dir: Yes, you are completely right.</p> <p>Int: Another example refers to you, asking 'how anyone could be afraid of this man?' during a meeting. This way you make a possible threat for team members undebatable by making a joke.</p> <p>Dir nods.</p> <p>Int: Everyone laughed. This can either be fun or a sign of discomfort. To what extent do you get feedback from your colleagues?</p> <p>Dir (hesitating): Sometimes I get feedback from M or E, or even from V.</p>	<p>P own role (D) B reflection (D)</p>	<p><i>Interventionist shares his perception of director's behaviour candidly. He holds the assumption that the director has the capacity for self-reflection and self-examination (see Argyris' social virtues of Model II). This appears to work out effectively as it stimulates the director to perceive his own role as a part of the process and reflect on this contribution to the undesired situation.</i></p> <p>Director reflects on own role; as opposed to last meeting, he shows no defensive behaviour. What makes him more open?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- effect of feedback in management team?</li> <li>- effect of him being alone?</li> <li>- delayed effect of earlier feedback?</li> </ul>
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<p>Silence</p> <p>Int: I think you can be quite threatening for people. Even for me, while I am an outsider, this is the first conversation with you I feel comfortable. So how safe are you for persons who report to you?</p> <p>Silence</p> <p>Dir: But why?</p> <p>Int: it is a combination of the way you make important issues undebatable and the firmness you show when presenting your opinion. Besides, you are easily bored if things take too much time. Still, you say that you want to improve communication and safety. However, this takes some time for inquiry. What you say and what you do are inconsistent.</p> <p>Dir (thinking): I understand.</p> <p>Silence.</p> <p>Dir: I think I can be threatening indeed. If an employee does not perform properly, he will be fired (some examples of persons who have been fired recently).</p> <p>Int: These actions will certainly not contribute to a safe atmosphere. But this is not what I mean. Our observations refer to your day-to-day behaviour and communication.</p> <p>Dir: I see.</p> <p>Int: We started with feelings of fear and insecurity deeper in the organization. You probably play a pivotal role. Besides, we see a repetition of the pattern deeper in the organization: pressure stifles inquiry. The focus is on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- instruction</li> <li>- management present their solutions</li> <li>- quick solutions</li> </ul> <p>Dir: That is not what I want. That is not good.</p> <p>It is time.</p> <p>Int: Don't fight against yourself now. Rather try to take time and inquire by asking questions.</p> <p>Dir: Thank you very much. This was very valuable for me.</p>	<p>P own role (D) B reflection (D) B inquiry (D)</p>	<p><i>Int decides to be open about the effect of dir's behaviour on him. He assumes that self-disclosure will enable dir's learning -&gt; this intervention indeed leads to inquiry (as opposed to the first time, when director became defensive).</i></p> <p><i>Intervention: giving insight into dissonance between beliefs ('we want to change') and actions ('we keep ourselves from changing').</i></p> <p><i>Reflection afterwards: As a consequence of pressure, the interventionist is talking too much, willing to share the observations. He is sensitive to exactly the same pattern he is feeding back: pressure leads to instruction and directing instead of inquiry and asking questions.</i></p>
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## Reflection 3

### Session with director: effects of the feedback

**1.8**

The director and an interventionist prepare the next management team meeting. During this session the director talks about his new insights and behavioural consequences. In addition, they discuss the consequences of one manager's dismissal.

Meeting starts with small talk.

Int: What would you like to discuss?

Silence

Dir: I would like to share that manager X is going to leave us. We will let the management team know in the next meeting. Also, I have thought deeply about your personal feedback in our last session.

Int: What did you do with the feedback?

Dir: The feedback gave me deep insight into my role. Since then I have been learning by experimentation. Last week someone approached me to talk about some problems in project Y. Normally I would have tried to persuade him, but this time I said almost nothing. I have only listened to his concerns. I made no promises either. And still he left my room quite satisfied. Actually I didn't do anything (laughing ....).

Tomorrow I have a meeting with all members of department Z. Without doubt, they expect I will increase pressure. However, I won't do that. I will sit down and listen to them. I will try to empathize with them. And ask questions like 'how do you experience the situation?', 'what consequences do you perceive?' and 'what is the relation with our approach?'

Int: Apparently you have the competence to use these kinds of questions. However, you usually do not use them in the business environment. As if you have put on a new record that you already possessed.

[...]

Int: Let's discuss next Thursday's meeting. If I understand you properly, you will tell the managers that manager X's contract will be terminated.

Dir: Yes

*Interventionist invites director to take initiative.*

P own role (D)  
P mutual (D)  
B reflection (D)

Director is able to ask questions (single-loop learning); it sounds quite natural, as if he has activated another program (double-loop learning).

Still, he seems to perceive these situations as relatively simple and he behaves relaxed.



Management team session: defensive strategies help to keep the situation under control		1.9
The interventionists enter the room during a short break, just after the announcement that manager X will leave the organization.		
<p>When the interventionists enter, the climate seems to be very good: jokes, laughter and a lot of talking.</p> <p>Dir starts the next subject: Communication and safety is a sensitive subject, as we have just announced that X will have to leave. Lately another manager left this team as well. Do you think this is the right moment to discuss this subject now?</p> <p>V: I am flabbergasted. I have never felt unsafe in this team. What do you mean?</p> <p>Dir repeats his message.</p> <p>E: Why do you want to discuss safety? Don't you feel safe?</p> <p>Director looks at interventionist and asks for help nonverbally.</p> <p>Int repeats the same message.</p> <p>H: I don't feel unsafe at all. However, I recognize a feeling of fear amongst employees. For example, an employee who said: 'Well, this remark may be not good for my career, but I would like to say ....'. But I have never had this feeling.</p> <p>During this discussion nobody looks at manager X, who is still attending the meeting.</p> <p>Dir makes a joke.</p> <p>A manager describes what makes good communication (in general) and another manager describes a meeting deeper in the organization. A third manager argues that second line management and employees should be trained to deal effectively with change processes.</p> <p>Director asks interventionists to share their observations regarding the last period.</p> <p>Interventionist shares insights as summarized in reflection 3 with some additional examples from</p>	I inquiry (D)	<p>This might be very well an utterance of the joke strategy.</p> <p>Director tries to activate and inquire into the lower circle, but is being 'pushed back'. Managers are very good at these routines: even if the director tries to leave the unilateral control model, managers immediately fall back on their routines. This response stifles the director's attempts and pushes him back in his 'well known' role. As a consequence, it is hard for the director to change the patterns (he may succeed with a delay).</p> <p>Managers activate several defensive strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- denial strategy: we have no problems with safety</li> </ul> <p><i>Interventionist goes on with the same strategy that apparently activates defensiveness. An alternative: make the process debatable.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- denial strategy: "To retain their power, defensive routines must remain undiscussable. Team stay stuck in their defensive routines only when they pretend that they don't have any defensive routines, that everything is all right, and that they can say 'anything'" (Senge, p. 255).</li> <li>- ignorance strategy: we act as if she and her problem are not there, just by ignoring her. And we keep saying that this team is very safe.</li> <li>- joke strategy</li> <li>- distance strategy: we talk about other parties and general observations</li> </ul> <p><i>Interventionist intends to avoid a painful situation for manager X and tries to save</i></p>



*Session with management team; managers address defensiveness and circularity*

**1.10**

In the period that follows, the interventionists have several moments of hesitation: will the director and managers succeed to de-block the process? Their routines seem to be deeply ingrained and difficult to change. In a subsequent session the management team evaluate the progress of the improvement process. This meeting has two faces: on the one hand, the interventionists experience the atmosphere as rather dutiful. On the other hand, this session illustrates some initiatives to make defensive strategies and circularity debatable.

Small talk.

Dir: On the agenda: communication. He looks at the interventionists expectantly.

Int: Brief introduction. ... Two questions are pertinent: what has the process brought you and what do you want to work on?

Dir: I communicate in a different manner with the second line managers. They visit me more often than before and discuss certain themes.

A: In my perception employees have less fear to bring things in. Besides, they really appreciate that W. (the director) behaves more vulnerably. Some second line managers find it a bit soft and would still prefer some concrete instruments to improve communication. That is really a problem for me.

H makes a joke. All laugh.

A: Gentlemen, we're changing the subject by making jokes.

H: You are right. (other managers confirm nonverbally)

H: I perceive a change in the way we communicate within our management team. Deeper in the organization the effect is still weak. For too many employees it is still vague.

Dir: V, what is the situation in your team? (V is the manager who has complied under pressure).

V 'wakes with a start'.

V: Eeehh, well communication is not a severe problem in our team. We had a session with P (an interventionist), which was pleasant. Especially his feedback was appreciated.

Dir (laughing): Quite valuable, those observations, right?

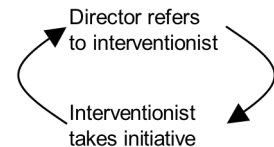
V: I don't get your point, W.

Dir: I am serious. These observations are valuable, aren't they?

I inquiry (D)  
I long term (D)  
I reflection (D)

B control

Circularity:



Looks like an improvement.  
Observation afterwards: it would have been interesting to ask what exactly this 'different manner' is.

Joke strategy.

Joke strategy being addressed.

What is this change in his opinion?

Dir wants acknowledgement that he has won.  
Joking strategy: a serious hint, covered by a joke.  
As a consequence, difficult to inquire.

<p>V: Yes.</p> <p>AV: L visited our team. This was very positive. We especially focused on ... [.....].</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>M: I have changed my view on this process. I perceive it as very positive. [.....]</p> <p>Dir (who has already looked at his watch a couple of times): We are talking bullshit too long. To be honest, I have been bored for 20 minutes already.</p> <p>Silence</p> <p>Int: In my perception you focus on procedures: 'I had a session with ...'. I wonder: What do you really want regarding this subject? I miss the fire.</p> <p>Dir: This process is really important to me. I realize that we are the problem. But it irritates me that we are discussing the subject by doing a round again.</p> <p>M: But this is not an easy process. It takes time. We have to see that we must start with ourselves.</p> <p>Int: The conversation sounds quite polite and obligatory.</p> <p>A: I do not agree. Last year we wouldn't have had this discussion.</p> <p>Dir: I hate repetition. I don't have Alzheimer's.</p> <p>H: W (dir), I see that you are in a certain mode.</p> <p>M: W, you are just too impatient.</p> <p>Some jokes about how intelligent team members are.</p> <p>Dir (laughing): But, what are we going to do now?</p> <p>A: I think a problem is second line management. They must be the bridge to the rest of the organization and we have quite a problem there.</p> <p>Dir: Let's not focus on other parties. Let's start with our own role.</p> <p>[.....]</p>	<p>P mutual (D)</p> <p>I inquiry (D) I long term (D) I reflection (D)</p>	<p>Compliance strategy?</p> <p>A confusing discussion: the director seems to be the person who has the highest commitment to the process. Still, he is the person who gets irritated.</p> <p><i>The interventionist confronts managers' behaviour. He assumes that managers are not really internally committed, but he does not share this. He does inquire by sharing what he experiences. But he is not open about his own assumptions. The feedback fits a unilateral control model, as he pushes (and blames): 'you do not show the right behaviour'. Besides, the feedback is too vague: what actions exactly make him wonder?</i></p> <p>A possible explanation: exactly because he is committed, he gets irritated because of the obligatory atmosphere: what people say does not seem to be consistent with what they show.</p> <p>Manager gives feedback to director. They seem to be impressed by the director's behaviour and act as if they want to compensate.</p> <p>Joke strategy.</p> <p>Blame/distance strategy is addressed.</p>
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<p>During the meeting there a discussion about the next staff information session. Normally, during these sessions the director and/or management team members talk about recent developments, while employees listen. One is aware of the disadvantage: 'the more we direct, the more reactive they will be'. A small committee is being formed in order to develop ways to break through this cycle.</p> <p>End of the session: interventionists feed back their observations of this session:</p> <p>Changes are visible in the communication patterns within the team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- joking strategy is often being addressed immediately</li> <li>- blaming strategy (e.g. middle management is the problem) is being addressed</li> <li>- much more attention to management team's role (however, less attention to managers' role; the 'we strategy is still active)</li> <li>- more direct feedback to director</li> <li>- awareness of circularity in behaviour during staff information sessions and initiative to break through this circularity</li> <li>- much more attention is needed for the visibility of these changes to employees; they still do not see real changes.</li> </ul> <p>Dir: Good to hear. I recognize these observations. We must not underestimate the perception of employees.</p> <p>Interventionists leave.</p>	<p>P circular (D) P own role (D) P mutual (D)</p>	<p>This discussion shows that participants' awareness of circularity and their own roles is growing.</p> <p>In the current situation, employees show an 'undergo strategy': in case of threat, just undergo the intervention (passively) and do not make the producing patterns debatable.</p> <p><i>This feedback, afterwards, is quite polite and focuses on things that are clear. Unclear issues, such as the difference between what interventionists sense and what managers say is not addressed. A factor that keeps the ints from going further might be their wish to add value ('together we realize improvements'). However, in avoiding this, they bypass and cover up defensive routines and block changing and learning.</i></p>
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### Reflection 4

