KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

A STUDY OF CONVERSATIONAL SPACES DURING FAMILY BUSINESS SUCCESSION

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What our business is; drawn by a grandchild in the Hotel Family,

Texts above the picture from left; Good Food and service; Big family; Economy Money; safety and peaceful coziness
Acknowledgements

I have always dreamt of taking a doctorate degree. Where this dream has come from I do not know no one in my family has ever been near anything like this when I grew up. But my father was very creative, and he had a strong desire to learn from his experiments of cultivating and grafting to refine the varieties of apples, pears and asparagus on our family farm. His passionate engagement in his work and also his great interest in everything around him, gave me my first conversational partner. My inheritance from him is this way of immersing myself in exploration.

When Peter Lang told me about the Systemic Practice Doctorate that he was developing in companionship with John Shotter I immediately knew it was meant for me.

I owe all of my systemic practice knowledge to Peter Lang. When making this action research it is foremost my systemic knowledge I have used, although so much is integrated into my way of working and approaching people that it has become second nature to me. The practice this dissertation is built on is permeated by my systemic knowledge, albeit not much is spelled out, instead it is the new knowledge attained during these five years of study that I write about. It is not really fair but I could not do it in any other way. In the appendix there is a long Skype conversation with Peter where we talk about when we first met in 1996 and of how I tried to demonstrate to him how wrong he was before I did the systemic appreciative ‘flip’ so characteristic of Peter. My work went from focusing on problems of the past, to looking for possibilities in the future. On this journey my friend Elise Sjöblom, my old college, has been of importance. She introduced me to Peter Lang and allowed me to participate in their in-house course of the systemic approach at the Child Psychiatric Clinic in Visby, even though I had stopped working there. She helped in making all of this possible.

The work I have used for this action research study has been part of my consultancy practice. From the beginning it was developed in co-operation with my daughter Jenny Helin, who at the same time worked on and finalized her doctoral degree at the Jönköping School of Business. In the beginning Jenny and I worked together with five of the families in the project, while Sven, my husband, and I co-operated with the sixth family. This study has come to focus on the Bjärges family, the family I continued to work with on my own. I would like to express my deep gratitude to all the Bjärges for letting me into their homes, and for their opening up for all the conversations this thesis is built on. It has been fantastic to be able to follow them and I am happy their succession evolved in such a good way.
It has been said before, but now I understand that it is not just an empty phrase; a dissertation is never made by one person alone, albeit it has a single name on the front page. During this last week of writing our home has been like Santa’s workshop with members of my family running around helping, not only with household chores but also over the internet. My husband, Sven, has apart from proofreading taken care of the layout and he has made sure that everything is in its right place. My daughters have been supportive in different ways; Vera has worked with the references as well as a chef. Jenny has supervised me in the same way we both helped each other during our studies. Karin and Anna have been supportive by the way they have shown their interest. My four grandchildren, Emilia, Amanda, Stig and Knut, have also been a great source of inspiration. Three of them were born during my studies; they are all unbelievably beautiful and fantastic.

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Further I would like to thank Alfastiftelsen for the financial support that made the first project possible and also De Badande Vännerna (DBV) in Visby who’s funding made it possible for me to finalize this study.
Finally I want to thank my family of origin without them there would have been no succession project for me. Because of my love for them I see our problematic succession as such a tragedy. That is the reason to why I want to change the way we work with these challenges.
Abstract

This practice doctorate study addresses the question of succession in family business, and whether it is possible to facilitate the succession process and enhance family relations by working in a systemic, conversational and dialogical way. The high percentage of successions in family businesses which fail and result in closed down businesses has led to extensive research and caused public debate in Sweden.

This study contains of four sections. The first section gives an introduction to my felt need of developing the facilitation of the succession process in business families. It also contains a philosophical background to the systemic way of working and presents my ontology, epistemology and methods for my study and its ethical considerations.

The second section puts my study in a wider perspective of this study with a short presentation of the field of family business research; there are interviews with mainstream consultants that are elaborated on and lastly there is a gender perspective on family business consultations.

The eight essays in the third section portray my action research into my facilitation of the succession process in the Bjärges family. The succession process began at the end of 2006 and lasted almost five years. Facilitation was performed during the first two and a half years and the last follow-up conversation was held in the beginning of 2011. The Bjärges essays are written in a generative and reflexive way by means of radical, social poetics thus allowing personal involvement in the text. Some of the essays study the succession process from the perspective of dialogical moments; a couple of them reflect on the succession process in a longer perspective and finally there are follow-up conversations with the family members.

The fourth section deals with knowledge gained from working with this study, knowledge I have taken into my practice where I facilitate family members to make their own decisions. It also includes my reflections on theory and on differences in consultancy to family business. Accountants and legal advisors focus on what is best for business, while facilitators working in the dialogical way have family relations at heart. This work proposes a 3rd Way, a new way of facilitating and supporting business families by collaboration of different competences in multi-professional teams. Thus both business and family relations would be addressed.
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Part 1
1. A Felt Need

I called Elsa, the mother of the Bjärges family, to decide a date for our next meeting. During the initial small talk I asked if they had continued to talk about the issues that had developed in the previous meeting.

No, as you know, we don’t talk about sensitive things; we have not said ONE WORD about the succession since you were here last.

The Bjärges family work together every day on the farm and handle their daily challenges in a seamless flow of communication. However, the important matter of succession where so much is at stake seems to be so extremely difficult to talk about. Their succession concerns so many important matters; their way of living, how to earn their living, family relations, the pride of being a Bjärges among many other issues. They give the impression that they do not know how to approach each other, the family members seem ambivalent and may not know what they want themselves. From individual talks with them I get the feeling they all believe they know how the others are reasoning. Maybe they do not dare to start talking, since this could cause an emotional volcano to erupt; it is so important to have a process that generates good family relations. Oskar, the father in the family asked for my help, they needed to find a way to go on; the question of succession has been hanging over them for ten years. I wanted to help them facilitate a dialogue where they could start to listen in new ways; dare to be responsive, to be moved, and let the succession process evolve. Raised in a family business myself I am familiar with these difficulties; I can feel them in my body, the wordless frustration and anxiety that keep us silent when it comes to what is most urgent to talk about with our closest relations.

A Widespread Need

The situation the Bjärges family is facing is common in Sweden today and succession in family business has developed into a ‘hot’ societal issue. In a newly published report it is stated that:
Ninety thousand enterprises in Sweden risk being closed down during 2005 – 2014 due to the retirement of owners born in the forties. Consequently a lot of imminent shifts and transfers of ownership are due in the near future. (…)

A low degree of preparatory work undertaken by the company owners is the most common reason for company closures which could lead to a considerable loss of job opportunities in years to come (Linder, 2003, my translation from Swedish).

A research team at the International Business School in Jönköping was assigned by Nutek to investigate the shift of ownership and leadership in small businesses. The team examined what will happen to businesses that face succession and or transfer of ownership. The team contacted 1 850 business owners in the Jönköping area, half of them intended to leave their business within the next ten years nevertheless they had a low degree of preparation due to a multitude of reasons. The team states that the failing of generational and ownership shifts is the most common reason for company closures. One fourth of every shift leads to either bankruptcy or a slow closing down of the company shortly after the shift. In their conclusion the Jönköping scholars suggest process training for consultants/advisors to family businesses to better meet the needs of process support in family businesses (Nutek B, 2004:6, p15).

A Personal Experience

The urgent need among business owners, together with my background, made me very inspired to try to do something. I wanted to use my systemic knowledge and experience of family therapy, including working as a psychologist at psychiatric clinics and within the social services. And my additional systemic experience from within the management field which I have attained as a consultant to small businesses during twenty years. My personal experience also makes these issues very urgent for me; it has to do with what happened in my family of origin many years ago. I grew up on a farm, a family owned orchard. Around thirty-five years ago the farm was handed over to next generation. The farm was going to be split between my sister and my brother. Before the succession more land was bought up for several years. My sister went to England and my brother to Denmark to learn more about the running of the orchard and prepare for the takeover. At the legal moment of succession, when the papers were to be signed, there was a disagreement. My sister felt let
down, she thought the deal was unfair as she would only have a supportive role to our brother in the future. An accountant took care of the whole process. As I remember it, the legal part of the process went very quickly, the succession went through and there was only my brother left as successor. A conflict started to live in our family that was never spoken about. It is not until recent years that there has been some reconciliation. The conflict has had an impact on most of our family life and it has been so much part of our everyday life that I have almost not thought about it. The conflict has ‘organized’ us in the kind of relationships it has been possible for different family members to have. I imagine my experiences could be helpful for families approaching succession. For some reason, the consultancy help that is available does not fully support families in this situation. Current consultancy practices seem to spring from rational, gendered business thinking, where family relations come second. I strongly feel there is a need for more holistic ways of approaching succession, where family and business are considered.

**A Dialogic Systemic Approach**

This is a Professional Doctorate in Systemic practice. My study is based on a project with six families approaching succession in their family businesses and my aim has been to work with them in their search for their own path for the change of ownership and management in their businesses. The project was designed in line with my systemic management practice. The project lasted for a year and had four meetings with every family; the Bjärges family asked me ‘not to desert’ them as they had not yet found a way to go on with their succession. This gave me the possibility to collaborate for one and a half more year, and it became a rich experience and a vehicle for my learning. Therefore the conversations with the Bjärges family are the main focus in this study.

The way I approach succession has many dimensions. One of the dimensions can be regarded as factual and concrete, the moment when the legal documents are signed. Another dimension is always at work within a business family, an infinite dialogue going on interwoven with history, culture and visions of future. I see it as an ongoing part of the meaning making; the spoken and unspoken language of everyday life. I sympathize with the family members and want to join them around their kitchen table to help them create a space where they can engage in fruitful conversations and find ways ‘to go on’, and let the next generation take over.
The dialogic systemic approach to both practice and research can be seen as a tree with many branches. Central to all of them is the postmodern and social constructionist view that there is no grand narrative, no objective truth to be found, social knowledge is situated and local and it is impossible to ‘discover any objective truth’ about our social lives (Lyotard, 1984). Instead we are constantly in the process of co-constructing our realities (Hedges, 2005). Important is also the assumption that human systems are relational and based on language interaction, spoken or unspoken (Anderson, 1997). We generate meaning through our conversations and these in turn co-construct our reality. Central to my take on the systemic is the Bakhtinian view on dialogue as embedded in people through language (Shotter, 2008; Cunliffe, 2003; Anderson, 1997; Helin, 2011; Vedeler, 2011). When people meet in a dialogical moment something unique is always created. What is spoken is as much a product of the listener’s anticipation as of the speaker’s utterances. The meaning making is happening in a joint process between persons (Shotter, 2008). The meaning of words and the meaning of utterances are always infinite; there are always openings for new meaning-making.

One reason that makes facilitation of conversational spaces important is the difficulties that can happen in families where each member has their own take on a matter. Their differing realities can develop into dueling realities (Anderson, 1997). Family members might start to focus on protecting their own view which is contrasted to the imagined view of the other family members. Conversations might become repetitious, with no give and take of ideas and without curiosity and joy. Dialogues around problematic issues are replaced by monologic statements or total silence.

In this situation the task is to find ways to open up for conversations, and make it possible for family members to talk, to be listened to and to be moved by each other (Shotter, 2008). Thus the monological, paralleled conversations can become dialogical explorations where multiple ways of thinking are welcome and new meaning making can develop.

**Research Space and Intended Contributions**

Successions are generally expected to be difficult and messy points of venture, where the risk is high that family relations break. Succession can instead be seen as an infinite conversational process which makes it possible for family relations to grow and develop. This study compares and contrasts the dialogical context-bound and situated ontology to
the rational, objective and context free ontological way of approaching family business successions today. The focus of this study is to explore if it is possible to alter how successions in family businesses are regarded to facilitate a process that takes into account what is best for family relations as well as for business.

This study does not aim at creating a formula for ‘how to’ facilitate a family business succession process; it rather reflects over what happens when a systemic, dialogical approach opens up for conversational spaces within families. My interest lies in the communication process, what is helpful, how can I work to enhance generative dialogues, and what is it that happens when ‘good things’ occur? Here ‘good things’ denote that the family knows how to go on and simultaneously the succession process has been a ‘life giving’ experience where family members have learned new things about themselves as well as about the all other family members and benevolent relations (Vedeler 2011) have developed.

The kind of learning’s gained in this study has to do with ‘knowing how’, ‘knowing how to live’ and learning ‘how to listen’ (Lyotard, 1984, p18). It is learning of a reflexive kind where we become more aware of how we relate and create meaning together in our work with business families. I have the aim to create new connections, new ways of seeing business families as relational embodied business organizations. I have not found a reality ‘out there’ that can guide all consultation to family businesses in the future, I have rather found that the way we perceive the reality we are inquiring into from the beginning, ‘makes for’ what we find in our investigations. Our ontology determines what we find, and how we make use of different ways of talking, construct different ways of relating ourselves to the others and the otherness’s around us (Shotter, 2008, p5).

My findings and contributions concern the dialogical process and I have come to be interested in processes that are transformational over time; I call this phenomenon for ‘dialogue with delay’.

Furthermore, I describe the dualistic and gendered view on family businesses, a view that is prevalent in the field of family business research as well as in traditional consulting to business families. The dualistic view is a gendered dichotomy with two separate systems. I find the family system described as emotional and female gendered and the business as
rational and male gendered. With this dichotomy follows the same hierarchy as always in our culture, it is the male gendered rational business system that is in focus and the female gendered, emotional system is seen as something that makes family business unprofessional. I am also highlighting how every decision within the business system also affects the family system; it is impossible to separate the two.

**Thesis Outline**

**Part 1**

The first part of this study contains a background since it is necessary to return to the Enlightenment to clarify the differences between often covert theoretical underpinnings of the family business field and the systemic theory.

Further I present the ontology, epistemology and ‘methods’ used in this study. The term Praction Research serves as an umbrella for my methodological aspirations in my systemic dialogical action research, viewing research as conversational and adding a radical reflexive way of writing to be in communication with both text and reader.

**Part 2**

Part two contains the larger perspective of this study. It starts with an introduction to the family business research field and continues with three interviews with mainstream consultants that are elaborated on. Finally business consultations are seen in a gender perspective and the dichotomy of the rational business perspective and the relational family perspective are explored.

**Part 3**

Part three contains eight essays presenting my practice when facilitating the succession process in the Bjärges family. Some essays portray dialogical moments and some present
processes over longer periods of time. The last essays are based on follow up conversations with all family members.

The essay form allows me to develop my writing in a personal way, with a deeply felt wish to express something that is not easy to reproduce. By my dialogic and reflexive way of writing I am finding new meaning and new connections. The aim is to gain a greater understanding of the dialogical process of the Bjärges family and myself.

Part 4

In the last part I summarize leanings from my practice with the facilitation process as well as from extensive reading and reflexive writing.

There is an interesting ‘working’ of the dialogue that I call ‘dialogue with delay’. By this notion I am focusing on relations built up during dialogical conversations which seem to make the transformation process work in a delayed sense after and between meetings. Further I have highlighted the enormous multiplicity of experiences included in the family meetings and the possibilities that those create for the conversations.

Lastly my proposal of a 3rd Way of working with multi-professional teams is presented.
2. Situating the Systemic Approach within the Philosophy of Science

In this systemic professional doctorate I have taken on the challenge to situate the systemic approach within the world of philosophy of science. The systemic field of practice/research is seen as living within language games (Wittgenstein) where philosophy is understood as performative of practice. Therefore to appreciate where the systemic approach stands today and how it differs from the general systems theory, so often used in family business research; it is important to understand its roots. It has also been important to gain an understanding of the roots of the rational economic thinking that dominates research and consultancy in the field.

This philosophical expose’ goes back to the starting point of modern western science, to the Enlightenment. In our social constructionist and postmodern inquiries we often, (I too), make strong distinctions in relation to the Cartesian paradigms. We are in opposition to a science that declares it is rational; a language that is supposedly representative of an objective reality that is just waiting to be discovered by a scientist. What we on the other hand propose is that there is no objectivity; that language creates our reality, and knowledge is relationally co-constructed and has to be written about in a way that honors the co-creation of it. The differences are vast but still it can be confusing because of vague knowledge about the roots of the different lines of ontology. I myself is so much part of the rational Cartesian paradigms that dominate our thinking in the western hemisphere, as well as having been trained in psychology from a natural science point of view during many years; therefore I have the need to clarify what I am proposing in this study.

The way this chapter is built is by a brief summary of the philosophy of science during the last 400 years. The aim has been to show the two main paths; the rational and the hermeneutic lines of philosophy. I have been looking for where they go in different directions and criticize each other. It has been necessary to leave out a number of important philosophers and ideas. I am aware of almost falling into my own trap, drawing up new dichotomies. I see these different paradigms as language–games that have developed during decades and whole ‘ancient cities’ (Wittgenstein, 2001) have been built.
up, of different bigger roads, smaller alleys and many connections. All of them have to a large extent developed through building on each other and criticizing each other, exactly like I am trying to do with systems and systemic philosophies. For now I am forced to simplify to get further in my thinking.

Gregory Bateson says that there are different kinds of problems;

There are first the problems of how things are, what a person is, and what sort of world this is. These are the problems of ontology. Second, there are the problems of how we know anything, or more specifically, how we know what sort of a world it is and what sort of creatures we are that can know something (or perhaps nothing) of this matter. These are the problems of epistemology (Bateson, 2000, p313).

What are the ontologies; how are people seen, what is the world like and how do we come to know anything about all this, especially about social circumstances? These are my main issues in this chapter.

These questions are vast; the study of philosophy of science could last a lifetime. Here I have only built the scaffold I need for my orientation.

I will make comments and connections in italics and with wider margins in the text. When the philosophic ideas fits with the reasoning around family business and consultation that I presented in previous chapters I will make a comment.

Scaffolding

The first time I realized the importance of philosophy of science was long ago. I sat in a library preparing for something when I happened to read about Galileo Galilei. It was overwhelming how his findings about the solar system upset the Catholic Church to such an extent that they tried him by the Inquisition and found him guilty. The old ways of looking at the world fell like dominion the whole belief system and thereby among other things, the foundations of power. The truth dictated by the Church was questioned. Consequently people started picturing themselves and their abilities in a new way and the world was explored.
Is that the way philosophy of science has developed? A smooth chain is drawn, where Galilei is one link, which starts the alteration of thinking. Thomas Kuhn (1970) finds in ‘The Structure of Scientific Revelations’ his research into the history of science that there was no smooth progress of reason the way it is told by the ‘Enlightenment Story’. On the contrary different theories coexisted for several centuries. By using the telescope and the microscope in different ways, opposing ideas could be justified by looking from different points of reference. From this perspective it becomes clear that new findings never are like a flash of lightning created by a single man in a laboratory. Scientists are always situated in the society of earlier and contemporary scholars and debates are going on all the time.