## Period 3: observations deeper in the organization

<p><b>Session with a second line management team: 'employees are reactive'</b></p> <p>During this session the communication, especially the relation between managers and employees, is being discussed.</p>			<b>1.11</b>
<p>All managers experience pressure. They are very busy and they are responsible for projects with hard deadlines.</p>			

<p>They perceive negative behaviour of their employees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'They are reactive and seldom bring in ideas.'</li> <li>- 'They often complain about lots of things. I expect them to suggest solutions.'</li> <li>- 'They are frustrated. They have the feeling they are overruled by the management team' (= first line management team).</li> </ul> <p>First line manager: 'I guess we create circumstances that stimulate this behaviour, don't we?'</p> <p>Int: How do you react to this behaviour?</p> <p>Some typical quotes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'If they don't come up with ideas themselves, I tell them what to do.'</li> <li>- 'They often come to my desk with small issues. Sometimes it is unbelievable. Mostly I give them a solution.'</li> <li>- 'Sometimes I ask them to bring in ideas themselves, but they seldom come up with ideas.'</li> </ul>	<p>P distance P blame P linear P subject-object</p> <p>P own role (D) P mutual (D)</p> <p>P distance P blame P linear P subject-object</p>	<pre> graph TD     Manager["Manager - instructs - gives solutions - is active"] --&gt; Employee["Employee - is reactive - brings in questions"]     Employee --&gt; Manager   </pre>
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<p><i>Session with second line management team and project leaders: highest in rank knows the answers</i> <b>1.12</b></p> <p>This session is a platform for project evaluations, organizational developments and customer-related issues. During the session two types of subjects are being discussed: relatively (dynamically) simple and dynamically complex situations. In both situations communication patterns resemble those in the management team. A 'complex' situation is described below.</p>		
<p>Project leader H: Y told me that her department has contracted a third party. At least I would like to know how we should deal with that (a reactive and dependent tone of voice).</p> <p>Second line manager E (his boss) looks at the first line manager (boss of the boss): Yes, what is our point of view?</p> <p>First line manager: Our point of view is .....</p> <p>Int: Look what happens. Project leader H brings in that at least he would like to know how you should deal with that. Apparently he feels uncomfortable with the situation. In a couple of seconds the question and responsibility are moved up to the person with the highest rank who, in turn, gives 'the right answer'.</p> <p>Alternative: H is a professional; ask him how he is dealing with the situation now and what alternatives he considers.</p>	<p>B reactive</p> <p>B reactive</p>	<p>Reactive attitude; he sends the problem bottom-up.</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Reactive attitude; he sends the problem bottom-up.</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Participant with the highest rank takes responsibility and instructs 'the right solution'.</p> <pre> graph TD     Manager["Manager - instructs - gives solutions - is active"] --&gt; Employee["Employee - is reactive - brings in questions"]     Employee --&gt; Manager   </pre>



<p>H: I know why they want to leave: they have shares in the external party.</p> <p>Int: How do you know?</p> <p>H: That is what I think. So it makes no sense to ask for it.</p> <p>First line manager (very careful): H, could this contribute to their behaviour? They might think: Oh, he just doesn't want to talk with us.</p> <p>H: Well ..... laughing ..</p> <p>Project leader K: Well, I think we have an important issue; it is all about the relation and personal attention, isn't it?</p> <p>Some other participants move along and they agree they should pay more attention to real conversations with the customer.</p> <p>End of this meeting.</p> <p>After the meeting a project leader approaches the interventionist and lets him know that he appreciated this meeting. However, he is disappointed about the interventionist not having said anything about his passive colleagues. He got really irritated about some of his colleagues.</p> <p>The interventionist has a brief think and asks: why do you expect me to confront him?</p> <p>Project leader: well, that is your role, isn't it?</p> <p>Int: how do you perceive your own role in this situation?</p> <p>Project leader: ehh, well, I could have said it myself. But that is different.</p> <p>Int: what makes the difference?</p> <p>Project leader: ehh, may be there is no real difference.</p>	<p>B control↑ B repeat</p>	<p>strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- blaming: putting responsibility on someone else's shoulders</li> <li>- distancing: one's own role is being ignored.</li> <li>- assuming: holding strong assumptions without testing them.</li> </ul> <p><i>Int tries to get directly observable data (compare Argyris).</i></p> <p>K. saves this colleague's face by generalising things: generalize strategy.</p> <p>Apparently the interventionist's presence keeps the manager from giving feedback to his colleague:</p> <div> <pre> graph TD     A[Interventionist active] --&gt; B[Participants passive]     B --&gt; A </pre> </div> <p><i>The interventionist feels he is criticized and initially tends to defend. However, he is aware of this and consciously decides to inquire into the situation. This leads to learning.</i></p>
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<p><i>A session with all members of one department: management break through circularity and routines</i></p> <p>In this session with employees, second line management and first line manager, some positive developments are visible. Subjects of this session: recent developments regarding products, services and customer relations. First and second line management try to break through circular patterns and routines.</p>		1.13
<p>Unlike this type of session in the past, second line management ask questions and employees discuss these questions in groups and present their answers. Normally, one works the other way round: employees have questions and managers have answers.</p> <p>However, managers find it difficult to be consistent. After each presentation they perform as a 'jury' and judge the quality of the answers. Each time management present their opinion as being the 'final answer'.</p> <p>In the last part of the session the first line manager is scheduled to give his opinion. He has observed the process and he tries to break through the routines. After a brief presentation one employee (the one and only who always asks a question) wants to ask a question. The first line manager:</p> <p><i>"P, I see you want to ask a question. That is what I expected, because that is the pattern we always follow: I tell you a story and you ask a critical question. Often you have an opinion about the subject yourself. In turn, I pretend that I know the answer and share another story with you. Then, after the session, you will evaluate my answer. You may disagree, but won't share your disagreement with me. I often don't know the answer, but I won't share that with you. That is a strange game, isn't it? Let's play a different game. If you have a question and I don't know the answer, I will return the question and ask your opinion. All right?"</i></p>	<p>P own (D) P mutual (D) P circular (D) B reflection (D)</p> <p>B control</p> <p>P dynamic (D) P own (D) P mutual (D) P circular (D) B reflection (D) I inquiry (D) I long term (D)</p>	<p>This new working method has a visible contribution to employees' ownership and creativity. Employees show enthusiasm when presenting their visions and ideas. People seem to break through the circular pattern.</p> <p>The consequence: the circular pattern is re-activated and employees fall back in their reactive and passive attitude. In a picture:</p> <pre> graph TD     subgraph Top_Pattern         direction TB         E1["Employee - gives solutions - is active"]         M1["Manager - asks for questions"]         E1 --&gt; M1         M1 --&gt; E1     end     subgraph Bottom_Pattern         direction TB         M2["Manager - instructs - gives solutions - is active"]         E2["Employee - is reactive - asks for answer"]         M2 --&gt; E2         E2 --&gt; M2     end     Top_Pattern --&gt; Bottom_Pattern   </pre> <p><i>This intervention contributes to insight into circularity and blocking patterns. As a consequence, employees are more actively involved. Still, it is uncertain to what extent they have a free choice. The manager imposes his analyses and does not check to what extent employees recognize these analyses. Even if he had checked, they probably wouldn't have been open about their real thoughts. Besides, he is the person who introduces 'another game' and imposes his playing rules. In short, this is an effective intervention as a start; still, it is characterized by unilateral control.</i></p>

<p>The employee is confused: Can I still ask a question?</p> <p>Mgr: Of course you can.</p> <p>Empl: Do you really think we are going to finish this project within the deadline?</p> <p>Mgr: I normally would try to persuade you, won't I? Please share your opinion.</p> <p>Empl: Well, I don't think we will manage (mentions some arguments).</p> <p>Mgr: How do others think about this?</p> <p>Some employees (more than ever before) share their opinions and actively join the conversation.</p>	<p>P own (D) B reflection (D)</p>	
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<p><i>Staff information meeting: 'employees normally ask no questions'</i></p> <p>During a management team meeting, the program of a quarterly staff information meeting is being discussed. The program is been prepared by HR and consists of seven speakers on several subjects. All speakers are first line managers. In the last part, employees have the opportunity to ask questions, but no time has been scheduled for that part. When the interventionist asks why no time for questions has been scheduled, the answer is that 'normally they don't ask any questions'.</p>			<b>1.14</b>
<p>During this session the awareness grows that this program will confirm existing patterns: managers talk and are active, while employees listen and are passive. A small group is formed to prepare a program that de-blocks existing patterns. An interventionist is asked to participate.</p> <p>In a session with this group some decisions are made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The interventionist will support the director with the preparation of his presentation.</li> <li>• The director will reflect on the management team's learning process, the circularity, how the setting of these meetings characterizes the circular patterns.</li> <li>• During the session employees can write down questions that will be collected; the director will answer these questions.</li> <li>• This session will be the last one that is prepared only by managers. A committee of employees, managers and HR will prepare subsequent sessions.</li> <li>• Employees can bring in subjects next time.</li> </ul> <p><i>During the session the director follows the line as prepared.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No slides; rather a personal story about concerns, why I'm working on this process, what it means to me, what happens in the management team, what have I/we already learned about ourselves.</li> <li>• We keep a tight grip on each other, e.g.</li> </ul>			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- management direct, employees listen ('watch this meeting')</li> <li>- management instruct, employees keep their ideas to themselves</li> <li>• This meeting is illustrative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- first line management prepare and have foreknowledge; second line management and employees wait and see. That is what we stimulate.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Personal expectations; what would be my ideal? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- trying to find each other: management visits employees and vice versa</li> <li>- sharing ideas, which requires managers to be open to ideas and employees to bring in their ideas</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What might you think now? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'nice words, but as soon as we are critical, we will be punished ...'</li> <li>- 'communication? We have done this before, but nothing has changed really...'</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Some recent examples of positive contact between management and employees</li> <li>• Suggestion for the future: employees and managers prepare these sessions together.</li> </ul> <p>During the session the director succeeds to create a good atmosphere. He tells about his personal concerns, what he has learned about his management style, what the management team has already learned and why he understands the distance that employees perceive. Moreover, he compliments some employees who have brought in ideas and criticism recently and labels criticism as a form of commitment. Employees seem to be surprised by the personal and vulnerable story of the director and respond positively. Many stay for a drink.</p>	<p>P dynamic (D) P own role (D) P mutual (D) P circular (D) B reflection (D) B inquiry (D) B proactive (D) I long term (D) I reflection (D).</p>	<p>This presentation by the director contributes to de-blocking the change process.</p>
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## Reflection 5

<p><b>Management team meeting: presentation of overall analysis</b></p> <p>The interventionist is invited to present an overall analysis to the management team. Appendix 1 depicts the slide presentation (including some additional remarks that are shared verbally). The interventionist shares valid information about and invites the managers to make consistent choices: <i>how safe do you want it to be if there is a continuous threat?</i></p>			<b>1.15</b>
<p>Interventionist finishes his presentation with the question 'Do you personally really want to invest any further in this process?' and sits down.</p> <p>Silence</p> <p>M: Yes, I agree with your analysis.</p>			

<p>H: Yes, I hear your analysis. However, I don't know what I must do with this safety in the management team. I don't know what to do differently (looks at interventionist).</p> <p>Int: H, I don't say you have to do anything. The question is: do you accept the situation as it is? I could imagine if you said yes. As a consequence, you might just have to accept people might not feel safe. But that's quite common in a lot of organizations.</p> <p>H: But this safety in the management team; what do you expect me to do? I am one of the managers who tend to say that we can say anything here and that I feel safe. Partly because I don't feel like saying that it is unsafe. Should I, time after time, say 'I don't feel safe'? Then we do not make any progress, do we? (exaggerates in order to make it funny – some laugh).</p> <p>Int: You respond as if you think this is not realistic. At the same time you expect managers and employees deeper in the organization to have an open dialogue about these subjects. That does not sound consistent. Based on your experience in the management team, you might decide to stop expecting others to discuss this theme. Please do not do this because you have to. W, you would really help the process if managers have some room to say they do not want to do this. I know this might be difficult for you, as you find this very important (director seems to be slightly uncomfortable with the situation).</p> <p>H: That is not what I want. I am really trying to find out what I should do differently in order to make a difference. Could you advise me what I should do?</p> <p>Int: Not immediately. If it were so simple, you would already have done so. You're very smart. However, I am quite willing to assist you in discovering ways to improve.</p> <p>Dir: I have learned quite a lot since we started this process. I really try to do things different.</p> <p>Int: I recognize and appreciate the way you are developing. There are already interesting experiments (int. describes situation when H suggested his employees to play another game on 26/06/06). H, this is part of an answer to your question about what to do. Create more opportunities in order to be recognizable and consistent.</p> <p>V: you mean we should do behavioural experiments? That is what I have learned in my management course.</p>		<p><i>Interventionist confronts inconsistency in current situation (valid information), invites them to make a free choice (each option is fine, as long as it is consistent) and to take responsibility. He releases pressure by saying that accepting unsafety and fear is fine. By doing so, he stimulates managers to hold a mutual learning model.</i></p> <p>Joke strategy</p> <p><i>Again, interventionist confronts inconsistency in current situation (valid information), invites them to make a free choice (each option is fine, as long as it is consistent) and to take responsibility. He releases pressure by creating room to say 'no'. Through this intervention he stimulates managers to hold a mutual learning model.</i></p> <p>(from this moment the pressure is reduced; persons are more open about their hesitations)</p> <p>It seems he makes a conscious decision. Subsequently, he asks the interventionist for an instant answer.</p> <p><i>For the interventionist it is very attractive to give advice and show added value (in the short run). By doing so, he would have established an S-O relationship that leads to dependency. Here, the int aims at establishing an S-S relationship that supports exploring and mutual learning.</i></p> <p>H. looks satisfied.</p>
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<p>Int: indeed.</p> <p>V: it is all about the consequences of our behaviour. We must develop more awareness of that. We must learn about the consequences.</p> <p>Int; indeed, in your management style you are quite control-driven. This means that changing your behaviour can feel uncomfortable. Not only for you, also for employees. They know your style and know this makes them feel uncomfortable. This situation, in the meantime, is quite comfortable. Changing your behaviour, as a consequence, can feel uncomfortable again for your staff. As a consequence, there will always be a delay in the desired effect. As you see, it is not easy at all.</p> <p>M: Well, I see that changing the atmosphere in this organization really requires us to change. The question is, do we really want to change and are we able to change. After all, we are a certain type of managers: result-driven, slightly dominant, more attention to contents than people. We should take more time for our people. Do we want that?</p> <p>Int: That is the question. But please do not try to answer that question under pressure. Pressure does not help you now. The benefit of this discussion is that we have never had a dialogue this way. Personally, and about the role you want to play.</p> <p>So now it is your turn: please think about the question and I will hear who wants to go on and invest personally in this process. I/we will be very pleased to assist you. And if you, deep in your heart, do not want to go on with this process, please be clear about that. Then it will be much easier for all persons.</p> <p>End</p> <p>Brief evaluation with director</p> <p>Dir: This was o.k.</p> <p>Int: I am sorry that I created room to say 'no', but I really had to do it.</p> <p>Dir: I understand, it is o.k. We had a good conversation.</p> <p>V joins.</p> <p>V shakes hands with interventionist: this was very good. You know I sometimes have some remarks, but this was really good. Now we talked about us and the consequences of our behaviour. That is good.</p>	<p>P dynamical (D) P own role (D) B valid (D) B proactive (D)</p>	<p><i>The interventionist draws heavily on management's reflection. Still, one seems to pick up the message.</i></p> <p>If the leader changes behaviour (model II), the environment tends to push him back. Leader cannot develop isolated from environment?</p> <p><i>Interventionist keeps them from answering M's question immediately. His assumption is that pressure might activate defensiveness again (e.g. a 'comply strategy'). Afterwards, the question would have deserved an answer.</i></p> <p><i>The interventionist should have advocated his assumption why he had to do this and left room for inquiry.</i></p>
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Later that day a brief evaluation by phone with the HR manager, who had also joined: It was good. Yesterday evening there were some critical notes about you coming again. Do we really have to discuss our communication again? Now, after the sessions, many team members gave compliments about the contribution of this session to the management team.		
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## Reflection 6

### Period 4: later developments

<p><i>Meeting first and second line management: breaking circularity</i> <span style="float: right;"><b>1.16</b></span></p> <p>In a meeting on future developments in strategy and organization design, the director shares his vision with first and second line managers. Subsequently, all managers get the opportunity to ask questions. It was decided not to share this presentation with first line management beforehand. As a consequence, first line managers are as open-minded as second line managers. The latter are not confronted with a 'power block' and participate more actively.</p>		
<p>Interventionist: although this is a step forward, the procedure stimulates 'old behaviour': first and second line managers ask questions, the director answers. It is clear that most questions could be answered by the managers who ask them. However, their vision is not asked for. Instead, the director does his utmost to give his answer. Please don't act as if you are dummies. Try to share ideas.</p> <p>Participants recognize the circularity and agree on another procedure: working on some questions in their teams and share their opinions. All teams are asked to present the outcomes subsequently.</p> <p>Some observations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The director asks questions, line managers answer. The latter grow more and more active, while the director really listens.</li> <li>• The director is open (self-disclosure): 'I thought it was all logical and clear. Now I see your opinions differ from mine. Apparently, it was my logic and clearness.'</li> <li>• A first line manager (to the director): 'the opinions of my second line managers appeared to differ from yours. I considered stopping them, but I didn't. After all, we're trying to share valid information.' The director agrees.</li> </ul> <p>The director finishes by asking how managers have experienced the session and if they would like to work this way in the future. Their reaction is positive and they bring in ideas for the future.</p>	<p>B valid (D) B reflection (D) B inquiry (D) B proactive (D)</p> <p>B valid (D)</p>	<p>By changing roles they break through the circularity.</p> <p>The director critically reflects on his beliefs and actively stimulates a mutual learning climate.</p> <p>This manager openly shares valid information, although this might be perceived as embarrassing. This is an expression of mutual learning.</p>

<p><i>Session with first line manager and his second line managers: disclosure of valid information, after all</i></p> <p>In a session with one of the first line managers and his management team, the effectiveness of the team and each team manager is discussed by giving mutual feedback. Team members are invited to select three elements that strongly characterize the team. One of the elements mentioned is 'harmony' that may lead to 'caution'. The interventionist describes possible consequences of this characteristic for the improvement process by feeding back his personal experience during a progress meeting with this team one week before.</p>		1.17
<p>Int: We discussed progress during that meeting. All said the process is valuable. Still, the dialogue related consistently to general themes like 'the management team', 'the organization' and information processes. It seemed to be very hard to discuss the effectiveness of team members, regardless of several attempts by me. At the end of this meeting the first line manager asked each of you to evaluate the meeting. All managers said that they really found the discussion valuable. The interventionist was thanked for his valuable contribution and the meeting was finished. However, I left the meeting with an odd feeling: what you had said contradicted strongly with what I had felt. My feeling said that you liked neither the process nor the discussion during that meeting. And my assumption was that you experienced the whole process as a top-down initiative and that the safest way to behave was acting as if you found it valuable and keeping the discussion on the surface. After my departure I was confused by the situation.</p> <p>Silence ...</p> <p>B: To be honest, your assumption is right. I felt a strong top-down pressure that forced me to comply.</p> <p>Other managers agree.</p> <p>H (first line mgr): I am glad you are so candid. I had the same feeling as the interventionist. However I did not know how to deal with the situation.</p> <p>Int: Great you can be so open. The problem is that you have been inconsistent. You said you want to contribute to an improvement process, but you blocked effective changing and organizing by sharing invalid information. Unlike before, now you are sharing valid information.</p> <p>All seem to feel uncomfortable with the situation and agree that this is not the way to be effective as a team. They agree that they will be more open about feelings and thoughts in the future.</p>	<p>B valid (D) B reflection (D) B inquiry (D) I patterns (D) I long term (D) I reflection (D)</p> <p>P own role (D) B valid (D) B reflection (D)</p>	<p>This example is in line with Argyris (1990), who argues that one tends to cover up defensive routines ("the process is valuable") and cover up the cover-up ("this was a valuable discussion about a valuable process").</p> <p><i>The interventionist advocates his assumptions by sharing them openly. He confronts inconsistency not in terms of 'right or wrong'. Instead, he brings in his assumptions and feelings neutrally and leaves room for inquiry. As a consequence, participants respond very open about their defensiveness.</i></p> <p><i>Interventionist confronts inconsistency and emphasizes the effectiveness of sharing valid information.</i></p>

## Presentation

The slides in this appendix were have been presented to the management team. The text in *italic* represents verbal notes that were shared during the presentation.

### Organization X Communication process

Presentation to management team

Distance and fear; how comes?

## 1. Many changes

- Who will be my boss?
- With whome I will work together?
- What is the new organization chart?
- Will I keep my job?

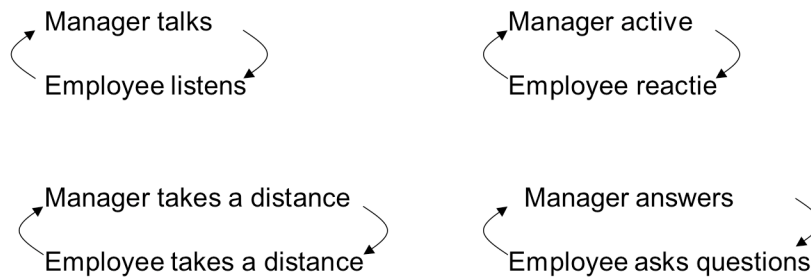
*Difficult to feel safe and secure in such an environment.*

*Compensation is needed by management style: contact, safety and personal attention.*

## 2. Management style

- Much instruction, few questions
- Problems bottom-up, solutions top down
- Taking distance
- Enlarging pressure
- Little time for employees
- Focus on tasks and contents

### 3. Circular patterns



*We have joined sessions with employees; the atmosphere feels quite unsafe for employees and managers, and does not stimulate managers to ask what employees really feel and think. This atmosphere stimulates circular pattern as described above.*

### Visible improvements communication management team - organization

- Attention for circularity
- Attention for decentral initiatives and concerns
- Managers try to perceive their own behaviour from an employee's perspective
- Employees' awareness that managers are willing to look at their own role (however, first see ....)
- All parties become more and more aware of one's own role
- More and more bottom-up initiatives

However ...

- 'The problem is not in this team ...' (*this applies to this management team as well: here we are safe and we can say anything; 'the problem is somewhere else ...'*)
- Depersonification of 'second next in line' (*first line managers talk about 'the employees' and 'their attitude' and vice versa*)
- Second line management have difficulties to bridge the gap between first line management and employees
- Employees still doubt management's credibility (first see, then believe ....)

### Visible improvements management team

- Addressing (some) defensive routines (*patterns that help you to make difficult subjects, like safety and personal communication, undebatable*)
  - joke strategy
  - blame strategy
- Attention to
  - one's own role in (de-)blocking change process
  - circularity (*e.g. staff information session*)
- Feedback to director

However ...

*(I will feed back some defensive strategies that are still active and keep you from effective change processes; you will probably feel them being activated while I talk about them. That is part of these strategies, so don't worry. Try to listen and understand what I say and what you feel.)*

- Defensive strategies difficult to change
  - reduction strategy
  - better talking about 'progress' than about 'me'
  - making difficult subjects undebatable
  - distancing: talking about others
  - 'here it is safe ....'