Expanding my reasoning, the development and effect of overwhelming new ideas in science I draw here are only referring to the world of science. Scientists however are also in the world living; with social movement, economic ups and downs, new worlds are ‘found’, tools are produced in new ways; war and peace supersede each other. I will submit just a very thin slice of the wider history of the times these different men were living. Once again I have to admit, I will narrate as if individuals have popped up with new ideas every half century, but this has been the only way I have been able to do it for now.

Enlightenment

The philosophers of Enlightenment were acting into the age of the Renaissance, a period of cultural and intellectual creativity. Artists and intellectuals were reconnecting with the traditions of Greece and Rome. In northern Italy and Flanders a new economy, capitalism was emerging. Entrepreneurs organized their production and employed large numbers of laborers and created markets for trading and selling. Local traders and manufactures formed trade organizations in towns called guilds that regulated production, trade and training. Humanism was developed by the rediscovery of Greek and Roman literary texts and the importance of the individual was asserted and God became less ‘overwhelming’. The improvements of ships sailing made crossing of the Atlantic and the Pacific possible, Spain colonized South America, Portugal set up trading ports in India. In 1488 Columbus crossed the Atlantic; in 1519 Magellan sailed from South America across the Pacific – the first circumnavigation of the whole globe (Spodek, 2010).

Rene’ Descarte (1596-1650) is the symbol of scientific development during the Enlightenment. He was a French mathematician and philosopher who broke with the
medieval ways of reasoning and pictured the world as big machinery, and it was through the sciences that all processes that kept the machinery going would be revealed. All of nature was going to be described and explained. The idea was that there is a basic structure in everything in nature, and if everything is studied into its smallest parts and analyzed in accordance to the laws of mathematics then the laws of nature will be found. With this knowledge mankind will be able to control and foresee every course of events, because everything is determined in accordance to the laws of nature. The way nature works is metaphorically by cog-wheels that influence each other. The first wheel is the reason why the other is rotating, that is the reason why the third, and so on. The key words are cause and effect; everything has causal relations (Birkler, 2008).

Descartes wrote “Discourse on the Method” 1637. He thought that the only thing he could be really sure of was that he doubted everything he saw and everything he was thinking, the only thing he knew for sure was that there must be someone that doubts, therefore he said “Cogito ergo sum”/ “I think, therefore I am”. The reasoning during the Enlightenment was liberating and made it possible for people to think for themselves, and as Shotter writes about the philosophers during the Enlightenment:

... their aim was to shine the light of reason into those regions of human life that other ages had kept in the dark. ...they ventured to raise a whole lot of new questions, to do with the nature of Man, of Society, and of the relations between the two. ...they struck at the very foundations (the legitimacy) of organized religion and organized government (Shotter 2010, p4).

According to the epistemology of the Enlightenment all knowledge is representative of an objective world and exists independently of mind and feelings which belong to the sphere of religion and has nothing to do with science.

A characteristic heritage of the Enlightenment is what is called the “Cartesian dualism”, the split between body and mind into two distinct domains; one subjective, internal world of the mind; and one objective, belonging to the external world. According to this way of reasoning we take in information about the objective world outside and construct representations or mental models from that. Cognition is then based on the manipulations of these internal representations (Devlin, 1997, p276).
We can already here notice how this way of reasoning is the base for the ideas in family business research and consultation by separating the ‘emotional family’ from the ‘rational businesses’.

In England, 55 years later Isaac Newton (1642-1727) was to become another cornerstone of natural science. He is most known for his investigations of why heavy bodies always fall toward earth even though the earth is moving through space. In formulating the universal law of gravity in Principia (1687) he found that all the planetary motions formulated by Kepler, the earthly movements by Galileo and the principles of inertia motion identified by Descarte, were all consistent and strengthened the certainty that this was the final truth about Gods creation.

Newton saw how the apple was falling toward the ground but he did not explain why this force worked. The method was reason, he had a motto “Nullius in verba”; “Nothing in words”, and everything should be explained by numbers with a “God like objectivity” (Spodek, 2010). We can see reason as a light by which science can look into darkness and in that way make inferences of what we already know, to what we can believe about the unknown. But we can never see, hear, touch, taste or smell the structures, laws and forces which constitute that natural order (Hollis, 1999, p49). Newton’s ideas were deterministic; he saw nature as composed of a complete causal order. The laws of nature are absolute and no human can choose what will happen next (Hollis, p13). Because of man’s imperfection Newton saw the laws as hypothesis, as suggestions, that derived from predictions. He never wrote what lay behind these predictions, he just formulated Nature’s adherence to law (Molander, 1998).

The classical mechanics of Newton have been a model for what ‘real science’ ought to do for us; give us universal deterministic laws. For long people had the view that everything was made up of particles, and if researched enough, we would be able to understand their mechanistic processes.

I find that these ideas of universal deterministic laws, that ‘real science’ ought to produce predictions, also is the basic thinking within mainstream business studies as well as the base for what could be produced by systems theory. This is why ‘experts’ can go into families and tell them what to do, because there is one way to ‘look for what is best for the business in the long run’ as the consultants in the interviews talked about.
Economy and Politics, Empiricism

The empiricism idea is that knowledge can only be reached by sensory experience as opposed to rationalism that stated that knowledge develops through thinking. Experience is gained from experiments in which hypothesis can be tested. Some of the most important empiricists were Hobbes, Locke, Hume and Mill. They were all individualists in the sense that a person is not defined by the group he is born into or the craft he belongs to et cetera.

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) wrote about politics in Leviathan 1651. In the aftermath of the civil war in England when thousands had been killed, Hobbes described the mechanistic laws of nature that rule everything including human behavior. He wrote about the human condition; ‘all mankind has a perpetual and restless desire after power that ‘ceaseth’ only in death. He viewed all human rational actions as aimed at maximizing their utility. Therefore societies must be guarded by... a Leviathan...a crowned king armed with the weapons of both church and state’ (Hollis, 1999).

John Locke (1632-1704) was some decades later the big political philosopher in England. He gave voice to the people of the Glorious Revolution in 1688, who favored the power of the parliament and said that any king has to obey the will of the majority of the people. ‘The people’ were those who owned land. Locke, as well as Hobbes, wanted an economically productive society and saw owning of property and private profit as the best means to reach that end. He also saw it as important to realize the ‘enclosure acts’, laws passed from 1450 – 1640 by which England had divided up the commons of each village, turned them into private property and sold them. The acts forced people that did not own any land, but had grazed their cattle on the commons, to find work with the landlords or move into the cities. Locke showed no concern for the non-propertied classes because in his view everybody had the opportunity to buy land (Spodek, 2010).

Locke is the father of liberal thinking. He is in ‘Two Treaties of Government’ (1690) giving humanity the great offer of ‘freedom’. He stated that human beings born of the same race with the same rank, born with the same natural advantages and having the same skills, should be equals none subordinated or reduced to submission. These ideas were part of the Enlightenment and mirrors what was happening in societies all over Europe and the Americas. These are the ideas that have fostered the American Declaration in 1789 and the
bill of Rights during the French Revolution 1789. The philosophy of wealth and the life that is made possible that way were new thinking. Before in the feudal time the owning and the power were all stated by rank which you were born into and of course, the King and Church ruled most everything in the European countries.

A person is now free, owns her own body and can sell her labor without selling herself and become a slave. A human being is not deemed to stay with the group she is born into; she can decide her own destiny (my translation from Swedish, Björk, 2008, p35). A principle, according to Locke, these rights are equal for both men and women, but because only men can own possessions they are the rulers in married life. Between master and beggar there is also equality, the master has something the beggar wants and there for the beggar freely agrees to be subordinated by the master. Locke does not view economic circumstances as political. To him governments exist to protect property-owners who are also best suited to rule the country.

Locke explains why he finds private ownership better for society than common ownership. In early times Gods’ gifts were meant for everybody to use in accordance to their needs. But when money was invented a silent agreement was made to attach value to them which led to the possibility of ownership of large estates. Locke goes on to describe how private ownership has led to greater benefit for mankind. This is because one acre privately cultivated land produces ten times more than an acre that is commonly held and lies untilled. (He did not consider common co-operation.)

Ever since the Renaissance the practice of economy had developed; in trade, in possibilities for ownership, for hiring labor, which all had led to the potential to accumulate wealth. It was now feasible to have a position in society without being born into it. Political parties were established and the new owner class demanded influence in the governance of society. The time of heavenly sent kings with exclusive rights to rule was over. We can note that both Hobbe and Locke were articulating the importance of economic development and that Locke’s ‘giving’ the individual free will, was an important political consent for further developments. It helped giving birth to the industrial revolution.
co-operating around its usage. Never the less these ideas of wealth are of course the base for economy in our part of the world also today. And the ideas of power connected to the amount of land is still felt in I guess both a symbolic and a factual way. The fideicommissaries acts written of in the preceding chapter, was the way the nobility in feudal Europe maintained their power. When the liberal thinking spread new groups in society took over, it became possible for entrepreneurs and capitalists to gain wealth and thereby power. How the philosophy of fideicommissary still is so vivid in Sweden today is an interesting question.

The person who went further and formulated the idea behind what were to be called capitalism was Adam Smith (1723 – 90) who lived at the time of the industrial revolution which is dated between 1700 and 1860 in Britain. He published “The Wealth of Nations” in 1776 where he voiced and developed the philosophy of economics. In contrast to the mercantilist ways of thinking which aimed at strengthening the nation’s economic power at the expense of its rivals by stockpiling reserves of gold and silver, Adam Smith instead argued that a nation’s wealth should not be measured by treasuries in precious metals, but rather of quantities of production and trade. His idea was that when workers specialize in what they do best, and then exchanged their products on the market, productivity increases. Goods that consumers ask for attract higher prices and producers get high profits. Unwanted goods earn no profit. This is the Law of Supply and Demand and according to his Law of Accumulation, profits are reinvested in further production.

Smith came to a revolutionary conclusion; wealth neither comes from the command of a ruler, nor from the regulation of the clergy, nor from the altruistic members of community, but as a result of people pursuing their own economic self-interest and exchanging the fruits of labor in the market (Spodek p452). He said:

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.

Smith himself did not use the term capitalism. He proposed the free market, with a minimum involvement from government. For those who saw the buying and selling as signs of greed Smith explained how competition and self-interest benefited the community. Paradoxically out of conflicting self-interests social harmony would emerge.
Now England was all set to conquer the world and with its efficient ways of managing bureaucracy the Common Wealth flourished.

*Now the economism of the ‘economic man’ is established. These ideas were new in the late seventeenth century; that men (equaling human beings) are ruled by economic self-interests. Mill will soon come to build further on the same ideas. This is a very simplified way of viewing life and I want to show that the organization of business in family businesses is a proof for the contrary.*

**Beginning of Positivism**

**Auguste Compte** (1798–1857) was born in France nine years after the revolution (1789). He said that the cultural history of mankind can be divided into three steps; the Theological, the Metaphysical and the Positive. He thought that the Positive step was the only natural and the last step where all human reason will get its final regulation. Everything diffuse will be replaced by sound scientific laws verified by experience. With the term Positive he meant; what is reality as compared to fiction, useful in contrast to harmful. Positivism creates sureness and harmony instead of diffuse speculations and never ending discussions. What should be researched had to be of value for mankind and what could be researched were only phenomena that could be registered by our senses by systematic observations.

Compte thought that the social and moral aspects of life should also be included into the real scientific field; too long had they been left out in “irrational isolation within the thinking of theological-metaphysical sterile rule” (Molander, 1998, p149, my translation from Swedish).

*Positivism was a great hope for the final regulation of human reason also including the humanistic and social fields. It was within this paradigm that the far reaching science of sociology, psychology, cognitive ideas among others has developed using scientific methods from natural science. These developments came to be very viable and are still in use and are what we in the social constructionist and relational field mostly are arguing against. I will not here validate what benefits have been reached from research done in accordance to a positivistic and sometimes called a modernistic, line of thought. I will only highlight that when it comes to my field of facilitation of dialogical communication processes positivism stands for most of what we are arguing against. Like view on knowledge, view on language, view on transformations and how to act and think as a facilitator or a researcher. This will become obvious as this chapter...*
proceeds. But the main objections lie in the objectification of human beings and the approaching of human processes as deterministic, technical and instrumental; all derived from the rational thinking of the Enlightenment.

Different holistic views of society; Marx - Mill

Ever since the ancient Greeks to Newton’s Principia and further on to for example Karl Marx the thinking of systems has been basic. Karl Marx idea was that the structures of society caused the clash between classes and forced society to change. He writes in his Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (1859)

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will...The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structures of society, the real foundations, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness....It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness, (Marx, in Hollis, 1999, p6).

Here Marx writes that men’s social being defines their consciousness and that the relations and forces of production in society sets the stage for what is possible to be aware of. Ontologically this is a view based on a causal structure of society that can be disclosed by causal explanations. Marx emphasis on the materialistic universal forces that are embedded in our world calls for a science that can make these unseen structures visible, a need for science to observe the facts (empiricism) and make us conscious of the underlying structures otherwise hidden. The need is for a version of a naturalistic science that can give a single logic explanation to expose the underlying reality.

These views are contrary to the ideas of John Stuart Mill, a true individualist, who in his most famous essay “On Liberty” (1859) says:

a glorious defense of individual freedom against all political and social encroachments, in the grounds that ‘the only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way.’ In an open society where individuality flourishes progress comes through critical thinking and rational persuasion (Hollis, 1999, p9).
This strong articulation for individualism is in contrast to that of Karl Marx but published the same year 1859; both written in Europe in the midst of the industrial revolution. They shared the belief in the unity of science but have very different views on what determines actions in society; is it the underlying structures or do phenomena in society rise from the actions and passions of single human beings (Hollis, 1999). Mill had earlier in 1836 written “On the Definition of Political Economy”:

[Political economy] does not treat the whole man’s nature as modified by the social state, nor of the whole conduct of man in society. It is concerned with him solely as a being who desires to possess wealth, and who is capable of judging the comparative efficacy of means for obtaining that end.

This feeds well into the ‘economic man’ thinking that was to be formulated some decades later.

**Continuation of Positivism**

The core of the ideas of **Logical Positivism and the Vienna circle** in the 1930s, between the world wars, were that claims to knowledge of the world could only be justified by experience. This solid empiricism completely dominated the whole field of science, at least during the first sixty years of the twentieth century, with men as Schlick, Carnap and Neurath.

According to the logical empiricists all scientific observations have to be judged from its logical structure and the observations must be traceable to earlier observations/experiences, or they are meaningless. Reality has to be described and explained objectively and not colored by the subject studying it. Research also has to be freed from ideological and metaphysical nonsense. The Vienna Circle had the aim to create a unity of all sciences with the natural sciences as the template. The mission was to establish a common ground of methods and a theory that could produce all knowledge. The key concepts were measurability and analysis.

*Here we have the real monologic scientific values established. There is one reality waiting to be found and there are natural laws that can describe everything. What follows is that language is representational of the description of the reality we find. The Cartesian split is clear.*
Reactions against Enlightenment

Giambattista Vico 1668 -1744

Vico was a professor of rhetoric at the University of Napoli. He wrote ‘New Science’ in 1725, and he is often seen as the earliest modern hermeneutic. He was one of the first to criticize Descarte. According to Gadamer Vico comes from the humanistic tradition which leans on Greek philosophy; he was not denying the merits of modern critical science and its mathematical methodology, but Vico sees:

the most important thing in education is something else – the training in ‘sensus communis’, which is not nourished on the true but the probable....According to Vico is what gives the human will its direction is not the abstract universality of reason but the concrete universality represented by community of a group, a people, a nation, or the whole human race (Gadamer, 2006, p19).

As early as 1708 in ‘On the study methods of our time’ he attacks the introduction of ‘the new geometric methods’ he expresses his worries that:

In spending so much effort on the natural sciences, we neglect ethics, and in particular that part which deals with the nature of the human mind, its passions, and how they are related to civil life and eloquence (Vico, in Shotter, 1993, p168).

Vico talks about education and what nourishes the human will and that it is important to train ‘sensus communis’ and ethics. He states that it is the concrete belonging to a community of a group, of a people et cetera that is important, as well as the passions of the human mind and how they are related to civil life. He warns about spending too much time on natural science and the “abstract universality of reason”. We can understand that he was worried about the way the human mind got invisible.

Something that really has hit me during my studies of the philosophy of science is how interconnected everything is with each other. How alive the philosophies of the old Greeks are, for example how Vico is leaning on his humanistic traditions with its roots in the Greek philosophy when he criticizes the Enlightenment philosophers. This is of course common knowledge but it has been an awakening for me.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING Lisen Kebbe 2011

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Philosophy of the Romantic Age

In 1790 a strong reaction against the mechanistic worldview of the Enlightenment emerged in Germany. They believed it impossible to build rational knowledge about complex wholes like human beings, societies, history and the world. These fields were seen as organic wholes in proceeding development. Instead the developments were seen as spiritual or of a “higher” nature. History was regarded as unfolding and becoming, proceeding towards higher ends. Knowledge about wholes is to be found through philosophy or religious insights. (Molander, 1998) Important philosophers were Schelling, Schleiermacher and Fichte.

The great achievements of Romanticism – the revival of the past, the discovery of voices of the people in their songs, the collecting of fairytales and legends, the cultivation of ancient customs, the discovery of the worldviews implicit in languages, the study of “religion and wisdom of India” – all contributed to historical research, which was slowly, step by step, transformed from intuitive revival into detached historical knowledge (Gadamer, 2006, p276).

This was also a period when all kinds of cultural activity exploded; music, art, poetry and the birth of the novel. The Romantics also returned God to nature. They were critical of the philosophy of the eighteenth century and regarded it as cold, mechanical, logical and unfeeling. For the Romantics the warmth of heart was a source of knowledge. Man could learn more by listening to intuition and imagination then by experiments and logical reason and they emphasized the limitation of scientific knowledge.

*Here is the building of the platform for my systemic toolbox starting to unfold. And it is in turn building on the ancient Greeks and the practices from the medieval times. Sometimes we can think that we are radical and contemporarily thinking when we are opposing the rational paradigm in for example ‘evidence based’ research. Many have paved the roads before us.*

*What the Romanticists were highlighting is the missing out of the whole field of knowledge that can be reached through our minds.*
Phenomenology

Hussler (1859-1938) thought that the natural sciences had too many theoretical biases and claimed that we need a philosophy that starts from the beginning again and “see the things in themselves”. By a reflexive view we can give a true description of our perceptions, of the phenomena. We experience through our perceptions, and get experiences of something that we already know something about. Take for example an apple tree. New experiences of an apple tree ‘land’ in earlier experiences. Thereby old knowledge of apple trees is directed towards new perceptions of the tree. This directedness Hussler calls intentionality.

The important idea is here that the “Intentio”, the experience, is not the apple tree, it is the consciousness of the tree and the intentionality describes the total connection between the experience and what is experienced (Lubcke, 1987).

The phenomenology takes the workings of the mind further with the theories of intentionality and how our intentionality/our will are built up of our earlier experiences. Merleau-Ponty was the next phenomenologist and he went further to talk about the intertwinemment between the mind, the body and the environment. He said that perceptions are both embodied and embedded in the world (Linell, 2009).

Now we have come into a field of research where the whole of body-mind is the ‘tool’ to use in the search for knowledge of the social world.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the art of interpretation; the name is Greek, Hermes the messenger from the gods. Hermeneutics dates at least to middle ages when it was used by the Church to interpret the Bible. In the seventeenth century the focus was still on the text, not on the interpreter.

There were many discussions around the differences of research and Dilthey developed the idea that natural sciences “Erklären”, explains, and makes causal laws. The science of the mind reach knowledge through “Verstehen”, understanding, Dilthey meant that understanding needs immersion and empathy into what was studied (Molander, 1998).
With the emergence of German Romanticism the status of hermeneutics changes, hermeneutics now turns philosophical. The question “How to read?” is replaced by the question, “How do we communicate at all?” This is the shift, initiated by Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, and others, that made the ontological turn in hermeneutics possible in the beginning of the 20th century.

**Martin Heidegger**'s (1889-1976) philosophical hermeneutics shifted the focus from interpretation to existential understanding. The reciprocity between text and context is part of what Heidegger calls the hermeneutic circle. Understanding is neither a method of reading nor the outcome of critical reflection. It is not something we consciously do or fail to do, but something we are, it is characteristic of a human being, of *Dasein*. Our understanding of the world take for granted a kind of pragmatic know-how by which we orient ourselves in the world. We open the door without determining the nature of the door-handle or the doorframe. The world is familiar to us in a basic, intuitive way. The world is tacitly intelligible to us. We interpret the world by our reflective consciousness and become familiar with it. Heidegger wrote ‘Sein und Zeit’ 1927.

Like in the example Heidegger gives us of the hammer that not is working; if we all of a sudden are forced to stop hammering then suddenly we become aware of what a hammer is. Interpretation makes things appear as something. But this is only possible if we see the world as solely consisting of practices and intersubjective encounters that are opened up by *Dasein* which make us understand it. However, because *Dasein* is fundamentally embedded in the world, we simply cannot understand ourselves without the detour through the world, and the world cannot be understood without reference to Dasein. What is important is how we enter the hermeneutical circle, not to do it only with the wish to be enlightened but with a willingness to realize that the investigation into the ontological conditions of my life ought to reflect back on the way in which I live my life (Lubcke, 1987)

This is bewildering and at the same time affording; we shall not only seek to be enlightened but let the understanding we obtain reflect back on, transform, the life we are living. Heidegger also states that we need the world to understand ourselves; we have to use the detour through the world, the hermeneutic circle is set up. (Lubcke, 1987)

**Gadamer**'s (1900-2002) hermeneutics is a development of the hermeneutics of his teacher Heidegger. Gadamer stressed that methodical contemplation is the opposite of experience.
and reflection. We can reach the truth only by understanding or even mastering our experience. According to Gadamer, experience is not fixed; it rather changes and gives us continuously new perspectives. He wrote ‘Truth and Method’ 1960.

A human being, Gadamer argues, is a being in language. It is through language that the world is opened up for us. We get to know the world by learning to master a language. But we cannot really understand ourselves unless we understand ourselves as situated in a linguistically mediated, historical culture; in traditions.

To be alien to our tradition is a prerequisite for understanding it. Gadamer points out that we can never step outside our tradition; all we can do is try to understand it. Being a part of our own tradition, historical works do not primarily present themselves to us as neutral and value-free objects of scientific investigation. They are part of our horizon and through which our world-view is shaped. We are, in other words, formed by these great works before we get the chance to approach them.

At the end of the day, Gadamer claims, it is not really we who address the texts of tradition, but the canonic texts that address us. We recognize the authority of a text (or a work of art) by entering into a dialogical relationship with the past. It is this movement of understanding that Gadamer refers to as the fusion of horizons. As we come, through the work of interpretation, to understand what at first appears alien, we create a richer and larger context of meaning. By the continuous interpretation we gain a better and more reflective understanding, not only of the text, but also of ourselves.

Knowing how to obtain a fusion of horizons is a tacit capacity, which we learn by following the example of others. The knowledge at stake is like a practical know-how; like the Aristotelian phronesis. It is a knowledge that can neither be deduced theoretically, nor be fully articulated, but that is an experience, a kind of sensitivity that is only shown in the form of judgments and interpretations.

This co-determination of text and reader is Gadamer’s version of the hermeneutic circle. The meaning of the text is not something we can grasp once and for all. It is something that exists in the complex dialogical interplay between past and present. Just as we can never master the texts of the past, so can we never find definite self-knowledge. Gaining knowledge of tradition and knowing ourselves are both endless processes; they are tasks without end-points (Gadamer, 2006).
Gadamer has set me on the track, to understand that everything is included in our traditions, in my traditions, and that it is a big job to become aware of the values included in this ‘language-web’ of our everyday life. It is fantastic and hopeful to think of how the knowledge reached by experience is not fixed it gives us on the contrary constantly new perspectives. This makes me think of the headline; “it is never too late to get a happy childhood” by Ben Furman (1998) we have an infinite possibility to dialogically fusing the horizons of different perspectives and get to know about the world and ourselves in new ways over and over again, like I am doing in this study.

Systems Theory

Around 1950 in the post-war time, the Logical Positivists ruled the field of science. The General Systems Theory (GST) had been developed during the thirties but did not gain much interest until after the Second World War. During the war the communication theories had been used to handle information. Systems theory was an answer to the very narrow specializing that was going on within different sciences. Very complex problems reaching over different areas of knowledge had to be attended to. GTS developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy sat out to explain all scientific phenomena in both natural and social sciences. From the molecule, through the single cell, organ and so on up to the individual, group and society level, there are systems in a hierarchy that are communicating and mutual dependent on each other. In the Josiah Macy Foundation conferences leading scientists; biologists, engineers, mathematicians and social scientists developed far reaching ideas in communication and control. Among them were von Bertalanffy, Gregory Bateson and Norbert Weiner who coined the term ‘cybernetics’ from the Greek word for the person who steers the boat, as a metaphor for self-regulating systems (Norrbom, 1973).

Morgan (1997) presents a glossary of some of the open-systems concepts. There is an emphasis on the environment in which the organism exists. The ‘open system’ exists in continuous exchange with the environment which was seen as crucial for sustaining the life and the form of the system.

The open system strives for homeostasis, (or equilibrium), a concept referring to self-regulation and the ability to maintain a steady state, like in biological systems. This is maintained by the process of ‘negative feedback’ where deviations from the norm initiate actions to correct the deviation.
Structure, function, differentiation and integration; in a living system all structure, functions, behavior and all other features of the system operations are closely intertwined and interdependent of each other.

The capacity of a system to evolve depends on its ability to forward to more differentiation and integration and greater variety which facilitates its ability to deal with challenges and opportunities posed by the environment.

The main ideas according Bertalanffy of system theory have to do with looking at knowledge in a new way (Bertalanffy 1974, in Morgan 1997):

- All phenomena can be viewed as a web of relationships among elements.
- All systems, whether electrical, biological or social have common patterns.

Gregory Bateson was as mentioned a member of the Macy Foundation group, and in 1972 in ‘Steps to an Ecology of Mind’ he writes:

In the last twenty-five years extraordinary advances have been made in our knowledge of what sort of thing the environment is, what sort of thing an organism is, and, especially, what sort of thing a mind is. These advances has come out of cybernetics, system theory, information theory, and related sciences....we can assert that any ongoing ensemble of events and objects which has the appropriate complexity of causal circuits and appropriate energy relations will surely show mental characteristics. It will compare, that is, be responsive to difference...It will ‘process information’ and will evitable be self-corrective either toward homeostatic optima or toward the maximization of certain variables.

A ‘bit’ of information is definable as a difference which makes the difference. Such a difference, as it travels and undergoes successive transformation in a circuit, is an elementary idea (Bateson, 1972, p315, italics by the author).

It was a need among many scholars within social sciences and family therapy to find new paradigms to develop within. And when the GTS developed in the middle of the twentieth century a strong move to liberate the ontology from the natural science had begun to develop. Pierce (1998) writes about researchers that started to destruct the worldview of
the Enlightenment, researchers as Einstein, Russel, Whithead and Wittgenstein. And one may see the development of the GTS as a response, a way to try to keep some of the distinctive characteristics of the Enlightenment. Von Bertalanffy and others wanted to find properties that were universal. The GTS defines systems with well-defined feedback loops and systems with well-defined boundaries. But again according to Pierce;

Not all systems are well defined or well formed, and even well-formed systems have much more fluid, varied, chaotic structures then the General Systems thinkers imagined, functioning far from equilibrium (Pierce 1998, p5).

I Want to Underscore Three Things about Systems Theory

The first is the importance of the systems theory to take in the environment, differentiation and change through feedback; all these dynamic factors that became available to understand the constantly changing relational world with.

The second is the thought that everything is striving towards homeostasis (equilibrium) that might be true in the physical world but it leads astray when used in the social sciences. Batson is pointing to the difference between the living and the dead and the complexity inherit in human relational life is not possible to compare with mechanical feedback loops.

The third is the remains of the Cartesian logic within systems theory, the belief that it is possible to find the truth ‘out there’, that you can become an ‘expert’ also within the relational and human areas like therapy and consultation. An expert that knows what is the right way to live and is able to tell people what to do.

The first notion, the importance of the environment is where systems theory and systemic theory still are on the same grounds, it is very important!

But the two other notions; that systems always strive towards equilibrium and the idea that you can watch a system from the outside, be an expert that is looking at a system without affecting it by your observation; here are divided the two theories.
Systemic

With the systemic I move into the family therapy field as this is where the systemic ideas belonged from the beginning. System ideas enabled family therapists to move away from an intra-psychic view of the person to an inter-personal perspective, to view the ‘water between’ family members so to speak. To look at the inter-personal, the relational perspective helped family therapists to make sense of puzzling and repetitive communication patterns when seeing them as patterns of feedback (Hedges 2005, p10). The idea of feedback that we now take for granted as an everyday notion, was at that time a new and revolutionary thought and GTS was revolutionary at the time.

Lynn Hoffman gives a picture of how therapists were thinking when the field was new in her retrospective book ‘Exchanging Voices’:

Twenty-five years ago (1965, my comment) I picked up a lens called cybernetics that was lying on the floor of universe. Cybernetics was the brainchild of Norbert Wiener and was called by him “the science of communication and control”. It described the activity of feedback cycles not only in machines but also in human affairs. From then on, I only saw circles, timeless circles. They seemed to invade every sphere. Influenced by this metaphor, I subscribed to a theory of family therapy in which a symptom was described as a part of a homeostatic cycle that stabilized the family. A therapist was a person who had the skills to disrupt that cycle and help the family get to a different place (Lynn Hoffman, 2003, p87).

In Italy in 1968 a ‘quiet revolution’ took place. The first steps were taken by the Milan group of psychotherapy who applied Gregory Bateson’s take on cybernetics and communication within family therapy. Bateson had now moved away from the inner circles of GTS and the very technical view on human systems. Bateson and the Milan group draw on the big difference between the physical world and the world of living communication. They were dissatisfied with the Cartesian cause and effect model and Bateson gave a maybe bizarre example of the difference of ‘the living and the dead’ communication; If a person kicks a stone, the trajectory (created by the energy forces involved) is predictable; but if a person kicks a dog, (because the kick is a communication, a way of giving information) we can
never predict how the dog will interpret this information, nor how the dog will react, if it will bite back, run away, maybe hide or something else (Bateson, 1972).

The shift from first order cybernetics came gradually because of dissatisfaction with the GTS overly simplified view on families. Many therapists did not feel at ease with this first order cybernetics view which compared family systems with the system of central heating, including the view that all systems were striving towards homeostasis or balance, and the idea that the patient’s symptoms were something that was meant to keep the family together. This mechanistic way of thinking created an instrumental way of working and new approaches started to emerge.

Second-order cybernetics represents a radical shift for the therapist. Contrasted with the first order cybernetic position where the therapist assumes a position of expert, the second order therapist is more like a collaborative explorer co-creating meanings with the client. In the earlier position the therapist is rather like a scientist who was seen to be able to accurately diagnose the problems in the family, identifying the functions that symptoms were serving and intervene to alter these so that the unhealthy functions that symptoms were serving could be remedied (Dallos and Draper 2000, p66).

The most important shift came when the therapists started to think that it is not possible to be outside the ‘the system’ or the family you are working with, you are always part of the system. Another thing that made a big difference was the new view on communication. Everything is communication, everything you say or the silence, the position you take, your body language and so on. What follows this altered position is the idea that you can never observe anything from the outside, as soon as we meet another person we inevitably affect and are affected by them. As Batson says we are always and inevitably a part of any ‘ecology’ or system we meet.

In the late seventies Cecchin and Boscolo broke out and build the post Milan approach, they started to travel round the world meeting families and therapists and co-creating new ideas, they all embraced the social constructionist thinking and started to see communication as a social process that is creating our world (Pearce 1995, p98).
Social constructionism reaches back to the sixties when the sociologists Berger and Luckman co-wrote the book ‘The Social Construction of Reality’ (1966). They drew on the symbolic interactionism developed by Mead during the thirties. Fundamental to symbolic interactionism is the notion that we construct our own and each other’s identities through our everyday encounters with each other in social interaction. What Berger and Luckman added was that human beings together create and sustain all social phenomena through social practices (Burr, 2003, p13). Later there was an explosion of ideas in communication and social sciences that questioned the concepts of objectivity, knowledge, reason, sciences and progress in our social world (Gergen 2001, p 1, Hedges, 2005). Social constructionism suggests that meanings are socially constructed within ordinary conversations and we are constantly in the process of co-constructing our realities (Hedges, 2005). It is the late Wittgenstein who unites those that question ‘foundational’, ‘essentialist’ and positivistic approaches (Gergen 2001). It is the way Wittgenstein writes about language, verbal and non-verbal, and how language creates meaning and reality for us that is basic. Wittgenstein views language as ‘language-games’ and brings forth that speaking is part of an activity, or a form of life (2001, no. 23).

The coupling with systemic ideas and the philosophy of social constructionism in the eighties and nineties made this therapeutic field part of post modernism, and a new way of thinking of knowledge developed.

Knowledge, including self-knowledge or self-narrative, is a communal construction, a process of social exchange. For Gergen the relationship is the locus of knowledge....everything is authored, or more precisely, multiauthored, in a community of persons and relationships (Harlene Anderson, 1997, p41)

Today we have come a long way from knowledge as representational, and the idea of the possibility of an objectively knowable truth about ‘reality’ that you can create general knowledge from, without considering any context as is done in the Cartesian way of thinking.

This new turn made many new things happen in the field, one of the most important was the ‘Linguistic Turn’ given emphasis to by Harry Goolishian and Harlene Anderson in their paper from 1990 “Human systems as linguistic systems”. Therapy was now seen as a kind of a relational language system which generates meaning. It was obvious that human systems
are not a product of social organization, like in the Parsonian social theories where people were defined as members by their roles and the structure in the system; as individuals, couples, families or communities; in a depersonalized instrumental way.

Instead a new way of thinking around the families has developed. There is no such thing as the family and there is no such thing as one family; reality is based on and created in communication. Consequently there are as many families as there are members of the system, including the therapist defining it (Anderson, 1997, p80).

So what is it to think and work systemically today?

...to think systemically is to think as ‘participant parts’ of the very systems we are investigating. ...The fundamental assumption, upon systemic thinking is based, is that everything is systemic. In other words, everything interacts with (affects and is affected by) what can be counted as the ‘things’ around it. If we want different outcomes from a situation, then we have to change the internal relations within the system, thus to change its relations with its surroundings (Shotter, 2010, p11).

Within the systemic social constructionist world there is now a wide range of different lines of thought and debate. There is no attempt to create a universal theory, a unitary theory that holds true in every place and historical context, writes Gergen and Warhus (2001), it would be ‘antietical to social constructionist dialogue and freeze cultural meaning. A better way of talking about ‘theory’ says Shotter (1993) is to use Wittgenstein idea of a ‘toolbox’ of concept, ideas, skills and practices: some of which are useful in one context, some in another context.

What I have learned from doing this expose’ is that all philosophy is building on each other; either by ‘adding a new tail to the building’ or as a ‘taking off, a space, a starting point from where new thinking can emerge. What I am doing here is to create such a space for myself, where I can criticize approaches that I think is unaware of the relational aspects of business families. Therefore am I creating a ‘clear picture’ (Wittgenstein, 2001) I can build my arguments against, and at the same time being aware of, that there are no living persons that are attaining to such shallow philosophies that I am criticizing.
The End of the Dueling of Philosophies of Science – an Overview

To make the picture even clearer I have made an overview in two columns of the approaches of natural sciences with the Cartesian ontology on one side and the hermeneutics and social constructionist ideas on the other.

I understand that there have been developments within systems theory as well as in the theories of natural and economics since the fifties, but I have not taken it on me to follow these up in my scaffolding. I just wanted to situate the systemic, where it comes from and where the steps were taken to move outside system theory. I also wanted to lay out the thinking of the enlightenment and compare it to the hermeneutic thinking that is fostering the other side.