*(These strategies are illustrated with some examples from past management team meetings, e.g. the meeting in which the director announced that some of them had to leave. Why haven't I shared some observations before? They all fit in a unilateral control perspective, which often seems quite logical. For me it is difficult to see the ineffective patterns immediately as well.)*

Have we reached the bottom?

*How far do you want to go? You say that you want to improve communication and change processes. However, you are quite effective in keeping yourself from deeper analysis and improvement. What you say and what you do is inconsistent. You might decide to be satisfied with the improvements that you have reached. That would be understandable. You might decide to work on further improvement, which requires inquiring defensive strategies and sharing valid information.*



## Conclusions

- Focus on first and second line management  
*(Somebody has to start; talking without acting stifles your credibility)*
- Stop talking, however act, act, act!!
- Take time to show leadership : pay attention to people
- Get in touch with your employees
- Be credible : consistency in what you say and what you do
- Be realistic : how safe do you want it to be if there is a continuous threat  
*(You might accept that during this period you have to take some awkward decisions and show much control; as a consequence you have to accept that many persons – employees and managers - do not feel safe and will behave reactively to their boss. In that case it is consistent if you stop talking about the desire to have pro-active employees.)*

This means ...

Courage and choice:

Do you personally really want to invest any further in this process?

*(Please share valid information : no more progress meetings that you do not really want. To the director: it would really help if one could say 'no' at this question. Please don't put pressure on your managers now. Try to get valid information. Please take time during summer to find out your answer and share your point-of-view with the director. We wait and see.)*



## Appendix 2 Narratives of moving moments 2

### Period 1: preparation

2.1

#### Approach

The approach reflects the interventionists' beliefs about the situation and what is needed.

Raw data regarding the situation

- Management want to develop a culture that is characterized by employees who feel responsible for the customer's problems, who take initiative and show entrepreneurship. As such, they would like to stimulate employees to implement improvements in the customer processes and interactions.

Interventionist's assumptions regarding 'the approach'

- Culture cannot be implemented. Instead, this implies organizational development; a 'learning' approach is needed.
- Line management play an important role in culture (development). For this reason, they play a central role in the approach.
- 'Organizational culture' is a vague concept for many managers and employees. The approach has to support them to translate culture into their own day-to-day work: 'what does it exactly mean for me to act entrepreneurially in specific customer situations?'
- The approach must be in line with the aims regarding employees:
  - 'our employees are proactive and entrepreneurial'
  - 'autonomy and a personal sense of responsibility are our employees' core characteristics'
  - 'in our company we stimulate employees to bring in ideas how to improve our service'

Approach

- Start with top management: discuss approach *and* consequences for their own role (compare Argyris (1984, 1990), who argues that one should start with the top).
- Follow the 'cascade': director and management team, management team members with their teams, etcetera. This way, employees can be invited to bring in ideas within their own circle of influence that can be implemented by themselves. This approach enables direct communication between managers and their employees and gives the opportunity to organize reflection and learning about the way people are working on improvement processes.
- Each department gets a team coach, who should support reflection and learning.
- Before and after each session the manager has a feedback session with the team coach about the communication patterns and his contribution. The underlying belief is that the team coach can ask question and give feedback in order to enable reflection and learning.
- Regular progress meetings with director, individual managers and management teams contribute to keeps things result-oriented.
- Evaluation after a couple of months.

*Reflection 1*

## Period 2: start-up

<p><i>Meeting director and team of interventionists; interventionist activate unilateral control</i></p> <p>In a session one of the interventionists introduces his team to the director. In addition, they discuss the workshop with all managers and team leaders that will take place.</p>		<p><b>2.2</b></p>
<p>Round to get acquainted. Dir starts and is open about his personal background. The next in row tends to cover compatible issues.</p> <p>Dir: Why do you cover the same issues? Please make your own choices.</p> <p>Int: Actually, that is what I did.</p> <p>Dir: O.k.</p> <p>When all persons have introduced themselves, the director says: ‘Well, all bright persons. Great’.</p> <p>Int (project leader): as you can hear, all persons have different backgrounds. This way we can deliver you a broad support.</p> <p>Dir: Why do you say that? I just called you bright persons. Do not over emphasize!</p> <p>Res: you are right.</p> <p>[....]</p> <p>Dir: the workshop of next week needs to be successful. You have to know that attendees will be very critical of what you do.</p> <p>Int: what makes them critical?</p> <p>Dir: Well, they come for a full day to this conference hotel. Then it has to add value, right? I expect real professionalism from you.</p> <p>Int: Of course you do. You can count on us.</p>		<p>Director gives a double bind message (Argyris).</p>          <p>Director’s messages put pressure on the interventionists. As a consequence, the interventionists activate a unilateral control model: little inquiry and much problem solving (<i>‘we fix this problem for you, you can count on us’</i>). The question is, what is meant by ‘value’ and ‘professionalism’? Here, interventionists interpret these words as ‘giving attendees the feeling that this day was worth it and keeping things under control’.</p> <p>Illustration of unilateral control.</p>

<p><i>Workshop with all managers and team leaders; change dilemmas and political correctness</i></p> <p>In a one-day workshop with 28 managers the change process is 'kicked-off'.</p>		<p><b>2.3</b></p>
<p>Opening by director. Director has a very inspiring presentation. He starts with personal experiences as a customer and describes positive experiences. Subsequently, he clarifies the vision and (SMART) goals of this development process. Director talks</p>		



<p>In the afternoon some simultaneous workshops on change management take place.</p>		<p><i>this moment by inquiry:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- what makes you say yes when you think no?</li> <li>- what does it bring you?</li> <li>- what is the effect on your actions/behaviour?</li> <li>- is this effect what you are aiming at?</li> </ul> <p>And to director (preferably in a personal conversation):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- what does it mean to you that one tends to say 'yes' even if one thinks 'no'?</li> <li>- would you like to find out how you contribute to this situation?</li> <li>- what could you do to find this out?</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Meeting management team</b></p> <p>In an evaluation of the kick-off meeting the director shares that the morning was good, however the workshops in the afternoon have not contributed to participants' enthusiasm for this change process. He would have expected the interventionist to create this enthusiasm. Now he has a meeting with his managers that focuses on their role in the improvement process. The director leads the session, while the interventionists focus on the process. The latter strongly wish a positive experience for their client and wish to prove their professionalism. As a consequence, they are relatively tense.</p>		<p><b>2.4</b></p>
<p>Director takes much time (45 minutes) to evaluate the kick-off meeting. Conclusion: the morning was okay. However, the workshops in the afternoon had not met his expectations.</p> <p>Interventionists ask questions and do their utmost not to defend.</p> <p>Dir also shares his disappointment about relatively passive role that managers have played during the kick-off meeting.</p> <p>Managers do not respond to this.</p> <p>Director asks managers to share their vision on what they want to realize with this process within their own departments.</p> <p>Director gives turns to managers, takes time to ask questions and gives them room to share their ideas. Managers wait their turn and do not ask questions to each other.</p> <p>Until it is K's turn.</p> <p>K: Am I allowed to divert a bit?</p> <p>Dir: Yes, but keep it brief please.</p> <p>K: Well, I have been working on my health more consciously lately. I even drink two litres of water, which I never did before. In short, I made a real behavioural change myself because I am intrinsically motivated. It is my ambition not to say</p>	<p>P distance P blaming P linear</p>	<p><i>In the meantime, interventionists perceive a major responsibility for this management team as well.</i></p> <p>Actually, in this session the same pattern takes place as they are discussing. The director is relatively active and initiates the discussion, while managers are relatively reactive. These behaviours seem to relate circularly.</p> <p>K's question confirms the circular pattern.</p>

<p>my team leaders and their employees must change. I want them to do it because they intrinsically want to.</p> <p>Silence.</p> <p>Dir: Well, but you have also a responsibility to manage the change and make things really happen. It is not free of obligations.</p> <p>K: I know, it isn't. But in my opinion I should coach them to find out their own way rather than tell them what they should do.</p> <p>Dir: As we have learned in our training program, you have three roles: leader, coach and manager. You easily forget the management role.</p> <p>H (another manager): How would you monitor progress? We have to make progress, haven't we?</p> <p>K: Yes, of course we have. But I don't believe people will really change if I push them.</p> <p>M (another manager): People won't change if you don't push them, will they?</p> <p>K: O.k., the message is clear. I will involve the management role as well.</p> <p>Int: What is happening? You put quite some pressure on K, don't you?</p> <p>All (including K): yes.</p> <p>Int: K, what is the effect of this?</p> <p>K: It does not feel pleasant; I feel I have to defend myself.</p> <p>Int: But it works, right? After all, you say that you comply. Does it feel this way?</p> <p>K: Well, actually I believe my way also works. But I see I need to change my belief.</p> <p>Int (to all): Is that what you want?</p> <p>H: No, I think you are right. We should not try to convince him, but I think we have to take time to find out how we wish to contribute to the change process.</p> <p>All agree.</p> <p>Dir: We shall cover this later; we had already put</p>	<p>B control</p> <p>B control↑ B repeat</p> <p>B control↑ B repeat</p> <p>B control↑ B repeat</p>	<p>This sounds like a double bind message: 'I want you to want it yourself.'</p> <p>This is exactly the difference in beliefs between K and his colleagues. K does not want to push his team leaders (he knows the effect from experience, illustrated in this meeting).</p> <p>The control model (pushing) leads to a short term solution: the manager says he complies (compliance strategy). However, this seems to be no valid information and will probably not help in the longer run.</p> <p><i>Interventionist intends to make the effect of this behaviour debatable. After all, forcing each other to act and think the same as the majority is not consistent with the desire to stimulate entrepreneurship and ownership.</i></p> <p><i>Int invites to share valid information.</i></p> <p><i>Int invites to make a free choice based on valid information and take responsibility.</i></p>
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<p>the subject on the agenda.</p> <p>There appears to be not enough time. According to the agenda, director tries to initiate a brainstorm. However, the later it is, the more he pushes and the less response by the managers.</p> <p>Director seems to be very dissatisfied about the outcomes of this session.</p> <p>Dir: we do not have enough time at all. Int should have known this. We need much more time.</p> <p>HR: What about cancelling all sessions with employees scheduling longer sessions?</p> <p>Int: I would not do that. Unlike this one, these are three-hour sessions. It is our experience this will do.</p> <p>Dir and HR have a brief talk, followed by a statement by dir: next week on Thursday morning all have to clean their schedules and then we will have a next session. G (HR) and I will prepare.</p> <p>Int: would you like us to join?</p> <p>Dir: Let us think about that.</p> <p>Dir leaves the room with strong body language and without greeting.</p>	<p>B control</p> <p>P reduction P blaming</p> <p>P linear</p>	<p>The pressure stimulates the director to activate a control model. As a consequence, the circular process of an active director and reactive (even passive) managers is activated.</p> <p>Dir and HR reduce the situation to one factor: lack of time. Subsequently, the solution is scheduling longer sessions in the whole organization. In their opinion it is the interventionists who are to blame.</p> <p>The interventionist, who knows how difficult it is to schedule sessions, tries to save the situation.</p> <p><i>In the end the interventionists do not feel comfortable with the situation: there is still no relation and they are held responsible for the disappointment, as they 'should have known more time was needed for this session'. In this situation they find it difficult to step into an independent position and give feedback about the process. As a consequence, they indeed add too little value, which leads to new disappointments. A circular process, that has to be stopped ....</i></p>
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#### Session with director: feedback to his contribution to defensiveness

**2.5**

Two days later director and interventionist have a conversation. In the meantime the interventionist does not feel comfortable in the process and has reflected upon possible explanations:

- he experiences director's behaviour as unpredictable,
- he misses a relationship and feels he and his colleagues are being perceived as 'suppliers' and
- the effect of this lack of comfort stimulates the need to stay in control by proving one's professionalism and added value; as a consequence, he loses his independency and finds it hard to take up a position from which he can reflect on the process and share valid information (in other words, pressure activates a unilateral control model).

The interventionist tries to break through this situation in the conversation by self-disclosure.