Below follows the quick version of 400 years of European philosophy of science in two columns.
The table below has two sides. The left hand is holding the Enlightenment and its ‘cousins’, all the rational reasoning of Descarte, Newton, Locke, the positivist and systems theory. The right hand is holding the opposition against the Enlightenment. Starting with Vico, the first hermeneutic philosopher who is followed by phenomenology, Heidegger and Gadamer then going over to the systemic and social construction. The important thing I want to point at is how the family therapist following systems thinking at the end of the seventies made a jump over to the other side! This is where the systemic philosophy started to develop along new veins that I will give an account of after the summarizing table that follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Enlightenment</th>
<th>Opposition against the Enlightenment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Descarte, 1637, mankind will be able to control and foresee everything, everything is determined by God.</td>
<td>Vico, 1725, opposes focus on natural sciences in the universities. Human nature, its passions and how they are related to civil life is neglected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Split between the subjective mind and the objective nature is established.</td>
<td>German Romantic age 1790, Knowledge about wholes is gained through philosophy or religious insights. Everything is unfolding and becoming, proceeding towards higher ends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only reason can guide us in our discoveries. All knowledge is representative of an objective world.</td>
<td>History is the main interest. Culture explodes; music, art, poetry and the birth of the novel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newton, 1687, says that everything has to be explained by numbers – knowledge can only be reached through experiments.</td>
<td>Man can learn more through listening to intuition than by experiments and logical reason. Imagination and primitive cultures are idealized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobbes, 1651, was one of the empiricists who stated that knowledge could only be reach through our senses. He thought that the mechanistic laws of nature ruled human behavior. He also said that every human being always desires power. Therefore we need a society that protects nations against invasions; and private property has to be protected by a crowned king armed with weapons and the church.</td>
<td>Phenomenology, Hussler, 1895, need for a new total science, to ‘see things in themselves’. And give them a true description by a reflective view by our perceptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locke, 1688, father of liberal thinking he said that humans are all born alike, both men and women. The ideas of ‘The Bill of Rights’ in America and the ideas of the French Revolution are the same as Lockes. Locke thought that the people should rule the country; “the people” were those that owned land. Governments were to protect property. The people who own property are those who are the best suited to rule.</td>
<td>Old knowledge is directed towards new perceptions, a directedness Hussler called intentionality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam Smith, 1776, said that all human beings have an economic self-interest. This will in turn develop</td>
<td>Hermeneutics, Heidegger, 1930, reciprocity between text and context, the hermeneutical circle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding is something we are- gives us a pragmatic know-how by which we can orient ourselves in the world. The world is familiar to us in a basic intuitive way – it is tacitly intelligible to us by our reflective consciousness.</td>
<td>We cannot understand ourselves without the detour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Compte, the first positivist, 1789.** Stable scientific laws must be verified by experience. **Positive science is what is real compared to what is fictive**; and useful as compared to harmful and create sureness as compared to diffuse speculations. Social and moral aspects of life should also be drawn into the real scientific field.

**Continuation of Positivism, 1930, Logical Positivists and the Vienna Circle.** Dominated in the first half of the century. **Claims to knowledge of the world must be justified by experience.** All scientific observations have to be judged from its logical structures and traced back to earlier observation. **- Reality has to be explained objectively without being colored by the subject studying it** has to be free of ideological and metaphysical nonsense. A unity of all sciences by measurability and analyses are required.

**Systems theory, 1950.** An open system theory with the aim to include all sciences had developed during the first half of the century. The environment was emphasized and **everything exists in a continuous exchange with the environment** – which is crucial for sustaining the life and form of the system.

The open system strives for **homeostasis** – the self-regulating abilities serves to maintain a steady state. Variations from the norm are corrected. Structure and functions are integrated and the capacity of the system to move to a greater differentiation is important for the ability to deal with changes in the environment.

All systems whether electric, biological or social have **common patterns.** And all systems have well defined feedback loops and well defined boundaries.

**A unified theory**

**Systems family therapy, 1950,** family therapy started within the systems theory during the fifties. System ideas enabled therapists to **move away from an intra-psychic view of the person to an inter-personal perspective,** to view the relations in the family.

To look at the inter-personal, the relational perspective helped family therapists to make sense of puzzling and repetitive communication patterns when seeing them as patterns of feedback.

**of the world, and we cannot understand the world without reference to Dasein.**

Investigations into the ontological conditions of my life ought to work back on the way in which I live my life.

**Gadamer, 1960** says that we can reach the truth only by understanding our experiences – and experiences are not fixed they are always changing and indicating new perspectives.

Human being is being in language. We can only understand ourselves as situated in a linguistically mediated, historical culture; a tradition – that is our horizon.

And we have to be alien to the tradition to be able to understand it.

We have to go into a dialogical relationship with the past – to create a movement of understanding where we can make a fusion of horizons.

**The systemic jump from left to right column**

**Systemic approach, 1978,** moved from systems theory to the **second order cybernetic.** When the systemic therapist started to work according the second-order cybernetics a **radical shift happened.** Contrasted with the first order cybernetic position, as in systems therapy, the therapist was seen as an expert, the second order therapist is more like a **collaborative explorer co-creating meanings with the client.** In the earlier position the therapist was like a scientist who was seen to be able to diagnose the problems in the family, identify the functions that symptoms were serving and intervene to take them away.

**Social construction, knowledge,** including self-narrative, is a communal construction, **a process of social exchange.** For Gergen the relationship is the locus of knowledge, everything is **multi-authored** in a community of persons and relationships.

**No unified theories.**
Ontology - Basic Assumptions Underpinning this Study

The preceding chapter pointed at how some followers of systems philosophy at the end of the 1970’s made a jump over to the ‘hermeneutic side of science’ and the systemic philosophy was born and started to develop along lines influenced by social constructionist and postmodernist thinking. This led to new ways of doing practice and of doing research. A basic hermeneutic assumption that ‘naturally’ followed was that science matters had to be understood, as opposed to natural sciences where systems theory still had its moorings, which implied that science matters should be explained.

This is a qualitative study with a hermeneutic aim to create an unfolding process of understanding of the succession process and of the facilitation of the conversations in the Bjärges family. The study of the dialogues is at a micro level; in situ, although embedded as well are macro level reflections. By studying ‘the bigger picture’ of the philosophies which underpin mainstream consultancy to business families in Sweden today and by interviewing consultants my intention is to create an understanding of how different philosophies affect the approach to succession and the way consultation to business families is performed.

Firstly though; what do I mean by ontology? Bateson (2000, p313) writes; “There are first the problems of how things are, what a person is, and what sort of world this is”. I also want to add; how we as human beings create meaning, make sense and shape our lives, and “how we perceive ourselves in relation to our environment, including other people” (Whitehead&McNiff, 2006, p22). In this study it has been important to study the philosophical roots of systemic philosophy, which were presented in the previous chapter. As a practitioner I have been so involved in the practice of everyday work that the philosophy imbedded in it became ‘natural’ and invisible. This is why it has been necessary for me to make my ontological base visible. Additionally this task has furthered and developed my line of thinking.

Secondly I will unfold the epistemology applied in this study. Bateson (2000, p313) explained that epistemology has to do with: “The problems of how we know anything,....how we know what sort of world it is and what sort of creatures we are that can know something (or perhaps nothing) of this matter”. Whitehead&McNiff (2006, p23) speak of: “a theory of what is known and how it comes to be known”. It has been important
to find ways to create an understanding based on language as ontology. Thus the question is: how can I make it possible to get to ‘know’ something about my practice, of how other consultants are working and about the larger situation business families and consultants are situated in? And how can my systemic ways of working be knowledgeable and developed and at the same time create knowledge that is useful also for others? Finally this chapter presents the ‘methodology’ which my philosophical assumptions guided me to develop and the ‘methods’ I have used in different parts of this study.

What kind of research is this?

This study explores my own practice. It is a first person qualitative action research with the aim to develop my practice. It also has the purpose of communicating with the systemic community and with the family business research field among others. My colleague, Gail Simon (2011, p64), calls this concurrency of practice and research “Praction Research”; a form of action research used for:

- critical, relational reflexivity to sustain respectful and irreverent movement across and between ideology, theory and practice.

According to Simon, (2011) there has been some discussions whether all reflexive practice, all systemic inquiry is a form of research, albeit Simon argues that ‘practice’ becomes research when public sharing comes into the picture and

- when introducing another level of relational context with the reader in which the writer(s) develops a richly transparent, reflexive account of something with and for others, when the writer(s) enters into conversations with other writers, practitioners and readers (p67).

So there are no ontological boundaries between practice and systemic research, but there are differences in the aim and practice of the two. Practice has the aim of facilitating the needs of the client; research has the purpose to share and come into dialogue about the developments with a wider audience. Simon draws on systemic values and practices from collaborative, dialogical and reflexive thinking to guide her when she takes the reader into account. I agree with Simon who draws on Ellis (2004) and Gergen (2009b) when viewing the writing of the research as an act of communication with the reader.
Language

Central to all systemic practice and research is language, dialogue and communication. This applies to all kinds of language use, which I will call ‘languaging’, both ‘live’ and when written. The systemic philosophy builds to a large extent on the developments in the ‘linguistic turn’ (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988, 1989; Alvesson & Sköldberg 2008). The linguistic turn rose out of social constructionism and postmodern thinking as described in the last chapter. The ‘turn’ had to do with viewing language as the central element in social worlds, instead of explaining social life by describing the structures and institutions that influence the way we act, think and feel. The mainstream perspective in social science is to view language as the means by which we describe and create realities of others from an outside, expert stance. This contrasts with social constructionism which views language as a relational language system by which we constitute our reality and create meaning. This is what has guided my systemic practice in attempting to find ways of inviting people to dialogical spaces as dialogue in itself is inherently transforming (Anderson 2007, p35) and it is through conversations we relate and co-create new meaning and new ways of living. This makes language the ontology. Language is what makes us human and meaning is created as language plays through us, as words, sounds, rhythm, and gestures evoke verbal and emotional responses (Cunliffe, 2002, p129).

It is in our everyday conversations we co-construct our realities (Hedges 2005). This sets language and languaging at the center of this study. In Practition Research language use is studied by the researcher who is in a collaborative way immersed in the studied dialogue and reflexively elaborates it when writing about it. In Practition Research the researcher simultaneously works as therapist or facilitator and as researcher directly involved in the dialogues that create meaning and continuously shapes the lives of the participants.

Understanding

One of the basic assumptions around how meaning is created and new life can be shaped through communication is found in the late Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations first published in 1953. Gergen (2001) states that what unites different postmodern philosophers is the immense interest in how Wittgenstein describes language. Gergen continues (2009, p164) alluding to Nr 154 in Philosophical Investigations concerning the
Process of understanding that there is no means of gaining access to others psychological states and we can only guess what other people are thinking. In Wittgenstein’s words:

Try not to think of understanding as a ‘mental process’ at all- for that is the expression that confuses you. But ask yourself: In what sort of case, in what kind of circumstances, do we say, “Now I know how to go on” (No 154, 2001, italic by the author).

To know how to go on with each other has to do with relational actions, with synchronic coordination. Gergen compares it to skilled tango dancing where each movement is coordinated with the movement of the other. To understand does not have to do with knowing what the other person is thinking; it is rather an ethical choice to coordinate with the other in response to the kind of scenario the other is inviting one into. Wittgenstein’s concern is to explore the nature of the embodied responses and reactions that make it possible for us to follow each other in practice (Shottter, 2005); to know how we can ‘get on with each other’.

This is also my main interest in this study: to help business families to find their own ways of going on together through the succession process. I get inspired by the way Wittgenstein is investigating into the smallest micro processes of language to create a picture of what language is and what it does. In Shotters (2005, p35) words the beginning of a ‘Wittgensteinian’ language game

is a spontaneous bodily reactions, and with such reactions as being the prototypes for new ways of thinking rather as the results of ones already in existence.

Here Shotter points at the very start of how new ways of thinking develop between human beings. It is not by expressing in words what we cognitively are thinking at the moment and then the other takes that in and thinks of something new. What happens is rather a spontaneous bodily reaction, a reaction faster than thought, a responsive impulse emerges, which, as Shotter states is the prototype for new ideas. The impulse can prompt us to make a gesture, give a glance or utter a sound or a word - or all of it together. This is to set the origin of language in a relational and embodied perspective, it happens between human beings. According to the same vein of thinking Wittgenstein finds the meaning of a word “only in the stream of life” (2001, No 173) this as well anchors the meaning of language in a
relational, “life stream” perspective. To be able to facilitate a process which aims at finding new ways ‘to go on’, it is necessary to join and be immersed in the conversation. It is only inside the dialogical practice that understanding of new ways of thinking and new ways of acting can be co-created. It lies in the ‘human condition’ to be able to be immersed in languaging; it is being human.

Language Games

Wittgenstein sees language as a game with rules, although when we are talking we are usually not aware of the rules; but anyhow, according Wittgenstein we are totally relying on rules to be able to communicate with each other at all. The rules are made up by the situations and the circumstances we are relating within. What is said can only be understood within the present rules, or seen as reciprocal, the rules give meaning to the words. Lyotard (1984, p10) summarizes these rules as follows:

The first is that the rules are “…a contract...between the players”. The second is that if “if there are no rules, there is no game, and a...modification of the rules alters the nature of the game. A ‘move’ or an utterance that does not satisfy the rules do not belong to the game they define”...The third remark is...:“every utterance should be thought of as a ‘move’ in a game”

This notion of “language-game” puts the finger on how people are constantly coordinating and connecting through language. The rules in the language games make up what Wittgenstein calls the “grammar”. This grammar is created by the language games and the state of affairs /state of minds (Shotter, 2005 p35) that the communicating parties are immersed in. As it is not possible to understand a word outside its grammar, it is the grammar that defines its meaning. This is of course not working in a static way by predefined rules, quite the contrary; it is constantly in flux by the appropriation and coordination between the communicating parties.

Withness Thinking

Shotter (2008, p 145) takes his starting point in the notion of ‘language game’ and includes the Bakhtinian dialogue when he develops his ideas around withness thinking. Withness thinking creates possibilities for new ways of practicing. This is done by “image guided
thinking – of thinking with, or through, or oriented by the expectations and anticipations aroused in us". Here is a summary of withness thinking as described by Shotter (2008):

- Withness thinking is a reflective interaction into a living contact with another living being, with their utterances, their bodily expressions, their words, their ‘works’.
- In the interplay between people, where living moments are intertwined, new possibilities of relations engender, new interconnections are made, and new shapes of experiences emerge.
- It gives rise to a ‘shaped’ and ‘vectored’ sense of our moment-by-moment changing placement in our surroundings...giving us unique anticipations as to what-might happen next–and what-next we might do.

Shotter’s way of pointing at how we anticipate each other, on how we ‘poise’ ourselves in relation to the other creates an understanding of how actively interconnected communication is, like mutual dancing and not as a back and forth addressing and answering. Withness thinking points at how communication is embodied, and how possibilities for new ideas arise and relations emerge by the constant dialogical movement of reciprocal interplay in between the communicating individuals. This is a furthering of the language game idea, of the embodied and responsive way we human beings are unfolding what is happening when we are most alive and interacting with each other.

Withness thinking is a philosophy of communication as well as a way to ‘be’ when languaging and a way to be aware of how big part of communicating the ‘anticipation of what happens next’ is. Shotter points at the activity of listening as being as big a part of communication as the talking. In line with Shotter I see families as living within communication, as living within active and infinitely languaging relational systems. When co-operating with the families in the conversational spaces, the withness approach ‘shapes’ and ‘vectors’ the moments and new interconnections become possible. This makes it possible for all participants to coordinate with each other in new ways; to ‘listen’ to vocal as well as silent speech and new thinking will emerge. As a researcher I participate in this ‘dance’ from my horizon as all family members do from theirs.
Dialogue

To further elaborate on the micro processes of communication the Bakhtinian take on dialogue opens up for additional perspectives. According to Bakhtin (1984, p293)

Life is by its very nature dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to hear, to respond, to agree, and so forth. ...He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium.

According to Bakhtin (1984) language and life enter each other reciprocally through concrete utterances (p63). A live utterance is the smallest unit of spoken words that are inherently responsive and any understanding of it is filled with active responsiveness. In as much as Bakhtin says that “the listener becomes the speaker” (p68), an utterance ends with the anticipation of a responsive answer. The answer does not always have to be articulated, it can for the time being be an expression of a silent responsive understanding with a delayed reaction. The speaker is always oriented toward such an actively responsive understanding and expects agreement, sympathy, objection and so forth, never a neutral answer that just duplicates what was just said (p69). And as Bakhtin comments, the speaker him/herself is always a responder as we never are the first person in universe to talk; “an utterance is always a link in a very complex chain of other utterances” (p69).

As well as being part of a response an utterance is always spoken in a particular speech genre; there is always a particular construction of the whole of the speech; there is always a special situation, a special local culture of some kind that the speech is spoken into. A speech genre according to Bakhtin organizes our speech in almost the same way as grammar does. This way of approaching language has many resemblances with the Wittgensteinian language game and his way of seeing grammar. There is an infinite amount of speech genres in private and in intimate life, in public and formal life, in art and in disciplinary forms of speech for example. We learn the genres along with learning how to speak; there is no speech without genres. The formal and official ones can be very stable while most of the informal ones are more flexible. We are usually not aware of them, but we listen for them and can often predict the genre by the very first spoken word and its intonation. In that way we get from the beginning a sense of the whole and can predict what will unfold and we can understand the meaning of the words. Bakhtin says that if we
would have to construct the genres while speaking, and construct each utterance at will for the first time, speech communication would be almost impossible (p79).

Bakhtin (p172) states that there is no limit to the dialogic context; it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future. As words are always understood in the context where they are spoken and there are no limits to the dialogical context, to the speech genres, the meaning is never finalized; there is always an ongoing movement between certainty and ambiguity (Vedeler, 2011). Bakhtin calls this ‘Unfinalizability’ which carries the view that the world is an open place and meaning is never a completed product. He supplies us with a metaphor for this eternally shifting process where meaning is elaborated in every utterance; the centripetal and centrifugal forces. The centripetal force moves toward unity and monologue while the centrifugal in the opposite direction, toward movement, openness and dialogue. Both forces are needed, the first to be able to connect and share values, the other to open up for new perspectives, multiplicity and dialogue (Bakhtin 1981).

Language as Poetic

This indecisive meaning of language described above; the unlimited possibilities of contexts of dialogue and the relational way of understanding dialogue and words point at the infinitive way words can be understood. All words are like open barrels that can hold a multitude of meanings, feelings and facts and they get their meaning through relations. This makes language in itself poetic (based on the Greek poiein, to create) with an infinite possibility to create images and opportunities; language has in itself a poetic nature.

Wittgenstein, Bakhtin and Shotter emphasize a practical understanding of language; an understanding of language in its speaking and writing. This is an understanding that to a large extent means ‘seeing connections’ (Wittgenstein, No 122) “between aspects of our surroundings circumstances, between ourselves and others, and between action and sense” (Geertz, 1983, p34, in Cunliffe, 2002). In seeing connections in the dialogue the multitude of meanings become apparent and new ways of understanding can emerge. Shotter (1996) calls this “arresting moments” in which we are struck, oriented, or moved to respond to our surroundings in different ways. Shotter has elsewhere also called these dialogical moments or movements “joint action”, the nodal point where transformation of relations and ways of thinking becomes possible.
Another way of approaching the “seeing of connections” is to talk of reflexivity between our “surrounding circumstances”. In social poetics (Katz & Shotter, 1996; McNamee 2000; Cunliffe, 2000) research is seen as a living process of reconstructing and reinterpreting of a participative practice. The research itself is seen as a dialogical practice, a process of jointly constructing impressions and the researcher herself is seen as a part of the process of meaning making (Cunliffe, 2002, p134).

Language as ontology gives an entrance to understanding research, not as a task to register information and views that can be observed, but as something that is constituted for the very first time, something that I as a researcher is embedded in and co-construct together with the research subjects, in this case the family members. The next chapter dwells on the kind of knowledge that can emerge from “Systemic Practitioner Research”.