<p>Director starts conversation enthusiastically and almost amicably, which is in strong contrast to the last session.</p> <p>Int: How do you look back at the management team session?</p> <p>Dir: Well, the outcomes did not fit my expectations.</p> <p>Int: What did you miss?</p> <p>Dir: It was not enough time. But even more</p>	<p>P distance</p>	
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<p>Int: After all, it is my own responsibility to be able to deal with you and my feelings. However, it becomes important if this has the same effect on your managers. Might they be cautious because they cannot predict your reaction?</p> <p>Dir: Yes, they might be ...</p> <p>Int: and as a consequence of their caution you increase pressure ...</p> <p>Dir: Yes, I see I may contribute to their behaviour.</p> <p>Int: You could ask feedback from your managers regarding this issue.</p> <p>Dir: Yes, I will do that.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Dir: But you cannot put full responsibility on my shoulders. You and your colleagues should keep in mind to be professional, right. We need very good expertise.</p> <p>Int: Of course. I really would like to join your extra session next week. You cannot take this opportunity to prove our role.</p> <p>Dir: I would be pleased if you joined us. Many thanks for this conversation. This was very helpful.</p>	<p>P circular (D)</p> <p>B inquiry (D)</p>	<p><i>Int helps the director to reflect: might your behaviour have the same effects in his management team?</i></p> <p>Director recognizes circularity.</p> <p><i>Int invites to share this issue with his team, in order to stimulate mutual learning.</i></p> <p><i>Actually, interventionist still does not know what director means by 'professional'. He believes he can play a better role now, as he feels much more comfortable. He thinks this will help him to see patterns and make them debatable. However, he should have explored what the director really means.</i></p>
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<p><b>Second meeting management team; bypass of managers' reactivity</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>2.6</b></span></p> <p>In order to speed things up, the HR manager has prepared a presentation regarding the issues that took much time the first management team meeting. The director has already approved the contents, the managers do not know about this initiative.</p>		
<p>Director starts with very transparent structure for this meeting. Then he asks everybody to write down what – in their opinion - the vision is. No one asks a question, everyone starts writing. Subsequently, director stimulates an open discussion. He leaves much room to respond to each other. This part of the meeting is energetic and interactive; all ask questions.</p> <p>Subsequently, director announces that G (HR manager) has prepared a presentation about the themes that took much time to explore together. Dir has already approved the contents of the presentation. G starts her presentation that is well-structured and has strong contents. All listen. After the presentation everyone keeps silent.</p> <p>Director (looks annoyed): I think he deserves a reaction.</p>	<p>P subject-object I cover-up I short term I symptoms</p>	<p>Director succeeds to leave room and stimulates active participation by managers.</p> <p>This intervention aims at speeding things up, as this process took much time in the first meeting. The circular pattern that underlies this is being covered up this way. In the short run, the presentation helps to make progress.</p>



<p>At the end of this session, director invites interventionist to share feedback with the team. Main observations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- in simple situations (no tension, no sensitive subjects) team operates fairly effectively: director leaves room, interaction between managers, active participation</li> <li>- in complex situations the director tends to enlarge control and reduce room; initiative and participation reduce and managers wait for their turn; director's control and managers' dependency are circularly linked</li> <li>- as such, entrepreneurship and pro-activity are being stifled</li> <li>- the presentation by HR was strong; however, one should be careful: the reason of her presentation was the team not being fast enough; this way this problem is by-passed and even confirmed; it is a short-term solution.</li> </ul> <p>All make notes. Silence.</p> <p>Int: Please take some time to think these things over.</p>		<p><i>To what extent is (asking for) feedback a bypass? After all, when the interventionist gives feedback this seems to be free of obligations. People can be impressed, say the feedback is interesting and subsequently leave it for what it is. This would be a 'shirk strategy': shifting the responsibility to an 'outsider' and avoiding sharing one's own opinion about the process or colleagues.</i></p>
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<p><i>Session with director; discussion of bypasses that aim at speeding things up</i></p> <p>Later, director and interventionist evaluate the current reality and progress, inclusive the second management team meeting.</p>			2.7
<p>Int: what did you do with the feedback I shared with you during the last MT session?</p> <p>Dir: We have taken the feedback very seriously. In the afternoon, after you had left, we discussed your observations again.</p> <p>Int: Is there anything you can do with it?</p> <p>Dir: Well, it will take time. At least, now we are aware of the patterns you have described.</p> <p>Int: Can I give feedback on your personal role in these patterns?</p> <p>Dir: Yes, I am always open to feedback.</p> <p>Int: You got irritated about a lack of initiative and entrepreneurship, didn't you?</p> <p>Dir: Yes, I did.</p> <p>Int: You tend to respond by showing your irritations without mentioning them and by taking more and more initiative, such as giving turns (??). Both reactions seem to stimulate exactly the behaviour you don't like: people get cautious and act reactively and dependently.</p> <p>Dir: I see.</p>		<p><i>Int assumes a confirmation of a shirk strategy, however is not sure. Should he have checked this (valid information)?</i></p>	



## Reflection 2

### Period 3: sessions deeper in organization

<i>Start meeting with manager and team leaders: resistance as self-fulfilling prophecy</i>		<b>2.8</b>
When director and managers have established a clear vision and main goals, the managers plan sessions with their teams (team leaders) in order to discuss the implications for their department. The processes in one department are described as an illustration.		
<p>Meeting starts with strong body language. Atmosphere is tense.</p> <p>Introduction by manager: some slides describe goals of session. Atmosphere is still tense, nobody responds.</p> <p>Mgr: Who would like to respond?</p> <p>TL1: I miss the connection.</p> <p>Mgr: What do you mean?</p> <p>TL1: I miss the connection between what the MT has developed and what we are doing in our day-to-day business. There should be acknowledgement of what our employees and we are already delivering.</p> <p>Mgr: Of course we do acknowledge your effort. But we are never good enough, are we. There is always room for improvement.</p> <p>TL2 (angry): Things don't work here. Look how this is organized. We can say 'yes', if you want. But we are well-thinking individuals. (A long monologue about ICT possibilities, lack of entrepreneurship in the top, bad top management and the developments in society follows.)</p> <p>Mgr does not respond.</p> <p>Int (to TL2): you are very angry, aren't you? It seems that you feel frustrated about your experiences in this organization, right?</p> <p>TL2: .....yes, right .....</p>	B control	<p><i>Up front, interventionists have heard some rumours about this team. It is said to be a 'difficult' team. The first impression confirms this belief. In effect, the interventionist feels he has to support the manager to 'deal with this difficult team' and activates a unilateral control model.</i></p> <p>Introduction is relatively long. It seems that the more tense the atmosphere, the more directing by the manager, etcetera (circular pattern).</p> <p>This message seems to be a reaction on episodic change, initiated by management. Episodic changes, combined with a Subject-Object perspective, give the impression that 'change should be imposed on the organization because otherwise nothing will happen'.</p> <p>Neither manager, nor interventionist inquires into what TL1 means. Thus, they keep things under control.</p> <p><i>Bypass by interventionist.</i></p>



*Interventionist intends to share valid information about the effect of team leaders' behaviour and addresses circularity. Furthermore, he says that he appreciates them being open and sharing valid information (not saying 'yes' if one thinks 'no'). However, these words are not consistent with the interventionist's perception and behaviour during the session, as he experienced valid information as 'difficult behaviour' and 'resistance' and activated a unilateral control model that – as a self-fulfilling prophecy – stimulated 'difficult behaviour' and 'resistance'.*

Mgr: I felt

- not happy
- more and more tense
- disappointed about team leaders' ownership
- I was let down
- I missed contact

Actually I was angry.



<p>Int: what kept you from saying these things?</p> <p>Mgr: I don't know; it didn't occur to me.</p> <p>Int : There was a distance between you and your team: the more tension, the more distance and the more focus on procedures. It seems there was a circular process: the more distance you took, the more critical some became, the more distance you took, etcetera.</p> <p>We saw a manager, but didn't see you with your feelings and expectations. Do you see what I mean?</p> <p>Mgr: This is what I felt. I was stuck.</p> <p>Int: I have some suggestions; would you like to hear them?</p> <p>Mgr: Yes, please.</p> <p>Int. Tomorrow you will have another session. Try to be open then about what you really felt as an effect of their behaviour: you felt you were let down. Share valid information. Why do you think they acted as they did?</p> <p>Mgr: I think they did not feel they were taken seriously. There was no contact.</p> <p>Int: What about checking this and inquiring about what you did that stimulated their behaviour. Would you be prepared to take your own role into account?</p> <p>Mgr: Yes, I would.</p>		<p><i>Actually, the interventionist had not been able to share these kind of feelings either. Both have been stuck in a unilateral control model that instructs them to keep things under control, to win, to suppress feelings, to avoid testing their own assumptions and to judge others (Argyris, 1990). Manager and interventionist showed all these behaviours during the session. The interventionist was a good 'partner-in-business'.</i></p> <p><i>By giving this feedback, the interventionist distances himself from the situation, as if he were not part of the situation.</i></p> <p><i>Interventionist tries to help the manager to share valid information and explore (his role in) circular patterns.</i></p> <p><i>Afterwards, a good question for the interventionist as well.</i></p>
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#### Communication between manager and team leaders

**2.10**

The next day the manager has a regular meeting with team leaders. In this session the manager is open about what he had felt during the session and why he was disappointed. In addition, he clarifies what he expects from his team leaders and he inquires into what he did that stimulated the team leaders' behaviour. Some say he was directing too much and not listening enough. Some felt they had not been taken seriously with all the pressure from the management team and the procedural focus during the session. Some found he had not taken enough time to hear their ideas and concerns. They agree a further session is needed; the manager and a team leader will prepare this session together and team leaders can bring in ideas. The next day the manager sends an e-mail message to all of them. Some parts are selected below.

<p>Dear all,</p> <p>We had two special meetings this week. A start meeting and an evaluation meeting. I think we all had mixed feelings about the start meeting. During the evaluation I shared my feelings. I let you know that I have higher expectations regarding our leadership in this change process. Of course I will be very glad to involve my own role. I wonder, for example, if you think I take you seriously and if I take enough time to involve you. I look forward to</p>	<p>P own role (D) B inquiry (D) B reflection (D) B proactive (D) I reflection (D)</p>	<p>Manager is open about his own role and his assumptions. He writes that he is willing to test his assumptions. This could be espoused theory. Later, this can be observed in action.</p>
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<p>feel comfortable?</p> <p>Mgr: Well, I prepared with a team leader and we have incorporated ideas of other team leaders. That helps me. Besides, the room is much better. I have reserved the café, which has a pleasant atmosphere.</p> <p>Int: Great. Is there anything you could do in the program that will help you?</p> <p>Mgr: I can do something. And I will. I'm starting with a special exercise. You'll see (laughs..). And I have a beautiful movie that I will show during the break. I am sure that will move you. This meeting is going to be fun.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>In the second part manager and interventionist prepare the procedural agenda of the meeting.</p>		<p>already has several ideas how he could contribute to a good atmosphere.</p>
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<i>Second session with managers and team leaders; manager stimulates mutual learning</i> During this session the manager contributes strongly to mutual learning and changing.		2.12
<p>Mgr opens with a surprising introduction: he invites everyone to shake hands and say 'welcome' (something they did in a teambuilding session some months before, which had been a positive experience).</p> <p>The atmosphere is immediately different.</p> <p>Mgr (with a friendly, warm tone of voice): Welcome to this session. A second chance session. In our first session we were not in touch. We were opposing instead of working together. In the meantime several important things have happened. We had a good evaluation the next day. And many of you have given input for this session.</p> <p>In the meantime I have learned myself. I have had intensive contact with A (interventionist) about my style. I have learned that I tend to take distance in difficult situations. As a consequence, I lose contact, which stimulates you to be offended. I really want to keep in touch.</p> <p>TL1: It is not the change itself. I think most of us do want to change. It is the process and the tone of voice that bothered me: the management team has exactly formulated what we should do ....</p> <p>Mgr: .. but these were only outlines ...</p> <p>Int: I know you wish to listen carefully. ....</p>	<p>P circular (D) P own role (D) B reflection (D) B proactive (D)</p> <p>B control</p>	<p>Manager is open about his own role and gives insight into the circular process.</p> <p>TL1 tells he finds it hard to feel responsible for things that are being imposed on him. The words he chooses make the manager defensive; he tries to control the situation (to win?).</p> <p><i>Int leaves his role of 'partner-I- business' and takes an independent role. The manager,</i></p>

<p>TL1: We want to be taken seriously.</p> <p>Mgr: What do you need to feel taken seriously?</p> <p>TL1: The way we talk now. In an open discussion.</p> <p>Mgr: Does anyone else wish to share any issues about the past?</p> <p>TL2: We don't like to be 'the difficult team'. That is what we hear in this organization.</p> <p>TL3: What is the idea? Do we want yes-men in this organization? That doesn't feel good.</p> <p>Mgr: I don't want yes-men. Let's be honest, it would be easy if you just followed. However, I appreciate you being honest about your thoughts and feelings. Still, it is not always easy to deal with. I expect you to take responsibility as well. Can you imagine?</p> <p>TL3: Yes, I can.</p> <p>Mgr: Can we go on and explore how we can work on customer focus and entrepreneurship in our teams?</p> <p>All: yes</p> <p>In the meantime the atmosphere is much better. The manager is calm and takes time for his team leaders.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>After a brief discussion on the focus of the development process and one's own role, subgroups are invited to think about the way team leaders want to organize workshops with their teams. Subsequently, ideas are shared plenarily.</p> <p>One team leader (the one that is generally seen as a 'difficult' person): I am not happy with the way we act. We prepare sessions without our employees. But why don't we involve them? It is strange, isn't it? When we drive to this company in the morning we are all equal travellers. And in normal life we are equal citizens. However, within the walls of this company there is a difference between persons who lead and employees who are led. What is the exact moment this new situation starts: the moment we enter the building?</p> <p>Int: This is an interesting question. What exactly is the effect of you preparing the session without your employees?</p> <p>TL1: The effect is that we create a distance between our employees and us. They might feel</p>	<p>B inquiry (D) I reflection (D) I long-term (D) I inquiry (D)</p> <p>B inquiry (D)</p> <p>B valid (D)</p> <p>P subject-subject (D)</p> <p>P own role (D)</p>	<p><i>subsequently, is able to put the feedback into practice immediately.</i></p> <p>Manager shares valid information. He is open about not wanting yes-men and about yes-men being easier to deal with. He is also open about his expectations.</p> <p>This team leader uncovers the basic paradox: as soon as team leaders prepare their sessions, they initiate a process from a Subject-Object perspective and – as a consequence – they initiate a circular pattern of active team leaders and reactive/dependent employees.</p> <p>Most team leaders are not enthusiast about his point of view. They find him abstract and difficult to follow.</p>
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<p>that we don't take them seriously.</p> <p>Int: This is an important issue. I suggest you don't surprise your employees during the session with your ideas and questions. Rather invite them to prepare and come up with ideas upfront. Otherwise you would push them even more strongly into a dependent attitude ('well, we'll see what my team leader comes up with').</p> <p>TL1: We are going to do that.</p> <p>[....]</p> <p>Manager finishes the session with a brief evaluation by asking each individual team leader for his/her feeling. All are positive and agree this was 'much better'.</p> <p>Mgr: What was the difference? How did we make this session more productive?</p> <p>TL: You took time for us and there was a dialogue. In the first session there was much more directing from you.</p> <p>Mgr: I am positive as well and wish to give you a compliment. I have seen a lot of energy, responsibility and team spirit. Thank you very much and good luck with your team session. A (interventionist), would you be so kind as to share your observations?</p> <p>Int: I have learned from you. To be honest, in the first session I tended to perceive you as a 'difficult team'. I really appreciate if one is open, however one can easily label real openness as 'resistance'. I did. In turn, I started helping J (manager) to persuade you and took distance. This stimulated you precisely in your behaviour. After all, I did not help J this way. On the contrary. Today you have shown how engaged you are.</p> <p>TL: Could you spread this message in the organization? To be honest, we don't like to be labelled as 'the difficult team' time after time.</p> <p>Int: What is the effect of being labelled this way?</p> <p>TL: We feel unhappy with it. Actually I get angry. It de-motivates me when the organization talks this way, just because we are not yes-men.</p> <p>Int: I will talk positively about you. However, if you are labelled this way time after time, you should think together why that happens. You might be in a vicious circle: you get angry, which leads to more negative labels, which make you even angrier, etcetera. Please try to find out together how you could stop this recurrent pattern.</p>	<p>P distance P linear</p>	<p><i>Interventionist gives a suggestion of how to resolve the circularity. This is a pragmatic but single-loop solution. An (double loop) alternative would be to explore to organize a process that gives better opportunities for employees to get involved.</i></p> <p><i>Interventionist reduces distance by self-reflection and involving his own role. Besides, he shares valid information and addresses circular patterns.</i></p> <p>TL does not involve their own role, as if 'the organization' perceive them as difficult without any reason.</p> <p><i>Interventionist tries to make circularity visible and stimulates reflection on one's own contribution to the situation.</i></p>
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<i>Manager and team leader: mutual exchange of valid information</i> <span style="float: right;"><b>2.13</b></span>		
In a feedback session the manager tells the interventionist that the 'difficult' team leader in effect is quite loyal. To illustrate this, he quotes a recent conversation that appears to be a strong example of a mutual learning conversation.		
Manager: I would like you to contribute to this policy.		
Team leader: Would you like me to be intrinsically motivated or is this just something I have to do?		
Manager: It is just something you have to do.	B valid	Valid information.
Team leader: O.k., I will do it. But don't expect me to do it because I feel so.	B valid	Valid information.
Manager: I understand and I am aware of that	B valid	Free choice and responsibility for the effects.

### Reflection 3

## Period 4: monitoring sessions

<i>Management team meeting; positive signals</i> <span style="float: right;"><b>2.14</b></span>		
In a subsequent stage all teams have monitoring sessions. Main goal of these sessions is to discuss progress and to schedule new actions. The first session is in the management team.		
Dir opens the meeting: Friends, it is a beautiful day! Great weather, great conference hotel and a great moment in our development process. I would like to start with looking back: how do you perceive the last two months?  Silence  Dir (open): Who wants to start?  Silence. After a while one manager starts.  Mgr1: We had a good session with our team. Team leaders responded positively and constructively. In the meantime, many improvement issues have been selected and teams have started putting their actions into practice. Also, in my opinion this process helps managers and team leaders to be a better team. Now we have to make clear whether customers really take advantage of our initiatives.  Dir: Do you believe we are going to make a		Director creates a positive atmosphere. Furthermore, he stimulates active participation and ownership by asking questions during the meeting. In doing so, his actions are consistent with his desire to enlarge entrepreneurship and ownership.



*Meeting with manager and team leaders; defensiveness pops up again*

**2.15**

Some illustrative parts of the session between one manager and his team leaders are described below. This is the same department that has been described before. In this meeting the interventionist does his utmost to address defensiveness.

<p>Mgr opens with a positive reflection of the preceding period and gives compliments to the team leaders about the first results. Subsequently, he looks forward.</p> <p>Mgr: We will have to steer this process. It is all people business. It is our challenge to commit persons and to motivate them. It is all about being pro-active, to make clear appointments, to show commitment and a strong coordination. Today, I would like to explore with you how we can keep the energy in the process. Besides, I would like to inspire you.</p> <p>Some laugh (not negatively, rather a reaction of 'we will wait and see').</p> <p>Mgr: But, to be honest, I feel dependent. I cannot realize anything alone. We have to support each other and work together.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Mgr shows an instruction movie (Fish!) about leading change, followed by a question: What struck you while watching this movie?</p> <p>TL1: They focus on coaching, which attracts me more than steering.</p>	<p>P subject-object</p>	<p>The belief that the manager is responsible for inspiring team leaders might lead to the opposite. Team leaders respond dependently and reactively (we will wait and see').</p>
<p>TL2: One really has to believe; it has to be genuine. That is not always the case here. Here we tend to be politically correct.</p> <p>TL3: If one does not believe in the vision, it is not going to work.</p> <p>TL4: One could also take another perspective: one has to be prepared to commit.</p> <p>TL5: Yes, what results does one want to realize oneself?</p> <p>Mgr: Let's apply the insights to our own situation. What is needed to keep the improvement process alive?</p> <p>TL6: We have to repeat our vision time after time.</p> <p>TL7: What exactly do you repeat, then?</p> <p>TL6: The vision of this development process.</p>	<p>B valid</p>	<p>Openness about defensiveness. However nobody responds. This is in line with Senge (1990): "To retain their power, defensive routines must remain undiscussable. Teams stay stuck in their defensive routines only when they pretend that they don't have any defensive routines, that everything is all right, and that they can say 'anything'" (Senge, p. 255).</p>



<p>TL2: We have to live the message ourselves. Not the organization, not our boss, not the interventionist, but I have a vision.</p> <p>TL3: That will cost time, as the movie shows.</p> <p>TL8 (just a team leader for a week; was previously one of the employees): People do not really find this process important.</p> <p>TL1: There is no clear sense-of-urgency.</p> <p>TL4: Don't refer to a sense-of-urgency. It is my personal interest to make things work. My job becomes more attractive by the improvements. What does it bring you personally?</p> <p>TL5 (to TL1): Why do you need a sense of urgency? Because you want to put pressure on things? That is not the coaching way, is it?</p> <p>Silence ...</p> <p>Int: It strikes me that you don't explore two remarks that have been made: political correctness and 'people don't really find the improvement process important'. I have heard this 'political correctness' several times. What do you mean by it?</p> <p>Silence ...</p> <p>TL2: Well, it means people just follow and are not open about what they really think: here, employees, top managers....</p> <p>TL4: I don't like the word. And actually it bothers me that this is brought in time after time.</p> <p>TL5: Let us focus on what we can do ourselves, what is within our own circle of influence.</p> <p>Int: This 'political correctness' word seems to hang over the process like a dark cloud. Let us inquire into how we could help the process forward.</p> <p>TL2: The best way is to ignore it.</p> <p>Int: But if you say that we don't say how we really think about this improvement process we cannot ignore, can we?</p> <p>TL2: But the problem is not in this group. It is somewhere else ....</p> <p>Tense silence</p> <p>TL4: We should neither accept nor ignore, however we should be aware of the risk and go on with this process.</p>		<p>TL8 shares a threatening message. Nobody responds.</p> <p>TL5 addresses inconsistency. However, the way he does (persuading) does not invite TL1 to reflect and is inconsistent in itself.</p> <p><i>Interventionist tries to make defensiveness debatable.</i></p> <p>Valid information.</p> <p><i>Interventionist tries to stimulate inquiry into defensiveness.</i></p> <p>Several defensive strategies are being activated: ignorance/denial strategy.</p> <p>Distance strategy: it is not here but somewhere else.</p> <p>This seems to be an ignorance/denial strategy in different words.</p>
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<p>Int: This is difficult, isn't it. Saying that this is not really a problem could be a confirmation of the problem.</p> <p>Several managers: We think we just have to go on.</p> <p>Mgr: This is difficult to grasp. I think we should all focus on our own role. And I appreciate if we can be open about what we really think. We have learned that before.</p> <p>Let's go back to where we were (looks at TL1).</p> <p>TL1: Well, after all I don't want them to do it for me. I want them to do it because they want it themselves.</p> <p>Many confirm.</p> <p>Mgr: That is important indeed. We have to make them do it by themselves.</p> <p>Int: Sounds like a difficult assignment: 'I want you to do it because you want it yourself.'</p> <p>Silence</p> <p>TL4: That is an impossible assignment, isn't it? But I think many employees want to make improvements themselves.</p> <p>TL7: I guest you're right. But what if they don't?</p> <p>Then we just have to expect them to do it.</p> <p>Int: Don't expect people to do it because they want to. Nor try to persuade them that they have to be motivated.</p> <p>[...]</p>	<p>P subject-object B control</p> <p>P subject-object B control</p>	<p><i>What could interventionist do differently, without being in a control model of persuading and pressing?</i></p> <p>And make this issue undiscussable .... <i>The interventionist feels he is pushing too hard and stops trying to make this discussable as their free choice seems to leave it as it is. Besides, two team leaders watch him in a way he translates as 'please don't go on, as we just don't want her negative remarks about political correctness'. He does not check this. The question is, how far should the interventionist go to make the undiscussable discussable?</i></p> <p>Feedback of double bind assignment.</p> <p><i>A relatively large amount of instruction (single-loop learning): do this, do that ....., which reflects a unilateral control character.</i></p>
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## Reflection 4

### Period 5: later developments

<i>Management reflection session: how do we get our employees in the right mode?</i> <span style="float: right;"><b>2.16</b></span>		
<p>Some months later several evaluation sessions are planned. Generally, people are satisfied with the improvement initiatives that are being taken: concrete improvement actions have led to higher customer satisfaction rates. However, several managers and team leaders bring in that <i>they have to work very hard to keep the process moving</i>. Illustrative are minutes of meeting of a management reflection session.</p>		
<p>[...]</p> <p>After the collection of problems there appeared to be one clear thread: employees tend to shirk their responsibility by referring to all kinds of circumstances.</p> <p>The leading question in our session was: 'how do we get our employees in the right mode and how can we explain why this process is so laborious?'</p> <p>Together, we draw the conclusions that the effect of this development process must be clear and that management has an important role in keeping the process alive.</p> <p>It strikes us that employees are blocked in being creative and bringing in ideas because they have to put their ideas into practice: 'good idea, could you please work this out?' And they might not feel like putting time into working things out.</p> <p>Managers have a role in making employees more flexible so that they can follow the development process.</p> <p>A couple of solutions have been brought in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- reflection sessions on all organization levels</li> <li>- workshops</li> <li>- meetings with a clear theme</li> <li>- knowledge management (focus employees' attention on core competences).</li> </ul> <p>[...]</p>		



## Appendix 3 Cross-case analysis

The transcripts in all cases have been encoded, based on the operational translations in table 5.1. The first overview in this appendix shows how often each expression of unilateral control was noticed in the cases. The second overview does the same concerning the alternatives that de-block changing.