**Epistemology**

Epistemology has to do with how our philosophical commitments, our metatheoretical assumptions and our ontology, create the logic behind our knowledge claims. What is the nature of this research, what is its purpose and how will it be utilized? These are other issues that influence the kind of knowledge declarations we make. This chapter focuses on the following points: what kind of material can I use as ‘data’; how do I notice, bring attention to and shape knowledge concerning the succession dialogues I have facilitated as well as the bigger perspective this facilitation is embedded in.

In “The Postmodern Condition” Lyotard (1984, p81) stated that we have paid a “high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one” referring to the unity of science as well as the terror in totalitarian states and he urges us to “wage a war on totality”. Lyotard questioned what kind of knowledge that was produced and for what reason. And according to Gergen (2009) and Richardson (1994) research is always built on values and there is always a moral aspect to what is studied and for what reasons. Is it knowledge, asks Lyotard, produced to oil the giant machinery of society, in order to make it work smoother? Or is knowledge produced with a critical, reflexive, hermeneutic kind of mind that reflects directly or indirectly on values or aims. This study aims at developing new ways of “seeing” successions as well as to developing new ways of facilitating the succession process. I want
to enable family members to find their unique way to move on instead of being assigned to predefined advice from main stream consultants. But what kind of ‘data’ could be collected in this Praction Research? I agree with Lyotard (1984, p81) when he asks us to “invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be represented”. This sets the context for a way of doing research that attempts to portray important moments grasped “in the stream of life” (Wittgenstein, 2001); in the writing; or by reflexive interplay between practice, writing, reading and reflecting on the total research project.

In the representational way of doing research it is taken for granted that descriptions of phenomena observed from the outside can make descriptions that are mirroring a ‘true reality’. This frequently used mirror metaphor was first created by Rorty (1979), and describes this representational view. The mind as a mirror that reflects nature, a cognitive computer, like a system which can make knowledge that is an assemblage of accurate representations of a ‘true reality’ (Rorty, 1979, p 163 in Anderson, 1997; Shotter, 2008).

The individual researcher is viewed as separated from what is observed, and is accordingly experienced as a rational human being (Anderson, 1997; Cunliffe, 2002; Shotter, 2008). Humans are often objectified in social sciences and described in distant and mechanical ways which give “dead representations of human nature” (Helin 2011, p49). The following is an example from family business research literature.

revolutionary change in whole systems is brought about by punctuation of the systems equilibrium – that is the breaking down of the inherent deep structures that had kept the system intact and in equilibrium and the rebuilding of different structures to create a new sense of order or balance (Gersick 1991, p19).

This way of approaching families, as unitary mechanical wholes, creates the need for an outside expert (preferably an engineer) that knows what necessary changes the family must make. It also presupposes that there is an embedded hidden order just waiting to be found by the researcher who carries within him the resources necessary to uncover and discover this (Shotter, 2008). When approaching language as ontology, as regards to what creates and shapes our lives, the representational and mechanistic way of doing research that presupposes a distance to the people and the matters being studied is inadequate. The idea that there is ‘one right way’ to consult families is to disqualify the families’ ability to find out what is the best way of going on for them. With the analogy that it is language that
creates the meaning in our lives and shapes the way we live, we have to, also in research, be aware of what we are creating.

*We are blinded*

Wittgenstein (2001) points at the difficulties of becoming aware of what he calls “the real foundations of the enquiry” and this is something that has been a great struggle, especially to become aware of my own participation both in the practice and in the study. As me and my practice is ‘always before my eyes’; like a child who is playing, is it easy to be naïve of what is going on. When working as a psychologist and seeing the participation and facilitation of dialogues as something quite ‘natural’ and exiting it is hard to really see what I am immersed in. As Wittgenstein (2001, No 129) states:

> The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one’s eyes.) The real foundations of his enquiry do not strike a man at all. Unless that fact has at some time struck him. - And this means; we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and powerful.

Therefore my first task becomes; how do I open my own eyes, how do I make the relational process I am working with visible? What kind of knowledge claims can I make?

With the base in hermeneutics I have to find a way to make the hermeneutical spiral move and as Taylor (1985) states; the hermeneutic understanding unfolds like “the ratchets of history” so must this qualitative research unfold in the same manner. I regard my research as a journey which started on a quite naïve ‘station’, my journey has passed through many lengthy roads in different directions; I have tried to be ‘all over’ and I have been ‘flying high above’ my research problematics (Leiter, 1980). My preference is mostly a reflexive take on hermeneutics and I have used my different outlooks to reflexively connote each other, as well as my way of working.

In Gadamer’s words (2006) the spiral of understanding requires the constant reformulation of one horizon of pre-understanding/prejudices as another is developing. This also implies reflexivity with awareness, not only of how I as a researcher affect the study, but also of how the researcher participates in the continual negotiation of meaning.
The exceptionally personal involvement in Praction Research requires self-reflection and an awareness of the subjective understandings and meanings which reflect history and traditions that are inherent in the researcher/interpreter herself. Therefor there has to be transparency of where I as researcher/practitioner come from on a personal, professional as well as a philosophical level, to enable the reader to evaluate the study.

**Focus on conversations**

When viewing language as constitutive of reality; as that which creates meaning through a relational language system; the focus of study becomes the conversations in which we are immersed. This approach challenges the modernist notion of knowledge as objective and fixed and the knower and knowledge as independent of each other. Instead ‘knowledge’ is seen as social and relational and a multiplicity of truths is created in relational processes (Anderson, 2011, p2). Like Gergen (2009) says; the task is to study the coordinated synchronic dance of dialoging.

Self-reflexivity is an important part of this process of social science as a means to know where the researcher ‘comes from’, where the point of venture is and what the aim of the study is. But at the same time the doing and writing of research produces meaning and social reality and continuously also constructs the self of the researcher; as ourselves always are present and exposed to transformation by being involved; no matter how hard we try to suppress them (Richardson, 2005). In this way research is always subjective, there is no other way to do it.

**Language as poetics creates “Social poetics”**

In social poetics research in itself is seen as a conversation, (McNamee, 2000, in Cunliffe 2002) with the participants and the readers, this makes it crucial to create a shared sense of experience (Cunliffe, 2002). In Cunliffe description of social poetics this sense is created by a notion called ‘radically reflexivity’ alluding to Garfinkel and ethnomethodology. Garfinkel according to Pollner (1991), asked for any sort of analysis, any effort to make the world “seeable sayable” – as an ongoing accomplishment.

No inquiries can be excluded no matter where or when they occur, no matter how vast or trivial their scope, organization, cost, duration, consequences, whatever their successes, whatever their repute, their practitioners, their claims, their philosophies or philosophers...
...[Procedures and results]...are managed accomplishment of organized claims, their philosophies or philosophers...[Procedures and results]...are managed accomplishment of organized settings of practical actions,...from witchcraft to topology- are acquired and assured only through particular, located organizations of artful practices (Garfinkel, 1967, p32).

Garfinkel opens up a multitude of varieties which I have taken on in a humble way. The ideas of having a variety of inquiries create polyphony of voices around my research question and situate my study in different ways.

Radical reflexivity is a way to “disrupt the flow” (Pollner, 1991) and is done by reflexive dialoguing with the written text, inserted in interviews or in other texts. This commenting ‘aids to a sluggish imagination’ (Garfinkel,1967) and is something that creates “tension and interplay of my voice/your voice, my sense/ your sense, what I am struck by/ what you are struck by, infinite possibilities emerge” (Cunliffe, 2002, p130).

As language always is ambivalent and multilayered it is, as stated earlier, in this way poetic. One of my interests is how we can use the poetic richness inherited in language to create meaning in our moment to moment dialogues and then continuously in the writing of the research make re-presentations of what has happened. The aim with the writing is that it shall continue to further create new meaning in a reflexive dialogue while writing and in the next instance with the reader. As Cunliffe puts it:

Poetic researchers explore how the vibrant use of language – metaphor, stories, irony, poetic imagining, gestural statements, and resonant ways of speaking – may construct shared experiences and meaning... One way is to take a radically reflexive approach in which we accept research itself as a socially constructed process and explore how we [all research participants] constitute meaning between us (Cunliffe, 2008, p143).

It is important that the social construction of knowledge and meaning is done by all research participants. The kind of social knowledge gained in this process has been different for all family members as well as for me as a facilitator and researcher. All of us have had different points of departure and different challenges.
**Macro level**

This study also contains creation of knowledge on a macro level. The first inspiration of how to make the disparate parts come together is found in Gadamer who writes about how difficult it is to become aware of one’s own history, traditions and horizons we are living within. Gadamer (in Paterson & Higgs, 2005, p343) says that we have to create a fusion of horizons whereby different interpretations of the phenomenon under investigation are brought together through dialogue to produce shared understanding.

The process of the eternally moving hermeneutical spiral constructs knowledge and meaning by the reflexive dialogical conversations between parts and wholes. It has been necessary to make a rough outline of the philosophy of science to be able to situate different basic assumptions; by presenting family business research as an introduction to earlier research in this field; by interviewing three mainstream consultants to get some idea of how they are working; by being inspired by social constructionist gender theory, using excerpts of several dialogues with the Bjärges family from my own practice written about in eight essays. By making reflexive connections between all these strands my dialogical way of facilitating is provided with multiplied backgrounds which it can be viewed against. To view different horizons; to create connections but not to fuse them and make them become alike, is my way of creating a ‘clear view’, an understanding of ideas and practices that have felt problematic to understand.

**Crystallizing**

To frame my way of composing this study I like to use the metaphor of ‘crystallizing’ as written about by Richardson (1994, p522):

Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns arrays, casting off in different directions.

What we see depends upon our angle of repose. ...there is no single truth...crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic.
Letting my research topic be lit up by looking through several different prisms is a way of trying to find a new kind of knowledge, something that could never be found by just looking closely into the micro processes of the dialogues within the family. To take in a ‘bigger picture’ and several contexts is my alternative which creates new insights, new ways of approaching business families’ successions. Hopefully when the reader takes in the different perspectives a dialogue with the text will start and new ways of thinking will emerge.

Gergen & Gergen (2000, p1039) suggest that:

we discard the traditional goal of research as an accumulation of products, of static frozen findings, and replace it with the generation of communicative process so the essential endeavor of research becomes that of establishing productive forms of relationship

and I agree with them. My next section will deal with the ‘methods’ I have used in my efforts to write a ‘story’ that can be used to “establish productive forms of relationships”.

‘Methods’ - Practice of Facilitation and Practice of Research

After describing the basic assumptions/ontology this study is building on and have articulated what kind of knowledge I am looking for/epistemology, it is time to portray the concrete ways/methods I have used when carrying out this Praction Research.

This research is based on two kinds of studies. The central part, concerning the conversations with the Bjärges family, is elaborated on in the essays in part three of this dissertation. Inspiration for the essays has sprung out of the micro processes highlighted by the transcriptions of the conversations. The other kind of texts presented in part two of the thesis, has to do with philosophy, stories and practices that make up some of the contexts within which family conversations are performed; such as philosophy of gender, ‘truths’ created in family business research and within mainstream consulting to business families. I refer to these as macro processes. By reflexive hermeneutic writing the intertwinement of micro and macro processes make it possible to find new aspects and new ways of approaching successions and by that it also becomes possible to find new ways of
facilitating the succession process. My aim is to create a ‘fuller image’ of the very complex world in which successions in business families are carried out. This chapter concerns the practices/methods I have used in order to carry out the research in the different parts, to be able to follow my line of thinking it is necessary to take in the whole of the study. The new ways of thinking the study opened up for me will be further elaborated on in part four, the last section of this dissertation.

First a short presentation of the first succession project that was the starting point for this research and then there is a brief presentation of the Bjärges family since their succession process is the main focus of this study.

**The first project**

In 2006 Jenny Helin, at the time a doctoral candidate at the International Business school in Jönköping Sweden, and I started to plan for a research project around family meetings in business families approaching succession. The project was planned in line with systemic practice inspired by my teachers Peter Lang and Elspeth McAdam at KCC, London. The ‘KCC take’ on systemic practice is building to a large extent on social construction and Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider, Whitney). In the project six families were included with their extended families and we had four meetings. Each meeting lasted between three to four hours. The meetings were pre-planned and are described in the wordings we used at that time:

*In the first meeting we started to discuss the current situation in the business and in the family, and if the family believed this project would be useful for them. The family was informed that the project was a research project and what that would entail.*

*In the second meeting we began to talk about the family members’ individual goals for the succession project. In an exercise everybody was asked to speak about their strongest memories connected to the business. Then a genogram was created, in which family members were placed in relation to the family and*

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1 In the appendix I have further presented my involvement with Peter Lang and the great importance he has had for my systemic practice.

2 In the appendix there is a report that presents the project and the families that were included.
the family business and as a way of discussing family relations and to talk about earlier successions. The genogram was completed with a time axis where the most important events in the life of the business were discussed.

The third meeting focused on the future. We let the family work in different constellations where they created a vision for the business from three angles; first from their own personal viewpoint, secondly from a customer’s point of view and thirdly from the perspective of the family’s and the business resources. From these pictures of an imagined future we talked about how the different individuals saw their future connection to the business.

The final meeting was focused on concretizing their vision of the family business and family life. We created time plans and decided who was going to be responsible for the different activities. An important part was the “inventory” of knowledge that was needed to realize the plans. Future roles were discussed and elaborated upon. The meeting concluded with reflections over their succession project and with evaluation questions in writing.

During this first project Jenny and I to a large extent worked together. When the project was over, the Bjärges family asked me to stay with them because they did not yet know how to go on with their succession. Therefore I continued to work with them for two more years, and I also attended several follow-up meetings a couple of years later. Thus my relation to the Bjärges family grew and they became the focus of my study. My contact with them has given me an opportunity to develop my way of working further, as well as giving me a much greater insight to what a succession process can mean to individual family members.

The Bjärges family

The Bjärges family’s paternal linage originates from a farm on the middle of Gotland. The family consists of Elsa and Oskar and their three sons; Staffan, the oldest works as a carpenter outside the farm, Markus the middle brother owns another farm nearby and Anders the youngest only works at the farm. All three brothers are married and have children. The main production of the farm is pork production. The main farm is managed in a common enterprise with Markus’ farm. Since 1996 there has been a wish to find a solution for a takeover of the farm. Who shall take over and how shall it be done?
The conversational meetings have been conducted in different ways during these years. The first projects contained four meetings where the whole extended family was assembled. Later there have been a variety of meetings with couples and with individual family members. On one occasion letters written by the brothers and the father were used as a way of preforming a delayed dialogue when the communication seemed to have come to a ‘stand still’. Conversations have been recorded and transcribed and the parts that are included in the essays have then been translated from Swedish into English.

My aim with these dialogues, as stated above, has been to co-create a conversational space together with the family where dialogues round successions matters could unfold. The way it has been done has many facets and will be dealt with at length in the third part of this study; in the introduction to the essays in part three there will also be further information about how meetings were set up.

*The wider context*

When I was immersed in the succession process of the Bjärges family I realized that the help they needed from their accountant and their legal advisor arouse out of a totally different ontology. It was more in line with the systems and ‘economic man’ assumptions that family business research is built on and which will be presented in the next chapter. To gain a better understanding I have had several meetings and interviews with consultants in this field and I have undertaken some studies of how consultation of the succession process in family businesses is performed today by other consultants which will also be presented in the next chapter.

Another ‘need’ that became apparent was to reflect over how gender affects the ontologies/philosophies used by family business research and the main stream consulting I have met. These reflections belong to a macro perspective that affect all of this research and have important implications for how consultation is carried out today.

It has also been important to get an overview of the family business research that has developed since the seventies. Most of the values I have met in the mainstream consulting have their origin in this research sector and since I want to contribute to this field it is important to be up to date.
How I have carried out the writing in order to create a dialogue within the research and with the reader

When language is the ontology and “meaning is created as language plays through us” (Cunliffe, 2002) meaning and research evolve all through the complex and ‘explosive’ life this research endeavor has had and continues to have. Everything is included; memories from my own personal history of a family business succession, through my educational and working experience, to planning a succession project with Jenny, starting to facilitate processes with families, writing field notes, audiotaping conversations, listening, transcribing, reading, discussing, continuing the work with the families, writing and so on……. This nonlinear process with a myriad of connections within me and for all the participants on micro and macro levels, in situ and over long periods of time; all of this that cannot be accounted for constitute the research process. So Lyotard’s (1984, p81) suggestion that we can only “invent allusions to what is conceivable” makes sense. So I have made my allusions to what has happened through writing essays. Some of the concrete steps have been:

- Preparing for the succession project.
- Facilitating the succession process through co-creating a dialogical forum with the Bjärges family members.
- Writing field notes and taking notes from phone calls with family members.
- Audiotaping the dialogues.
- Listening to and transcribing the conversations.
- Translating into English the especially moving sections of dialogues where new meaning was created.
- Using samples of text as centers of reflexive elaboration including personal experiences, field notes, reading, and examples from other domains.
- Narrating these ‘nodal points’ of experience and writing in a dialogical way anticipating a responsive understanding from a reader.
• Reading philosophical and professional texts and exploring points of connection and illumination with the live conversations and the reading of the transcripts in the research.

This is the schematic way of describing how the writing has been carried out.

**Writing essays**

As the writing has evolved it has become an important tool for ‘analyzing’ and sensitizing myself to the ‘organic life’ of the conversations and enabling me to ‘see’ and become aware of what was happening. The writing made it possible for me to be responsive to the relational understanding that had given me a “practical grasp of the changing, moment-by moment links and relations (Shotter, Katz, 1996, p16)”. It let me continue the line of embodied ‘practical grasping’ and thinking that had started in dialogue with family members. In this way the writing made dialogues with the transcribed texts, my reading and the macro processes possible.

Etherington (2004) presents heuristic (from Greek meaning to discover or find) research training and practice as a process which enhances personal and professional learning which is in line with my writing experiences. She noticed that students using reflexive methodologies reported profound changes by immersing themselves in practice as well as in reflexive writing and using this as transparent ‘data’. Heuristic research encourage connections with tacit knowledge, images, dreams, intuition among other things and to gather this as ‘data’ along with ‘data’ collected through conversations and to filter all of it in a reflexive way through the researchers own experience of the topic in question.

Etherington also points to the need of something she calls a period of ‘incubation’ a period where there can be a feeling of not getting anywhere, of not seeing any connections, and of being unable to make any sense. I fully recognize these feelings of being ‘lost’; “what am I doing!, this does not make any sense!” To be encouraged to go on, to keep working, to keep reading and to keep writing and to be sensitive to what kinds of questions that I asked myself, has led my embodied and reflexive way of studying further.

Added to this heuristic way of approaching the writing has been the radical reflexive ways of commenting in between the flow of text as suggested by Garfinkel and Pollner and written about earlier. This adds yet another dimension to the text which I have used in the
‘second round’ of writing, when the different parts became visible to me and I felt an urgency to connect them with each other and to myself. This radical reflexive commenting has given the hermeneutic spiral another swirl which again has taken my understanding of the succession process and my own facilitation further.

From the beginning the essays were written as solitary pieces, but as the process went along I noticed that if I ordered them according a time line it was a way of telling a story about the succession process in the Bjärges family however not THE story, since there are many more ways to narrate what happened during these five years. But it adds a time perspective that creates connections between parts and makes it easier to follow the story. The sequencing of the story made me also at the end of the study write a couple of essays that I thought were ‘missing’ to give a ‘clear enough picture’ of what this research process had included and to be able to view the succession process in a new light.

The essays are ‘snap shots’ from the conversations, from moments where I have been moved and new ways of relating and seeing have become possible. These fairly long sections of dialogue have been necessary to be able to situate the moments and for the reader to be able to get involved with the family. The conversations that were carried out in the Bjärges family created a ‘language game’ where family members and I as facilitator could feel ‘at home’. We coordinated procedures that became safe enough to make it possible for family members to respond in spontaneous ways to each other. The essays became my way of reflexively bring together new learning that the listening to the audiotapes and transcriptions made visible; it has been amazing how every new contact with the tape or the transcriptions, created new ways of understanding what had happened. The poetic aspect of language, the open ended polyphony of meanings created many openings which in combination with reading and writing created my take on reflexive heuristic; and made me “let go of structure and embark on a journey into the unknown; to reflect on self and others and to move beyond cognitive processes” (Etherington, 2004, p62).

Writing about macro perspectives

The thesis contains not only the essays. In the proceeding chapter there is also an introductory text to the history of the philosophy of science, and then there is an expose of the culture and gender perspectives that make up the landscape for the mainstream
consultation to business families that is prevalent today. It also contains descriptions of my ‘felt sense’ as described by Gendlin (2002, p32-33) as not only “a mental experience but a physical one”. He likens this experience with taste or a musical chord that makes you feel a powerful impact “a bodily feeling” which guides you to go in certain directions or to understand something. This is what happened to me when I realized that the Bjärges family, when they were about to find out how to proceed, had to contact their accountant and a lawyer and I realized that the facilitation I was developing was going to be on a market where I was not alone. All consultations are going on in the midst of a culture that I had to get acquainted to. So my studies led me into family business research which included interviews with accountants and lawyers, the attendance of official meetings around these matters and extensive reading of many kinds. I find the expression “blurred genres” used by Geertz (1983, p132) where meaning is achieved by “writers leading readers through a sequence of movements as the ‘tack back and forth between ludic, dramatistic, and textual idioms’, ...We can call it an ‘instructive’ and informative’ way of writing...so we can grasp or see something in our surroundings entirely new to us”. So my studies have progressed in much an intuitive way and only step by step and as a whole are starting to make real sense. As Wittgenstein puts it “we talk, we utter words, and only later get a picture of their life; thus, you must let the use of words teach you their meaning” (Wittgenstein, 1953, p209 cited in Shotter&Katz, 2004, p8). This is the advice I have followed and all of these different inputs to the study are now in internal dialogue building up my reflexive hermeneutic moving between horizons (Gadamer, 2006). The ‘tacking back and forth’ contains reflections on micro as well as macro levels, often within the same chapter, all to build up a meaningful whole where what has been invisible ‘steps forward’ and makes a ‘clear view’ possible which creates new ways of approaching and facilitating succession in business families. I am inspired by Giddens (1995, p396) notion of double hermeneutics by which he means the constantly ‘slipping’/the interactions between the social world of ‘lay actors’ and the meta-languages as invented by the social scientist. Giddens sees these interactions between the different frames of meaning as a necessary part of social science. Likewise I ‘jump’ between different contexts in my writing to create a wider understanding and new perspectives.

“Write to find something out”

As said before the writing has been an important ‘analytic tool’ and as Richardson writes:
I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I didn’t know before I wrote it, (Richardson, 1994, p517).

Richardson considers writing a method of inquiry. She encourages researchers to write and to re-write and to reflect over their own process while doing it. To strengthen the individual voice and to be more fully present in our work, more honest and more engaged is to take the postmodernist possibilities for qualitative writing.

Polkinghorne encourages researchers to experiment by using the narrative format “by changing the voice into a storyteller, they will also change the way their subject can be heard” (Polkinghorne, 1997, p3). He also puts forward the idea that narrative discourse produces stories about human actions and the search for progress to a solution, clarifications, or unraveling of incomplete situations (ibid, p13).

This is something I connect with. During this study I have listened to my inner voice of the ‘story teller’ to feel engaged and engaging in my writing, using the social poetic way of making sense in my study. To me and my dialogical approach it is equally important that the reader is moved by my writing and wants to engage in dialogue with the text. A text is meaningless without readers. And I agree with Polkinghorne, the narrative format made me sense ‘what was missing’ and add what I thought was needed to clarify the story.

Social poetics suggests a far reaching cooperation between participants and a joint crafting of meaning during the research process (Katz&Shotter, 2004). In this study we have been cooperating during our meetings. Although when I have tried to engage family members to reflect on my writings about our meetings, they have a couple of times politely tried to satisfy my request by reading and talking about it, but then told me that they are happy to only participate in our meetings, reading about it and discussing what is read is strange to them. I sometimes envy my research colleagues that study supervision or therapy, with research participants that are just as interested in talking about what has been going on as the researcher. My research participants do not have a reading or writing tradition in the same way. I think it is especially hard for them to take an interest in talking about what we talked about last time. After a month (and it is often much longer between meetings) the world is ‘new’, so much has happened in their practical lives, so it is strange enough to just meet quite regularly around their kitchen table and co-create a conversational space. They
are happy and proud to be part of the research and hope it will be helpful for future families.

**Summary of the ‘Methodological’ consequences of my metatheoretical position**

<table>
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<th>Practice situation</th>
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<th>Epistemology: How meaning and knowledge is created</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Common meaning situated in words, structures. Transcends time and space.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviews with consultants</td>
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<td>Conversational spaces with family</td>
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<tr>
<td>The whole study</td>
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<td>Knowing from within, situated knowing and common knowing.</td>
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**Ethics as Relational Responsibility**

McNamee and Gergen promote relational responsibility that values a continuous process of engagement in relational inquiry that ask for responsible actions that sustain relationships as opposed to “fixing blame, correcting errors or solving problems” (1999, p47). Research is never objective and it is all our choices that determine if we are ethical or not. According to Bakhtin it is only as we think and act in a participative fashion that we can be wholly responsible or answerable for our actions, in the sense that we are “reflexively conscious of the existential meaning of our acts and their implication, ethical or otherwise (Gardiner, 1998, p136). A main concern through my whole process has been ethics - what and how am I contributing. My research focus is to forward the relational aspects in writing, thinking and talking of business families in a way that is useful for them.

The second more local ethical responsibility has to do with protecting integrity, confidentiality and consent from the persons that have been co-creating this study and made it possible for me to carry it out.

Before involving the families in this study there was a two hour meeting where Jenny Helin, my co-worker during the first project, and I talked with them about their needs and how we had been planning to carry out the one year project. We informed them about our intentions to record the meetings, to keep field notes and to write about the whole process. We assured them that we would not publish anything about the different families without having their consent. The writing would of course secure confidentiality.

Five of the families consented, the sixth family did not want us to record the conversations but agreed to us taking notes during the meetings; they also consented to be participants in the research process.

The first project included four meetings with each family, and follow up phone calls after one year. The first project was done in cooperation with Almi, an official consultant organization on Gotland. There is a report about the whole project, where all the families are briefly presented. All families have read and approved to the publishing of this report and it is included in the appendix of this thesis.
These continuous meetings with the Bjårges family for one and a half more years were made on the background of the first project. The essays written in relational connections to the meetings that evolved during these one and a half years are the core experience this thesis is built on. I had the firm purpose to continue to let the family read what I had written; the transcriptions in Swedish, and my reflections in English which I translated while telling about them. The family members politely tried to meet my concerns; this was my idea of collaborative research. But after a while they told me and I understood that this was none of their interest. This only took a lot of time and interfered with the dialogical process we were developing. They told me that they trusted me and were proud of being part of the research and hoped it could help other families in their succession processes.

From the beginning I did not think of including my sister. But my own story has become more and more important and it is in relation to her that I first and most strongly experienced the ‘failed process’. My own memories have during these five years gone in many different directions. I have been inside a hermeneutical spiral continuously moving between different strands. From deep bodily memories, to the philosophy of science, to the rationality of family business research literature relating to economic consultancy, to the experience with the Bjårges family, to the ideas of the ‘systemic, postmodern umbrella’ and back again; all to create an understanding and new ideas about ways to ‘go on’ when it comes to co-operating with families in their succession processes. This is the ethical stance I have taken. When I told my sister of all of this and of how I have written about her and asked if she wanted to read it, she got very moved. But she also said that she cannot read English, but that she trusts me and she feels that I am doing this for a good cause.
Part 2
Situating My Research in a Larger Perspective
1. Family Business Research

I will here give a brief survey of the field of family business research when it comes to succession and communication in business families. The academic field of family business is surprisingly small although family owned companies is the most common way of organizing businesses worldwide. Businesses are more often studied from the organization aspect and ownership issues are usually left out. However during the past 30 years a specific field has developed and started to grow (Fletcher, 2002). In this research field the question of succession is the most common. How then is a family business defined? Christine Tidåsen defines in her dissertation:

(Family business)...is a business that is mainly owned by a family and where the family members influence the strategic, tactic and operative level of the business. The family members themselves also regard their business as a family business (Tidåsen, 2008, p43, my translation from Swedish).

Zahra and Sharma (2004) write about the developments in the field. The pioneers in the sixties until the beginning of the eighties were mostly scholars who also consulted to firms they were studying and they focused mainly on succession issues. Zahra and Sharma refer to Handler (1989a) who states that the early researchers “were keeping the research in the back seat” as research became a secondary goal and was, more of a result of consultancy work. From the start, the field borrowed from other disciplines including psychology, sociology, economics, law and family systems (Wortman, 1994) and since the late eighties there has been a rapid increase in studies from various disciplines (Dyer and Sanchez, 1998). In 2004 succession was still the dominating topic; with around twenty percent of all published articles, followed by economic performance, firm governance. There are often normative, instrumental and mechanical ways of looking at families and family relations in these articles. The following two quotations demonstrate that view:

To function well in the forthcoming developmental stage, work may be required to adjust, reconfigure, or re-create the relational structural linkages that make up the “deep” structure that effectively binds the system together (Murray, 2003, p19).
Later Murray refers to Gersick (1991) who 
finds support from a diverse range of literature for a shared paradigm and 
constructs that suggests revolutionary change in whole systems is brought 
about by punctuation of the systems equilibrium – that is the breaking down of 
the inherent deep structures that had kept the system intact and in 
equilibrium and the rebuilding of different structures to create a new sense of 
order or balance (Gersick 1991, p19).

Systems theory is the most common theoretical approach that has been used to make 
sense of what has been seen as two competing systems; family and business. A very clear 
definition of the field is made by Zahra and Sharma (2003, 2004); “what mainly is addressed 
is the interaction between family and business” (p340), the two competing domains. Many 
researchers refer to the three circle model developed by Gersick et al. (1997) to describe 
the unique characteristics of family businesses. According to them family businesses are 
characterized by the overlap of three separate spheres: the ownership, the business 
(management) and the family. Each circle is seen as a separate institution based on certain 
values, norms and interests which put pressure and expectations on the other circles. There 
is also the use of two circles; the family and the ownership in one and the business and 
management in the other. McCollom (1990) states that a family firm contains the 
interaction of two complex social systems, family and the business, Ward (1988) writes 
about the family as emotional and the business as objective. One more example of the 
characterization of family businesses is Tagiuri and Davis (1996) who summarize most of 
what I so far have seen in research about the combination of family and business in the 
concept of family business:

...norms about behavior in business and norms about behavior within families 
are opposed. Families traditionally seek internal unity and try to repress or 
deny rivalry among members, whereas business often strives for a healthy 
level of internal competition. In this framework of double norms, either 
competitiveness within firm, or family unit may be sacrificed to protect the 
company or the family (Tagiuri&Davis, 1996).

During the eighties when the research sprung out of consultants close relationships with 
family businesses communication was often stated as very important. It was often stressed
that families have to communicate more, and communication was seen as something very complicated. Weiser, Brody & Quarry (1988) point to the importance of communication for a rewarding succession process. Handler & Kram (1988) and Lansberg (1988) found that a reason for families not to start the succession process was that these issues were too hard to talk about. A good succession process depends on the communicative capabilities of the family according to Weiser, Brody & Quarry (1988). At the same time, Ayres (1988) states that distrust and a feeling of being treated unfairly can stop the flow of a dialogue. Lansberg (1988) points out that ‘having conflicting goals about the outcome can also be a hindering factor in achieving successful communication and Sharma et al. state: “This failure to communicate could by itself cause the failure of a succession process” (2003, p681). Although there seems to be consensus of the importance of good communication there is no article that covers the details of communication or what makes for good communication or how it could be facilitated.

Jenny Helin (2011) summarizes the evolving family business research during three decades as three overlapping waves; the first wave, centers on what gives family business its unique character namely the family involvement in business. This involvement is seen as problematic and many scholars suggest that each system, family and business, needs its own forum to make it possible to run the business without too much disturbance from the unprofessional and emotional family.

The second wave leaves out the problems with the emotional family and concentrates on the need for rationality. Family businesses are pictured as less capable than non-family businesses, so there is a quest for non-family executives that are more in line with the theories of ‘economic man’. Together with demands for professionalism in all parts of the organization, the dichotomy between family and business is emphasized.

During the third wave, the current wave, the underlying assumptions of rationality and belief in systems theory still remain together with a call for more scientific approaches to research focusing on measurements. De-contextualized large-scale empirical studies are run and the proximity of research to everyday life of family business is gone. But there is also an emerging understanding of the heterogeneity of family businesses and that family businesses should not always duplicate best management practices developed for non-family businesses. There is also an interest and support of the unorthodox ways of working.
and an approval of how family values and culture strengthens family businesses. This summery from Helin’s dissertation is to be found in (Helin, 2011, p 20-37).

A literature review on ‘Corporate Governance in Family Firm’s made by Pieper (2003) contains a review of the research presented in Family Business Review since its start in 1998. He states that the most common theory used in the research in recent years is systems theory which now complements the traditionally used agency theory. The assumptions behind the theories of science used are rarely developed in this literature, and the references in the articles are mostly made to other family business researchers and their projects. Therefore some brief descriptions of agency and system theory are required and I will mainly use ‘Organization Theory’ by Hatch and Cunliffe (2006).

**Agency theory** was developed by behavioral economists and accountants for controlling the motivation and behavior of executives to make sure they would protect the interest of the owners (principals) of the business. The way to control the managers (agents) can be done in three different ways. The first is to design a simple routine job that can easily be observed and rewarded, based on targeted behavior. The second alternative is to design a more complex and interesting job and invest in information systems as a means of control and to reward performance. The third way is also to design an interesting and complex job but to use a simple evaluating scheme and to give rewards based on corporate results (p261-2). This is the idea behind bonuses and stock options for managers that are so much talked of today in both private and public organizations.

This theory leans on instrumental mainstream ‘economic man’ ideas with its roots in Hobbes, Locke, Smith and Mill who during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries developed the individualistic ideas about the rational man. They also developed the ‘truth’ that man’s rational actions are aimed at maximizing his own expected utility (Hollis, 1994). This is just one example of the basic rational economical thinking, often found in family business literature. A ‘truth’ taken for granted and never discussed.

**Systems theory** was developing during the 20th century and its breakthrough came after the Second World War. There are many scholars and versions of systems theory but I will here talk of General Systems Theory (GTS) developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy and many others. Systems theory set out to explain all scientific phenomena in both natural and social sciences. From the molecule, to the single cell, organ and so on up to the individual, group
and society level, there are systems in a hierarchy that are communicating and mutually dependent on each other. The system strives for equilibrium which it reaches through feedback loops. When there is a deviation from the norm it initiates actions to correct the deviation; like for example when the body temperature rises we begin to perspire and breathe heavily to get back to normal temperature. Systems theory has to do with communication and control of the systems as used in the references by Murray, Gersick and Tagiuri&Davis earlier in this chapter. Read more about systems theory in chapter 5.

In most articles concerning family business the concept of ‘roles’ is used. Talcott Parson and his developments in the Sociocultural Systems Theory, which was part of the systems development during the fifties is one example of systems orientation. He describes both macro and micro systems which he finds organized according to role and structure. The basic theories for the functions and norms that build his systems lean on Freud who gave the theory, the formula for the “normal” social development (Chodorow, 1978) Harry Goolishian (1988) described the Parsonian theory and his followers as the creators of an “onion theory”. Like the core of an onion, surrounded by outer layers the individual is encircled by the family, the family by the larger group and then the community and so forth. In these concentric circles each layer is subordinated to and controlled by the next, just like in the General Systems Theory. According to Anderson (1997) this ‘onion like’ cybernetic theory’s contribution to family therapy is that it contextualizes behavior. At the same time, as the problem is caused by the systems subordinate there is always someone to blame. The naming of what should be fixed in the social structure and organization fosters a discourse searching for people who do not perform their roles adequately. Then there is a need for ‘revolutionary’ interventions to make people fit into their ‘natural’ roles, so the system can go back to its equilibrium. The idea is that the superordinate system must be inadequately socialized if it is producing a defective role and structure on the system below (Anderson, p19-20). According to Hernes (2008) all the functions and roles in the Parsonian system serve to uphold the system and norms serve as an ultimate point towards which the system converges. Consequently, systems become deterministic, evolving towards equilibrium states supported by its functions (p80).

When it comes to the family business research literature this instrumental and technical way of viewing the two different systems, both systems are searching for their own equilibriums. The conflicts of role becomes evident, it is hard to see how a facilitating
process would handle the scenario. One of the systems has to be sacrificed, as stated by Tagiuri&Davis (1996). The consultant’s task becomes very difficult with this way of approaching the succession process.

The rational idea for having one approach for the ‘family’ and one for the ‘businesses’ is that the family system is not a task for the business consultant. It is only a way to make the difficulties intelligible as I understand it. In my experience it is the ‘hard facts’ of the business that will be addressed; this is however often carried out without awareness of the fact that when addressing business matters family relations are automatically also addressed.

I want to challenge the three or two circle model of family business, the idea of competing systems. The researchers Aldrich and Cliff (2003) write about the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries when all businesses were family businesses. There was no splitting into different “institutions”. And it might be that the old way of keeping the business as an intertwined part of the family still is a living practice that is seen as irrational by many family business researchers who strive after a more “professionalized”, not so emotional “messy”, way of doing business. Another researcher that is interesting in this respect is Johannisson (2002) who does not want to talk about competing systems or institutions but rather sees the family and the business as arenas for different ideologies where there can be constructive tensions between the ideologies which can be used in helpful ways for the family business.