### 1. Expressions of unilateral control

	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
<b>PERCEPTION (P)</b>			
Reductionism Reducing complex problems to simple and manageable categories of incidents and problems – <i>P reduction</i>	2	1	5
Distancing Considering oneself as not being a part of 'the problem' and observing 'the problem' from a distance – <i>P distancing</i>	9	3	17
Blaming Selecting one or more parties as being the cause of 'the problem' – <i>P blame</i>	8	4	20
Linear patterns Considering only one-way causal relationships of cause and effect – <i>P linear</i>	6	4	12
Subject-object Considering leader as an active subject that imposes reality on employees, being passive objects – <i>P subject-object</i>	3	9	16
<b>BEHAVIOUR (B)</b>			
Controlling circumstances Unilateral control, the desire to win, suppress feelings, to avoid testing one's own assumptions, to judge others, to be rational and to avoid situations that are considered difficult to control or have uncertain outcomes – <i>B control</i>	9	12	10
Repeated behaviour regardless of ineffectiveness Showing the same behaviour time after time, regardless of the perceived negative consequences – <i>B repeat</i>	10	4	3
Stronger control in case of threat Showing even more controlling behaviour if one experiences threat from the environment (e.g. feedback, time	10	4	3

pressure, pressure on results, pressure from shareholders or clients) – <i>B control</i> ↑			
Reactive behaviour Solutions are expected to start outside oneself - <i>B reactive</i>	3	1	9
INTERVENTIONS (I)			
Focus on symptoms Focusing on the visible problems that should be solved – <i>I symptoms</i>	2	4	5
Cover-up of underlying patterns Avoiding inquiry into more fundamental problems that 'produce' the symptoms (questions like 'how do we keep ourselves from successful change processes' and 'what makes these problems reoccur time after time?') – <i>I cover-up</i>	6	4	2
Short-term solutions, quick wins Focusing on quick and practical solutions for symptoms (pragmatic short-term perspective) – <i>I short-term</i>	2	4	2
Focus on impersonal instruments Preferring instrumental ways of 'solving or controlling the problem', e.g. instruments, techniques, checklists, tips 'n tricks – <i>I instruments</i>	2	3	5
DESIGN OF ORGANIZATION (O)			
Positional organization Organizations are designed as a hierarchical ranking of people based on the degree to which they have an overview of and insight into the organization; focus on structure (and boundaries) – <i>O positional</i>	0	0	3
Variety reduction Attempts to keep control by organizing along the principle of positional organization as well as by planning and structuring for control – <i>O variety reduction</i>	0	0	2
Subject-Object Relations between an active agent (subject) and an acted-upon (passive) object that are perceived as being sharply separated entities – <i>O subject-object</i>	0	2	1
Organization and change separated Considering organization as a stable condition and change as an episodic	0	0	0

period in between an old stability and a new and desired stability – <i>O episodic</i>			
<b>CHANGE OF ORGANIZATION (C)</b>			
Goal-oriented and planned process Elaborative plans describe the steps that lead to clear goals along a linear path - <i>C planned</i>	1	1	1
Step-by-step Focusing on stages and steps; the output of each stage is logically input for the next stage – <i>C step-by-step</i>	1	1	1
Episodic and top-down Considering change as a logical result of (top-down) initiatives, that will not evolve otherwise – <i>C top-down</i>	0	1	3
Rational Emphasizing rational analyses and considerations – <i>C rational</i>	1	1	2

## 2. Expressions of alternatives that de-block changing and organizing

	<b>Case 1</b>	<b>Case 2</b>	<b>Case 3</b>
<b>PERCEPTION (P)</b>			
Considering dynamical complexity – <i>P dynamic (D)</i>	3	1	5
Considering one's own role in underlying patterns – <i>P own (D)</i>	14	7	7
Considering mutual influences – <i>P mutual (D)</i>	6	1	3
Dynamical/circular patterns: each party or element is both cause and effect – <i>P circular (D)</i>	5	6	5
Considering leader and employees as well-thinking and making choices based on valid information – <i>P subject-subject (D)</i>	0	1	0
<b>BEHAVIOUR (B)</b>			
- Valid information (which includes information that may cause embarrassment or may be difficult to deal with) - Informed and free choice - Personal responsibility and commitment to effective implementation – <i>B valid (D)</i>	5	4	1
Reflection on effectiveness of own	11	2	10

behaviour and exploring alternatives – <i>B reflection (D)</i>			
Ability and willingness to test one's assumptions; learning by advocating own position and encouraging inquiry into or confirmation of it, and minimizing face saving – <i>B inquiry (D)</i>	4	4	4
Pro-active behaviour by self-disclosure, dialogue and inquiry into one's own role – <i>B proactive (D)</i>	3	1	1
INTERVENTIONS (I)			
Researching underlying patterns that 'produce' symptoms – <i>I patterns (D)</i>	1	0	0
Inquiring into underlying patterns and defensive routines that aim at covering up these patterns, including one's own defensive routines – <i>I inquiry (D)</i>	4	2	0
Making underlying patterns and defensive routines debatable and developing approaches to de-block change processes (fundamental long-term perspective) – <i>I long-term(D)</i>	5	2	0
Focus on learning by reflection, inquiry and dialogue – <i>I reflection (D)</i>	5	2	0
DESIGN OF ORGANIZATION (O)			
Transactional organization: organizing is a process of ongoing transactions, relationships and meaning creation; focus on processes (and interfaces) – <i>O transitional (D)</i>	0	0	0
Variety beats variety; acceptance of several perspectives and meanings – <i>O variety (D)</i>	0	0	0
Subject-subject relations, based on equality: each party is part of the 'system' and plays his role in the patterns – <i>O subject-subject (D)</i>	0	0	0
Organizing and changing as interlocked processes, that cannot be sharply separated – <i>O continuous (D)</i>	0	0	0
CHANGE OF ORGANIZATION (C)			
Process-oriented, focusing on value and effects of day-to-day interactions – <i>C process (D)</i>	2	0	0
Focusing on day-to-day interactions	0	0	0



between leader, employees (and consultants) – <i>C interactions (D)</i>			
Considering human beings as being able to continually change and improve autonomously, without any force by others – <i>C autonomous (D)</i>	0	0	0
Emphasizing emergent and blocked changing and organizing – <i>C emergent (D)</i>	0	0	0



## Appendix 4 Findings of informed expert

All cases have been evaluated by an informed expert. The aim is to get an objective judgement of

- the quality of the case analyses;
- the consistency and transparency of the chain of evidence, leading from raw data to interpretations and reflections to conclusions;
- the quality of the application of the theory.

The informed expert is E.L. Drukker. Several scientists and practitioners have mentioned his name as a professional who is not only familiar with Argyris' work, but who is also able to bring the concepts into practice. Furthermore, he is an experienced action researcher.

The cases were evaluated in two sessions. In between, there were some additional contacts. The feedback of the two sessions is summarized in this appendix.

### First session, July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2006

- Your diagnosis model is a smart format, which is very helpful for your analyses.
- The analyses are good, but boring. Something is missing. You analyse the different situations and that is fine. However, you describe them as an observer who is outside the text. It is too objective, as if you were not involved in the case. You have had considerations why you made several choices, but you have not made them explicit yet. The surplus value of your doctoral thesis is in what is missing.
- Are you defending your case? As a researcher, you have to take a distance from what you did as an interventionist. Information becomes valid when you can make free choices. That means you need a certain distance. As a researcher, you have to feel responsible only for the analyses, not for what happened in that room. That would help you to look critically and free of your own role as an interventionist.
- The matter of 'defensiveness'. It is okay to be defensive. Accept defensiveness as something normal, also for you as an interventionist in the cases. However, try to find out what the effects are and how you could contribute to your own and others' learning.
- The conclusions of your cases are sound. I agree with them. I even think you could be firmer.
- I think you do a great job in using Argyris' theory. Everything is in it. The only thing you have not used is the ladder of inference. For further reading I suggest Isaacs (1999) and Kegan (1994).
- There are some specific remarks regarding your analyses (*not involved in this summary*).

## Second session, January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008

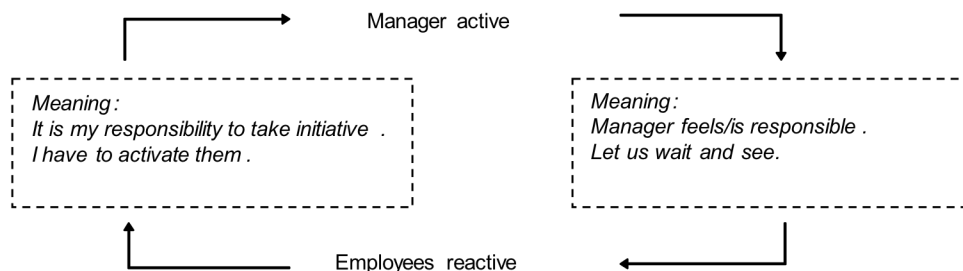
- There is a huge difference with the last time. Then, I found your reflection too much on the surface and from a distance. But not anymore. The commentaries in the third column are a pleasure to read and they are sound. Sometimes I think 'why would he think that, but that is in a very few instances (*later these instances were discussed; not involved in this summary*).
- The description of your cases is convincing. However, the hit is your reflections. Unlike the first time, now you dare to evaluate your own role as an interventionist critically. In your reflections, you illustrate that you accept your own defensiveness as an interventionist. You are more open about your assumptions and reasoning and analyse the consequences of your defensiveness. After all, defensiveness is normal. Your challenge as a practitioner and researcher is to see defensiveness and find out how to turn it into learning for you and clients. (Mutual) learning supposes that you accept that you might be wrong or that you might miss something. This is an essential condition that distinguishes Model II (mutual learning) from an advanced way to apply Model I, e.g. by asking for other beliefs and thinking that in the end you are right.
- The cases and analyses are well organized. You have kept your material under control. The structure and your line of reasoning are transparent.
- The relation with the theory is also clear. As I said last time, the model that you have developed is a helpful format for your analysis. Although the subject of your thesis is quite complex, you succeed in keeping the theory relatively transparent. In my opinion, you have realized your aim to contribute to making Argyris' work more accessible and actionable. What I like in your cases is that you clearly illustrate that managers are able and willing to take steps towards a mutual learning model whenever they see this will help them to realize their goals.
- There is one issue that I would like to address. In case 3 you argue that Argyris' insights do not involve power. In my opinion Model I (unilateral control) is strongly based on power thinking. It is a power model that leads to defensive routines and systemic reactions. In case 1 you demonstrate how you feel intimidated and unfree initially and how you succeed in finding back your autonomy. A good example that illustrates how power works and that you don't need to get stuck in the situation.

## Appendix 5 Circular patterns

In this appendix the 11 circular patterns are depicted that are all different manifestations of a Subject-Object perspective.

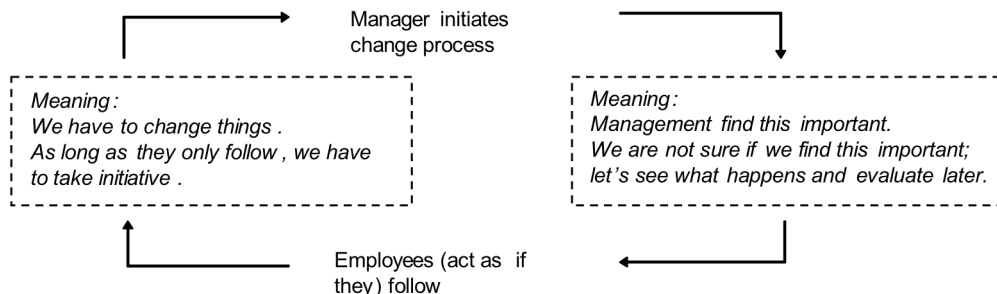
### Manager active; employees reactive

The more initiative managers take (executing change actions, organizing meetings, chairing meetings, stressing the need for change), the more reactive and dependent employees behave, the more initiative managers take, etcetera.



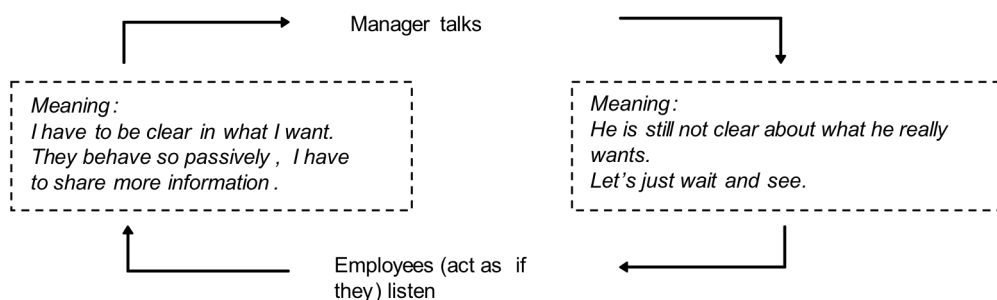
### Manager initiates change process; employees (act as if they) follow

The more managers consider themselves as subjects who can impose changes upon employees, the more employees (act as if they) follow, the more managers are confirmed in their belief they should impose changes, etcetera.



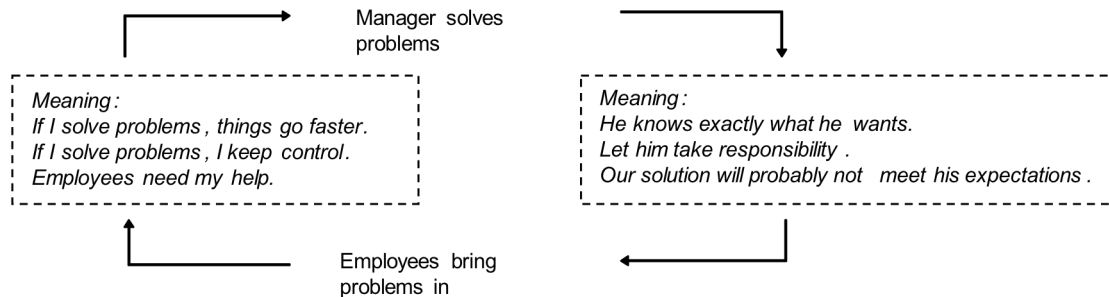
### Manager talks; employees (act as if they) listen

The more managers talk(about 'the change approach', their opinion, the need for change) the more employees (act as if they) listen, the more managers direct, etcetera.



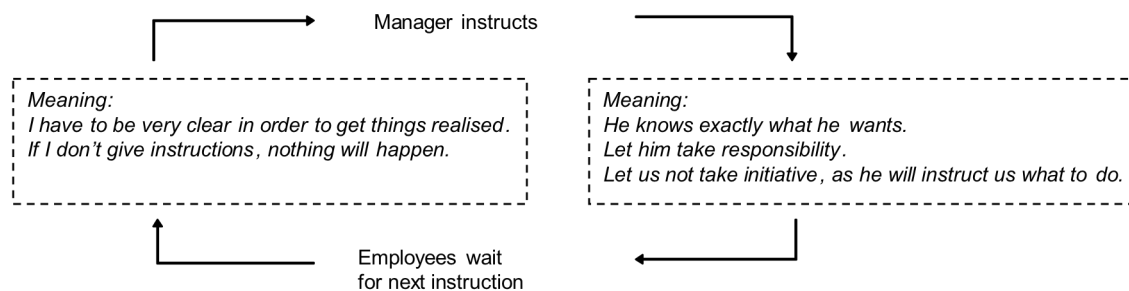
### Manager solves problems; employees bring problems in

The more managers solve problems that employees bring in, the more employees bring in their problems (instead of solving them themselves), the more managers solve their problems, etcetera.



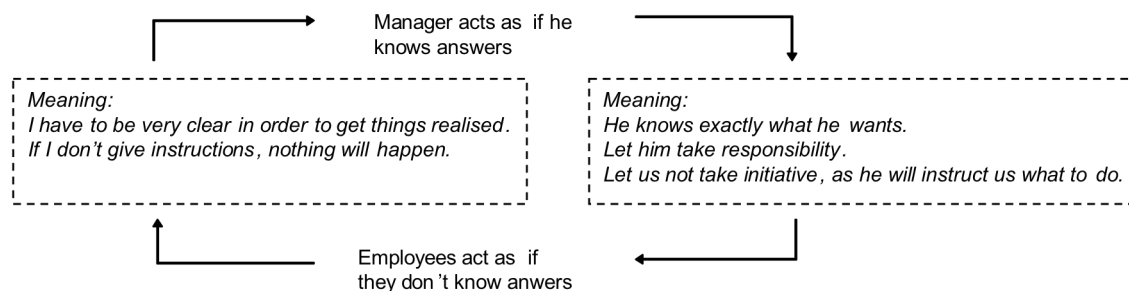
### Manager instructs; employees wait for next instruction

The more managers instruct, the more employees wait for the next instruction, the more managers instruct, etcetera.



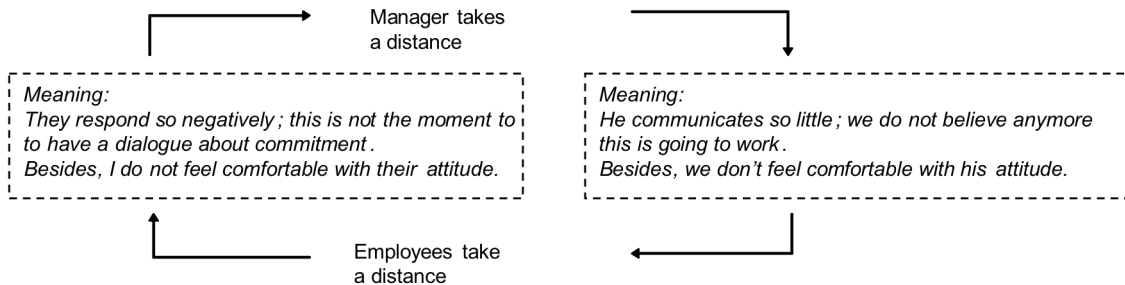
### Manager acts as if he knows answers; employees act as if they don't

The more managers act as if they know the answers (even if they don't), the more employees act as if they don't, the more managers act as if they know the answers, etcetera.



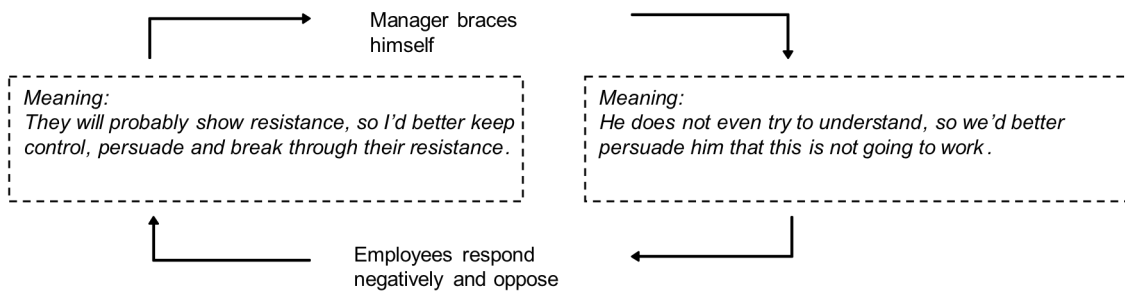
**Manager feels uncomfortable and takes distance; employees feel uncomfortable and take distance**

The more uncomfortable managers feel, the more distance they take, the more uncomfortable employees feel and the more distance they take, the more uncomfortable managers feel, etcetera.



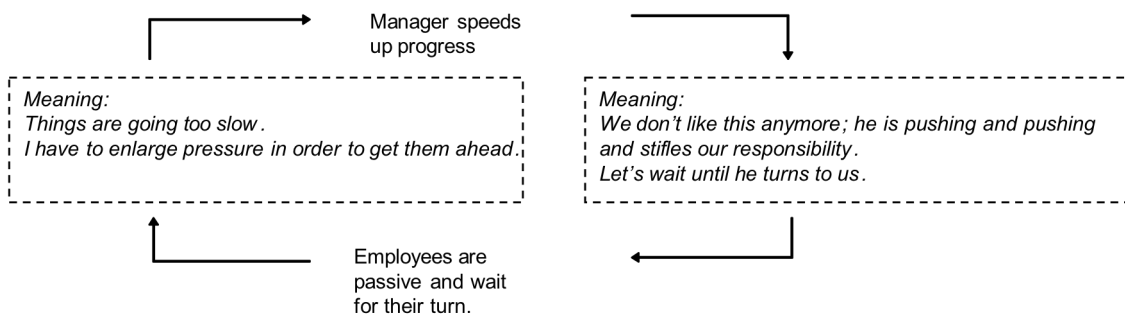
**Manager expects resistance and braces himself; employees respond negatively and oppose**

The more managers expect employees will show resistance, the more they tend to brace themselves and persuade, the more employees respond negatively and develop resistance, the more managers brace themselves, etcetera.



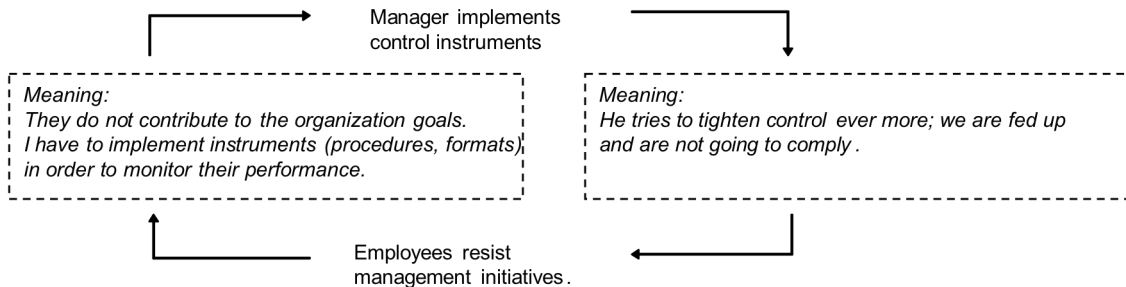
**Manager pushes to speed up progress; employees are passive and wait for their turn**

The more managers increase pressure to speed up progress, the more employees become reactive, the more managers increase pressure to speed up, etcetera.



**Manager implements control instruments; employees resist management initiatives**

The more managers enlarge control, the more employees believe managers are not a positive role model and resist management initiatives, the less management influence, the more managers enlarge control, etcetera.



**Manager tries to motivate and inspire employees; employees feel lack of motivation and inspiration**

The more managers try to motivate and inspire their employees, the less employees feel responsible for their own motivation and the more they feel dependent on the manager's capability to motivate and inspire, the more managers need to motivate and inspire, etcetera.