Again the research group in Jönköping (Brundin, Florin-Samuelsson, Melin 2008:1) has an interesting article addressing the core characteristics of family ownership logic. They explore the meaning of owning in family businesses and are introducing a construct “Family ownership logic”. They are questioning both the rational financial logic of the so often used agency theory and the dichotomization of emotionality and rationality and find that there seems to be a “satisfactory marriage of emotionality and rationality within the family ownership logic”.

Chrisman, Chua and Sharma (1998) have found in their survey of what makes a succession successful that good relations in the family are a key factor. I will argue that good relations is not enough, it is only a good start. My experience is that matters concerning where to live, how to work and how to handle everyday life have to be talked about. In a family
business succession the transition pulls along not only business matters but also big changes for the family that takes over and the changes do not only affect the internal family life but all of the family relations in the wider context. All along this process different tasks and different emotions are brought up. According to the family business researcher, Dunn, family business life can be very stressful especially during the succession phase. She writes that the stress can lead to “families living under conditions of chronic, sometimes acute anxiety” (Dunn, 1999, p54). B. Dunn asks for more case studies to get more in depth knowledge around what is on family members’ minds and what can be “carried into” the succession process.

I want also to stress, like Melin and Nordqvist (2007), the importance of seeing each family business and each family-member, as unique. Melin and Nordqvist express a fear of research that is generalizing all family businesses and expressing the findings in a normative way which leads to an institutionalization of the field. These normative ways of looking at family business are carried out by organization advisors, educators and researchers. Melin and Nordqvist write that:

> it is the dynamic interplay between research and practice that drives the institutionalization process ...differences between different types of businesses ... are overlooked and the understanding of each individual business’s uniqueness are downplayed (Melin, Nordqvist, 2007, p328).

The two of them ask for studies that takes into account the reflexive dynamics of research. This is interesting, how research affects consultancy to family businesses. As they say; the reflexive loops academic findings make into the way business families are approached, and how their dilemmas in successions should be viewed is obvious and will be shown in next chapter. The need for new ways of seeing these complex matters is obvious and I will try to complement the ‘map’ on these matters.
2. Conversations with Consultants

During the five years of my studies I have been interested in everything that has had to do with family business and successions. An additional aim has also been to find partners to co-operate with in different agencies, both legal and economic experts working with business families. I have attended several official meetings around succession arranged by banks and consultancy agencies. I have also followed the Bjärges family to their lawyer as well as their accountant. In my search for more knowledge; to create contacts and to find out how my way of working could fit into this consultancy market interviews with two accountants and one lawyer have been carried out.

These interviews are presented here because I find them representative of the way of thinking and working that I have met among consultants during these years.

Two of the conversations were audio taped, transcribed, and are in parts presented here. Both of them agreed to be part of my research. The third interview is based on notes during a phone call. All three are anonymous with fictive names.

My radical reflexive comments are (developed in chapter 7) italicized between sections in these interviews. These comments are my way of constructing new meaning in the conversations with the texts of the interviews. The three consultants pin point a traditional view and values concerning the relational aspects of the succession process in a way I find elucidating.

Ove Lind

The lawyer Ove Lind has worked in banking for many years helping family business owners to ‘set up’ their successions. He has a background as the oldest son on a family farm and he also knew the accountant, Jakob Wahlberg that assisted during the process of succession in my own family thirty-five years ago. So besides his views on the succession process we had a lot in common to talk about. When I had presented my ideas and the project I worked
with I also told him the story from my own family, Ove then started to speak about his own experiences from growing up as the oldest son on a farm.

Ove It was natural it had to be the oldest son; it was in the air although never spoken out loud that I should take over. That was the way I was brought up. I have talked to my father about it later, but he never said anything about it then, it was in the culture, then it was assumed that money should be taken out of the farm to buy out my brother.

There was also a rule in our family that we should get an education first, I guess they thought farming wasn’t that secure. I think they had hoped that after the secondary school I would stop acting, cut my long hair and get an education within the agricultural sector. But I never wanted to take over, I wanted to get away, and then my little brother was there and he really burnt for farming. So everyone was happy, he took over, and I studied law and was away for 25 years. When I returned to the island I started to work with these issues within consultancy agencies and within banking.

Lisen In your experiences the question of buying out the siblings always on the agenda in succession processes?

Ove Yes, together with the assumption that the oldest son should take over, the others have to be compensated. This is something you have to count on. This is decided by the older generation, it is their property and they can solve it the way they like. Usually they want the best conditions for the one that takes over; otherwise he will not be able to continue with the business.

Many people think they have the right to an inheritance; that it has to be fair, but that is rubbish. There is no inheritance before somebody dies. Before that there are certain limitations, but those are fairly simple to circumscribe. If you want to disinherit somebody then you can do that.

I have had cases with great conflicts, because when it comes to farms there are so many emotions involved, and then the owners have weapons like this. But I have told the fathers; if you disinherit somebody the risk is that your children will stop talking to each other and there will be a terrible racket.
Lisen And another aspect is that the one that takes over will not get any support from his siblings.

Ove Yes, you have to think of everything, you can make lists of the positive and the negative sides, but if you as a parent is enough emotionally involved then you say: I don’t give a damn!

Lisen Is this common?

When Ove talks of emotions I realize that he is talking about anger, he also states where the power lies. Ove’s way of reasoning is in stark contrast to my view of succession as a relational and dialogic process, my view must seem very strange to him. The fathers are the owners and they decide and they can disinherit children if they get angry. I sense the ‘law of the patriarchs’, a law that is not outspoken, but innate in the tradition, in the culture. A law that tells wife and children to obey, otherwise.... This brings to mind the very high percentage of male business owners throughout the world, most of them are ‘fathers in power’. I realize that he has not gotten my point. Like a mouse beeping I ask, ‘is it common?’

Ove Yes of course it’s common, you have the power if you are the owner, and there is a whole business of this when it comes to divorces. There are lawyers that do nothing but help people find ways to be bloody-minded to former partners.

Lisen And escalate the conflict?

Ove Yes it is always possible to find ways to create conflicts, which make relations in the future impossible. But suddenly you get angry, I think of your story Lisen from your family again, and I can imagine your father thinking; ‘the little girl doesn’t understand what a bargain I am giving her, if she turns down my offer I will show her, then she will get nothing!’ I can imagine my father doing exactly the same thing. He would have wanted to give me a lesson for life. Didn’t your mother do anything, mothers usually think a little differently? But my father would have done just the same; ‘bang, bang, bang’, without any further analysis.

This fantastic insight into male rationality is also the strongest and most common discourse in our society. It’s a discourse I frequently bump into and often identify with. It can sometimes feel good to stab someone that is weaker with rational mainstream arguments. When reading the text now, I can
see that Ove is very sympathetic towards the father that gets so overwhelmed with emotions of anger, just like my father was. But he asks if our mother didn’t do anything. I imagine the ‘law of the mothers’; their duty is to save relations from being totally ruined by the anger of the fathers. That is an optimistic view, but in my experience it is almost impossible to have a view of your own if you are close to a patriarch; their influence on everyone close is extremely strong.

Lisen Then my father suffered from this all his life.

Ove Yes and then, I guess, he got even angrier, he was totally emotionally involved and he could not reach her. He wanted to give your sister something that was so very well thought out and kind hearted and she could not see it.

Lisen But the idea of the oldest son and the ‘mother farm’ that had to be supported was making her feel let down...

Ove Yes of course, that is the traditional idea, which had to be, it did not include thinking of who was most suitable, like in our family. My younger brother was much more suitable, but no one thought of that from the beginning. Both sex and age matter. This dates back to the old fideicommissaries, the logic behind the big manors. They knew that if the manor was split between all heirs, there would be nothing but a cottage for each one.

Lisen Yes that is the thinking...

Here the old fideicommissary way of thinking comes up that I will write more about in the next chapter. The great match to the reasoning I have done myself makes me happy, but at the same time I am shocked by the self-evident logic that estates should not be divided. These ideas are recognizable from local reasoning when discussing farms where it has been necessary to sell land are discussed. That is a ‘no, no’. Selling land is like ‘dying a little bit’; it seems to change the identity of the owner into an ‘owner of a little less’. These ideas fit easily with what Hobbes wrote in the Leviathan 1651; ‘all mankind has perpetual and restless desire after power that ceaseth only in death. ...[he saw] all human rational actions as aimed at maximizing their utility’ (see chapter 5).

Thirty-five years later Locke wrote that the best way to get a productive society is by private property and profit and the base for all this was the free human being. Land-owners were also considered best suited to rule a country (see in chapter5). By that way of reasoning new groups in society could take over the old roles of nobility, but with the same importance to own property which grants superiority in society. The most interesting is how this old philosophy still is so vividly alive and still in use today.
Yes that is the dominant idea and that is a good way of thinking. Some of the fideicommissaries are still working. This is not a ‘fairness story’ and the thinking behind it has to do with keeping a viable unite together. If we want to keep our cultural heritage, there has to be a lot of land around the big mansions to be able to afford them. Earlier it was the king that supported these big manors and castles. The nobility helped the country during wars, and then the king gave them support. Now the state supports them by a law which makes sole inheritance for the oldest son possible.

Now there are new ways of thinking, people want to be fair to all their children, but this is not easy. If you only own your bed and bed-table and have money in the bank, then it is easy to divide your property. But when it comes to estates, a house, a summer house and you have five children. Then it always ends in big conflicts. I myself am in this situation now. You can imagine it; everything is so nice, all the families are staying together and having a good time. But that is not the way it works. I have to be aware of this, not keep an idealized picture that could be a set up for fights. This is something I have experienced so often in my work. Spouses come in, arguments can rise about anything; like ‘who painted the most’, who has been in the house what weeks, and so on. If I let them inherit together I create a possibility for conflicts. Then it is better that I make a decision that one child will get the house, since I am the owner, and then I have to try to compensate the others. Then they can be mad at me. So I will have to take up this discussion with them, they are all very emotionally involved in this place and the house. I will have to gather them and give a lecture on how I regard life so they can understand my thinking and my world view.

Here Ove talks about his personal situation with his grown up children and it is obvious that what he plans to do is out of love for his children. I also sense that this is Ove’s ‘mansion’, where he is emotionally involved himself; this is the cottage he got when his brother got the farm. It is the summerhouse from when he was a child. This seems to make it emotionally necessary for him to preserve the place, in line with the fideicommissary logic. I recognize this in myself, the strong emotional bonds to the farm; I also have a small piece of land cut off from our family farm where we have a very small cottage; no one can imagine how much I think about that all our four daughters shall inherit it together; but also how we today shall make it possible for all of them to visit at the
same time. Here the differences between Ove’s and my way of reasoning become obvious, although we have the same strong connection to our families and our history.

Lisen

Yes, this is your worldview. But what about the risk of creating a conflict by giving it to only one of your children, do you reason the same way when it comes to businesses and farms?

Ove

Having a summer house is a simple example, nobody has to make a living from it, it has only got to do with emotional values, ‘we were here in the summers and’ lull, lull’. But it gets more complicated when it comes to businesses which you have to make a living from. That is the harsh reality. Who is best suited to manage this company? Have you seen the English programs where a man visits small businesses and looks at them in a really tough way? He observes the individuals, make records; this I believe in, you have to examine the individuals otherwise it won’t work. It is important when you sit down that you really get to know what each person thinks, because this is difficult, it is very emotional. To tell somebody that they don’t fit, but it is not because you don’t like them. It is also hard for the children to express what they want. To tell your parents who have been working their whole life to make it possible for you to take over. A farm can have been in the family since maybe the fifteenth century. But it is much better if you can talk, and take your time; it can take one or maybe two years to make the decisions. That is why long conversations with the families might be needed in order to get everything sorted out.

This long speech about individuals and the necessity that people say what they want is a very static way of looking at these matters. Has he never heard of family conversations where the future is co-created? Obviously not, this is what I have to understand. Talking about conversations with the whole family without knowing the end result, that is a very strong sign of weakness. It is to state that you are unmanly if you have to talk not only to your wife and all your children, but also to their spouses before making decisions. I can see what a fool I have been! I have not really understood how strange my ideas are before.

In the genre (Bakhtin, 1986) of ‘economic man’ male weakness is taboo. The female support is not articulated (Derrida, 1973, Anderson 1997), it is just there in its absence to construct the male strength and for him to have somebody, (wife and children), to take responsibility for.
Lisen: Yes and this is my niche. I see succession as a possibility to strengthen family relations, instead of breaking them.

Ove: Yes, it is necessary to create the best conditions for the future.

Lisen: Is it common that all family members are included in the meetings?

Ove: No, this is still a patriarchal world where traditions rule. Usually the owner comes in with his 19-20 year old son and says: ‘Nu skall sorken ta yvar’ (The time has come for the lad to take over). ‘Vi får gå igenom papprena’ (let’s go look through the paperwork). The son is usually a little quiet and I often ask if I can talk to the son alone. I remember what it was like to be that age. But usually the young man is burning for the task and it rolls on.

Lisen: I look on a family as a team; everybody is part of the family at this moment in time. It is not only the father and his son. There are the parents, all their children, their spouses, their children and the older generation if they are still alive. The way I work is by gathering the extended family to meetings to talk about what the business means to them and how they look at the future.

Ove: Yes, but at the same time, you have to be aware of who has to make the decision in the end. And the children have to understand this.

Lisen: Do you see a risk in involving everybody?

Ove: Yes, how do you do it? I do not think the owner should be influenced by the children. What if they are living with a wife or a husband that is pushing them, telling them to ‘take everything’, they don’t have these feelings for the business, and then the patriarch has to make the final decision anyway? His decision is going to go against somebody, but everybody has to be aware of that it is our father that has to make this decision.

I think it is very important to talk about these questions, because they are so emotionally important. There is so much involved like fairness, love for the children and love between husband and wife; all is manifested in this process through the succession of their belongings. But then there can be other
things that influence what is decided. And this has to be highlighted, because a child that is feeling that s/he is treated unfairly, as if ‘they don’t love me as much’ and that is so unnecessary if it is not the truth. If you can talk about it and know that there is logic in the decisions, then it can help.

*I realize that Ove believes that there is a ‘truth out there’, that there is ‘a single right way to do it’ and it is Ove’s duty to help the father (because he is only talking about fathers and sons) to find that way and to support his decisions. To me it is obvious how this is part of the economism that permeates our Western society and it becomes even clearer to me that this is a male domain. To introduce another ontology, the postmodern ‘not knowing’; which makes the succession process a becoming process’ throughout the whole of family business life, with all members of the family involved; it is to speak another language.*

**Sören Andersson**

Sören Anderson has a background in finance and he is the local manager in a national accountant agency. A lunch meeting, was arranged, my intensions were to plan for future co-operation, and to talk to him about the way he works with successions.

Lisen: How does the question of succession come up in your business meetings? Do you talk about it?

Sören: Yes you could say that, I ask what do you think, what will you do later, have you thought of, and what do you want? Some of them want to close down, but others, and they are the interesting ones, they wonder how they can get out of the business. I have one company now where the process has started without anybody having talked about it. It is a family business where several siblings are working in the company and one of them has employed his son. And naturally is he hoping....

Lisen: Are they three generations that work together?

Sören: No, they are brothers and just one son. It is pretty tense in this case. It is interesting, two of them are very active in the business, one brother works part time and one is only a sleeping owner. Now one child has come in and...
his father in teaching him to manage the business without having talked about it with his siblings.

Lisen There are things happening that you feel is not ok for all the four siblings?

Sören Yes then you can wonder, is there interest and is there competence? In some cases it is only the parents that wish...

Lisen Yes and the son may need support to be able to say no.

Sören Yes, it can be terrible.

This is interesting, Sören understands immediately what I am talking about and we have a dialogue about the family he works with. He is really interested and starts to reflect over the succession process where no obvious decisions have been taken and he has a feeling that it is not ok for all of the siblings. Although he is very involved in the business and the four siblings he does not have any way of bringing it up. He is full of experience and can think in several ways of this situation, he knows it can be terrible.

Lisen I approach successions this way; I do not give any advice about financial or legal matters, what I am doing is to help people talk to each other. Right now I am very happy because the family I have worked with for a long time has started to talk to each other by themselves. It is very exciting, what is it that has made this possible, something that has been impossible for ten years. Just to assemble people...

Sören I definitely believe that you could have a role with us, absolutely, to come in from another angle. When we come in is it only the ‘hard values’ that get talked about, if I can put it that way.

Lisen Yes, it is what is expected; it is interesting that people have different expectations from different advisors. If I come in as a psychologist something else is expected and another type of conversation is possible; a focus on the ‘soft values’.

Sören I think that could be very important. I can see that if you can talk about other things, people might be able to let go of hang ups. I know of families where the siblings have not talked to each other since the succession ten years ago,
it is very sad. It is a high price to pay, it is not worth it and you cannot really have it like that.

Yes we could have some cooperation around this...

Built into the consultancy agency is the language game (Wittgenstein, 2001) of ‘hard values’, the language rules that tells him to talk of business matters according to the ‘economic man’ metaphor. I have the feeling of him that he immediately enters into the ‘relational and dialogic’ language game when we start talking. I know that his wife works the welfare sector and I imagine him moving between these two language games every day, one at work and one at home. But that is just in my imagination. Never the less it also makes me think of how easy it has been to establish the conversational spaces when working with the families; it has been expected just as easily by the men as by the women. I guess it is a question of context (Bateson, 1972) what kind of conversation that is expected.

Lisen Yes it would interest me very much; I want to see more families.

Sören Yes, these families come all the time, we do not have that many, but I see it in my private circles, where people have asked me privately. Sometimes nothing is prepared when the parents die.

Lisen Then it becomes complicated, if the parents haven’t made any plans.

Sören I agree, we have a farm of our own that we use as a summer house, not that big, but it is valuable, worth a lot of money. We have three children, but I do not want this estate to be scattered. At the same time do I not want to put pressure on them, but if they do not ‘burn’ for it, then they don’t. Here a person like you could have an important role, because you could come in, maybe I express myself wrong, but you come without dollar signs in your eyes like we do.

Here is another example of thinking about the inheritance of summer estates. Sören also has the idea of keeping it together, not to let it be divided. The problem is how to handle things in a fair way when there is a valuable property in combination with emotional attachment. He is not talking at all about the ‘oldest son’, but in these thoughts of protecting ownership I can feel the winds from Hume and Locke. He sees in me a promise of conversations that go beyond dollars. I am not certain that that would be the result if the whole family would be invited to a conversation about this very nice estate. Probably something completely different to what he is thinking would come up. That is the fantastic
thing with conversational spaces; you never know what will be co-constructed, but I would guess that there might be a need to take up the high value of the farm. To have a relational focus in the conversation does not exclude talking about ‘hard facts’.

Lisen This is an important difference I have found, I give neither economic nor legal advice. My role is to help people talk to each other.

Sören In my case, in my work, I have this very good long term contact with the owners of the businesses, and naturally, the others in the family think I am biased from the beginning.

Lisen Yes in your profession you are linked with those that are active in the business.

Sören Yes and I have to see to what is best for the business.

Margareta Olsson

Margareta Olsson is a legal advisor in a small accountant agency. She calls me because she is interested in knowing more about the way I work. She is interested in finding out how she can make family members talk to each other before they come to her.

I tell her a little about my project, and she informs me that in their agency they usually cooperate with different consultants and there might be a possibility for us to cooperate in the future.

This conversation is not audio taped; I took notes during our phone conversation.

Margareta speaks about a situation when a father comes into the office and says that they have talked about the succession in the family; ‘we have been sitting around the table and we have discussed everything and now we all agree; this is the way we want to do it’. Then Margareta knows that it is not true, they do not agree at all within the family. This is difficult, and she wants to know how she can make them talk to each other. She says ‘It’s
impossible to indicate that there would be a problem, nobody ever admits that there are any problems within their family on this island (Gotland).

Then the siblings contacted her and she answered them: “I have to be explicit with you, this does not work. I have your parents as my commissioners; I cannot start listening to all of you”. She then tells me that her take on succession is that she looks for what is best for the business in the long run, if she would take in the perspective of all family relations then liquidation could be the next step.

And later on:

If there are two persons who own together and then there is a recession; you can never predict the future and see what is going to happen; co-owning is a very unsettled area.

If it is a limited company with partnership regulations then it might be better. But taxation can be highly affected if you own estates together, it can give sky-high taxes.

I talk about the high price that families have to pay if the succession leads to conflicts in the family and destroy family relations for all future. I state my belief is that all of us working in this field are driven by values that affect how we work with the family.

This makes Margareta very upset, she does not have any values, except what is best for the business in the long run. She gave a new example (or was it the same example?) where some siblings just before Christmas holidays came into the office and wanted to have the conditions that were already written changed. “But then I said no, the way you want to have it doesn’t work, although it might have worked out. But the parents could not stay on the farm, there was no money and we do not have unlimited amounts of time”.

I continue to talk of the ways I am working and underscore that I do not give advice; I just help them talk to each other, and I tell her about my wish to work with a combination of advice and dialogues.

Then Margareta reflects over how much time it would take to invite all the siblings all the time, and all the time the consultant has to meet the family and she concludes that nobody could afford that.

I tell her about one family where we were 19 persons and she gets a bit choked.
I realize that our worlds are very different; it is not that self-evident and easy to build up a co-operation. We talk about making a new appointment to meet and so on, but we never met.

I am not very proud of this conversation. I realize that I did not treat her with the same patience as I did with the men. She wanted to consult me about a problematic situation and instead we started fighting. I went on and escalated the argumentation without any curiosity of the way she was thinking. My only excuse is that we talked on the phone and I was not really prepared for the way she was thinking. When I heard that she was interested to know about my way of working and I started to tell about that, I think I expected her to be interested in the dialogical and the relational part of the conversations. I guess I expected this especially as she was a woman, and got irritated when it was not so.

I realize that the use of the metaphors and the language games of the ‘economic man’ do not have to do with our biological sex. It has to do with our ontology and the contexts we are in. It felt like Margareta was interested, but she became defensive when we went on and talked about values in consultancy. At the moment I did not understand how controversial it was.

Reflections

I am very grateful for these three conversations. Ove, Sören and Margareta are three different persons, with different backgrounds and ways of working. In spite of this they have something in common; their grand narrative of economic rationality and their sole purpose to safe-guard the long term interests of the business.

These three conversations give a pretty good view of the way of reasoning I have met. In the beginning of this study it was not easy to see how they differed from my way of working. I was so much part of this economic thinking myself, so when I was in a context where the genre (Bakhtin, 1986) of talk and thinking was one of economic rationality, it was easy for me to ‘join the grammar’ (Wittgenstein, 2001).

My studies of the philosophy of science are what have made the big difference for me, and they will be presented in chapter five. To be able to notice how ideas used today about the importance of protecting private property creates an understanding in me. It is interesting to become aware of how ideas formulated by Hume, Locke, Smith and Mill are still alive today. These philosophers thought that all human beings have an economic self-interest
which in turn laid the ground for the philosophy of the rational economic thinking of today, the ‘economic man’ ideas. All of this rationality is of course totally split off from any emotional and relational involvement in good Cartesian manner.

This also underscores how totally dominated the field of family business consultancy is by rational economic ways of thinking. Due to the high amount of failed successions there was a government plea for a focus on ‘soft values’ almost ten years ago as told about in the introduction, but it has fallen on deaf ears. I do not know if I can find any difference from thirty-five years ago, there are no signs to show that the succession in our family would have been handled in any other way if it would have happened today.
3. Splitting the Systems by ‘Doing Gender’

This chapter is a reflection on gender; how we produce it, how we ‘do it’ and how it is a central part of the construction of family businesses as two different systems. The view in family business research literature is that one system is rational, a ‘male’ business system, and one is emotional, a ‘female’ relational system. My reflections will be made by envisioning some snapshots of reasoning made by different scholars and then reflect on how these connect to my work. The aim is to insert an awareness of gender into this study. I want this awareness to live as a tone humming through the reading, although I do not make gender reflections overtly in every chapter I try to make gender differences visible. By highlighting family relations and the need for dialogue during succession processes I automatically zoom in on the female gendered arena. However, my ambition is to join the two circles, according to me there is only one way of looking at family businesses since there is only one system where all aspects are intertwined. This makes my whole study female gendered as it does not accept the superiority of the rational ‘male gendered’ business system.

Gender as performative

Simone de Beauvoir was the first to phrase it:

One is not born, but one becomes, a woman”, (Beauvoir, 2002, p325, first print 1946).

Simone de Beauvoir has inspired a whole world, she wrote this while the Second World War was going on. The war forced women and men to find transgressive ways of living. While the men went to war, the women went to work outside their homes and they also became an important part of the French Resistance movement during the Second World War (Eva Gothlin, foreword in ibid). As thanks women got the right to vote in1944. After the war

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3In Sweden women got the right to vote in 1921, England 1918, Italy 1946, Switzerland 1971.
everything went back to ‘normal’ again, and the era of the housewife started all over the Western hemisphere.

West & Zimmerman, (1987), have an ethnomethodology take on gender in their much referred to “Doing Gender”. They discuss how gender is a routine that is accomplished and embedded in everyday interaction:

We conceive of gender as an emergent feature of social situations: both as an outcome of and a rational for various social arrangements and as means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society (p126).

They are poiting at our way of ‘doing gender’ meaning creating differences between girl and boy, woman and man, differences that are not natural, essential or biological. These differences are then used to reinforce the ‘essentialness’ of gender. They criticise the Parsonian role theory that emphasizes ‘master identities’ and sex categories that cut across situations. They do not view gender as a set of traits, nor a variable, nor a role. On the contrary, West & Zimmerman see gender as without any organizational context, moreover many roles are already gender marked, so that special qualifiers – such as ‘female doctor’ and ‘male nurse’ must be added to show exceptions to the rule (p128-29). Furthermore, they state that the sex category/gender relationship links the institutional and interactional levels. That is to say that the ideas about gender work two ways, by being produced it is taken for granted and it becomes part of what is ‘natural’, in other words it is invisible to us. As they state: it produces, reproduces and legitimates the choices and limitations that are predicted by sex category (p147).

What interest me most here is the way gender is institutionalized and that many fields of life from the beginning are infused with gender like the field of business that is marked ‘male’ and family life that is marked as ‘female’.

Judith Butler argues along the same lines, inspired both by Beauvoir and Foucault, she writes about the construction of gender. According to her it is a mistake to think that our biological sex causes our gender. On the contrary Butler reasons that sex and gender are

4‘female entrepreneur’ can be added
constituted and constantly constructed in language. Gender is not sprung out of physical appearance; instead it is constituted by repeated language and actions which create our gendered identity. According to Butler the whole society discursively regulates obligatory heterosexuality by a fabricated matrix, where everything is specified so binary genders can be dictated. The only way to escape the verdict of the matrix is by disobedience; by moving outside the box and act and talk in new ways (Rosenberg, 2005).

Business

Elisabeth Sundin, who is a professor in business administration in Linköping, Sweden, has for many years studied the gendered economy and the values behind it that are taken for granted. She writes about the male imprint on entrepreneurship – its reasons and consequences. She pinpoints our unconscious so called knowledge that we take for granted, namely that an entrepreneur is a man. One of her examples is from occasions when she has lectured about business and entrepreneurship and illustrated it by female examples. If the audience is not prepared for this they get very surprised “you are only talking about women”. She has never had this reaction when her lecture is illustrated by male examples (Sundin, 2002).

Another Swedish scholar, Karin Holmquist, who for twenty years has been studying the gendered way of looking at economy and entrepreneurship, says:

I mean that it is in the co-creation of the question what should be studied and who should study it that the making of the invisibility starts. Through choosing man as the object of study entrepreneurship an individual phenomenon has been created as the what that is interesting. The female experiences of entrepreneurship are more collective and to accept that fact would give another what to study – a what that would include family as the possible entrepreneur and not only individual members of the family separately (Holmquist, 2002, p 67).

This indicates that there is a whole different world of entrepreneurship and economic thinking that is not taken into account. This is was first made me aware of that my whole study is gendered; it is female gendered because it has the wholeness of family and
business in focus and it views the phenomenon from a relational perspective. This dichotomy of the female as relational and the male as rational is an old (hi)-story. The historian Yvonne Hirdman (2001) makes a zap version of 2000 years of femininity and masculinity, from the Greeks and onwards. She shows how woman, in ancient Greek philosophy, is described as a deformed man, more like a child or an animal, lacking reasoning capacity and totally emotional. Man is defined as the opposite, with a complete body, with reasoning ability and in all aspects superior to woman. During the 19th century the emphasis was on the female body and how women would run the risk of infertility and mental illness if they were to live like men.

This is the discursive foundation for how femininity and masculinity are described as opposites and complementary. Man is the norm and woman is always defined in comparison, someone that has to be explained. The two genders are kept apart, it is very important in our culture to bring out the differences; make no mistake about that.

Still entrepreneurship, as Holmquist states, is viewed as a male business in a traditional way, and connected to male business is rationality. In this way, regardless of whether there is a woman or a man in charge, business becomes male gendered. The discourse of business is so strong that it forces the person ‘doing it’ to act within the frames of economy. Elisabeth Sundin comments on the common contemporary idea in Sweden that business should be transgressive to sex; she says that is true but only for men. Men can establish themselves within traditionally female branches, but it is almost impossible for a woman to establish companies within male sectors. She says that within business the segregation of the sexes is even stricter than on the labor-market.

This recent research shows us that there are still very strong traditions governing our ways of dealing with businesses. However there is very little written about this when it comes to family businesses. The only comments in this area concern the fact that there are still a very high percentage of sons taking over family businesses, and the tradition of the oldest son is still alive, and should there be no son a son-in-law comes in handy. Unfortunately, it has been impossible to find statistics on this.

Ahl, who has been writing of the scientific reproduction of gender in entrepreneurship states, that in the literature couples co-working in small businesses are identified as something problematic. Marshack (1994) found that co-preneurs were traditional; the wife
did the household chores at home and traditional female work in the business. These studies show how family plays a role for female entrepreneurs but interestingly, male entrepreneurs are not asked the same questions. Ahl further says that there are few studies of family business with an explicit gender perspective, but she has found one. It focuses on how families integrated daughters into family business management (Dumas, 1992). Dumas interviewed family members from 18 businesses. She found that daughters were an untapped resource; they were not socialized into taking over and did not count until there was a crisis; the father became ill or the son refused to take over (Ahl, 2004, p98).

Ahl’s findings are very much in line with what I want to discuss in my next section. The feudal traditions that still are alive in Sweden highlights the historical traditions behind the praxis of ‘oldest son inheritance’ where total male dominance is the rule. This is what Ove Lind alludes to in chapter 3.

**An example**

A couple of years ago a young man, Björn af Kleen wrote ‘Jorden de ärvde’. He reconstructs the story about how the nobility have been able to protect their possessions by an ancient inheritance law called the fideicommissary act. By that law the nobility of Sweden has managed to keep not only their castles and mansions, but also vast land inherited over centuries. The law was eradicated in 1964 but it is still possible to get an exemption if big cultural-historic values are at stake. Af Kleen has visited counts and barons who have allowed him into their homes and told him their life-stories.

The inheritance law, the fideicommissary act, is a feudal tradition which was taken from Germany to Sweden during the sixteenth century. From the beginning the law was created as a strategy for the German nobility to keep their newly won wealth and the power that followed with it. This law kept the extremely large estates intact and made inheritance to the oldest son the sole alternative. This law was stated throughout Europe during the 16th century until the 18th century.

During the eighteenth century most of the fideicommissaries that still exist in Sweden today were established. The law states that all of the inheritance shall go to the oldest son and after that to his oldest son and so on forever. If the son is dead, then there might be a

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5 ‘The land they inherited’
grandson, if not there might be an uncle, if the uncle also is dead, it will go to his oldest son. If there is no uncle and thereby no male heirs, the inherence will go to the oldest daughter. Otherwise the daughters will inherit nothing. There is, however, a paragraph that states that the oldest son has the duty to give an annuity to his siblings. This way the wealth is kept together and the family’s influence in society is granted. These families have been the most influential in the governing of Sweden during centuries. They are not in power these days, but they are still very influential behind the scenes, in lobby organizations and such.

All over Europe the law was questioned and as early as 1792, during the French Revolution, it was eradicated in France and the other European countries followed during the 19th - or early 20th century. The main reason for taking it away was that immense areas of land were locked and this was seen as a political and social hindrance. The national states in Europe wanted to develop; they wanted people to own their land, not to be tenant farmers on the vast noble estates, which could include whole villages. Nevertheless in Sweden there are currently around 70 fideicommissaries.

One of the barons, Nils Gyllenkrog, recounts how it is a life-long task to convince the children of the advantages of the fideicommissary. Another task is to convince the oldest son of the importance that he takes on his ‘owner responsibility’. During Nils’ upbringing there was never any doubt about who would be the heir. “It was as self-evident as it is for my son Axel today. Axel has the view that it is his own choice, as I thought it was mine. The brainwashing starts the moment the son is born. It works like this; all the time you tell your son what a wonderful job you are having. You bring him along on the estate, talk to him about future plans and make him feel that the plans are important for the family and for him”. Then Nils continues with a little anecdote, something his father acted out during Nils’ upbringing to establish this ontology of unfairness among the siblings.

On Saturdays we kids got candy. We were three siblings but my father bought only two bars of chocolate. One of us did not get any. Then he stated: “I only want to teach you one thing. The world is unfair”. This is the way we were taught that we had to share; we learned to tackle the unfairness in a good way. Because the one that gets the inheritance has to give some allowances to his siblings (af Kleen, 2009, p25, my transl.).

This is a fascinating example of how gender is being done and these remnants from the feudal times give such a good description of the ‘responsibility’ of and the construction of
male dominance. It is like West & Zimmerman writes; our ideas of gender are produced, reproduced and legitimated by our everyday talk and actions. I can recognize this traditional thinking from my own father and also from myself. It was totally ‘natural’ to me that I would not get anything and I did not give the unfairness a second thought until my sister was let down. The values had been efficiently infused into my way of thinking. The construction of our place in the family, our duties and rights are imbedded in the culture we are born into by our gender. And as Nils Gyllenkrok says; he thought the idea of taking over the estate was his own, just like his son does now, although it was decided already in the 17th century when their fideicommissary came about. Like Butler is stating; our gender is constantly constructed in language and actions and regulated by the matrix that dictates what is possible to do, act and think. It is a reciprocal process that all the time works to reinforce itself and links the institutional and the interactional levels.

These patriarchal echoes probably guided my father and his accountant 35 years ago. They probably regarded these values as ‘natural’, values that stated that it is the father’s responsibility to maintain the reputation of the family and if possible strengthen it and when the time comes hand it over to his oldest son. It is the old story; the old tradition of male superiority over the female.

The important idea was that the farm must not be divided, the idea of the ‘mother-farm’, the farm that we were named after, should be strengthened. My sister thought that the deal she was offered was very unfair, she felt she was given the role of supporter to our brother, according to the way the deal was constructed the primary idea was to maintain the prosperity of the ‘mother farm’. She felt abandoned and deceived. I was confused. At the time I thought our father had the right to decide over his own property and I did not have any claims for myself. But at the same time I was furious that our father was letting my sister down and very frustrated and angry that our mother just agreed and supported the decision of the ‘patriarch’. This splitting of the farm was never a real division of the farm, it was a way to let my sister get a small piece of land so she could support our brother and the ‘real farm’, to make it even stronger and strengthen its reputation. This perfectly matches what Ove Lind stated in the interview in my preceding chapter. This is very interesting but depressing how these ideas is still ‘going strong’.

My sister did not obey the matrix and therefore she had to be punished, according to the logic Ove Lind explained.
Implications for family business

The snapshots highlighted in this chapter are to be viewed as a background to the division of female and male in family business where there is a split between an emotional and a rational system, two systems that are seen as competitors. I have here shown some details of how the two genders - female and male - are made up.

Our own views on gender make basic differences for how we work and how we construct each other’s gender in our consultancy business. As West & Zimmerman state, the ideas about gender work two ways, as basic institutional assumptions as well as guidelines for how to act and how to perceive each other. When only addressing the business part of the family business as a consultant, only the rational ‘male’ gendered entrance into the family business is used. The family side, the relational ‘female’ gendered entrance is viewed as subordinated, something that should be taken care of before contacting the consultant. Today the family side of family business is noted but looked upon as ‘messy’ and something that obstructs rational business considerations. The interview with Ove Lind, in chapter 3, is a good example of this. Also family business research, (see chapter 2), treats the family system as subordinated by not really taking it in. The unity of family and business is seen as what is special with family business but it is the business that is in focus, often family relations are seen as something that obstruct the business, destroy the rationality that should guide all business. Holmquist (2002) reasons that it is how and by whom something is studied that we choose what we will find. And by making man the object of study of entrepreneurship, as an individual phenomenon, a what that is interesting is created. The more collective experiences women have of entrepreneurship would give another what to study, a what that would include family and not only individual members of the family. Holmquist points to the different paradigms and the different ontologies our views on genders are creating. And as research is created in language it is also performative of how we view the world, it is part of what is ‘doing’ our genders.
Part 3


**Essays**

**So what is an essay?**

The French author Montaigne was the first to put a name to this form of writing and he published his first essays in 1580. Montaigne lived in Bordeaux, in the midst of religious wars where fundamentalist Catholics and Protestants killed each other. At eleven he witnessed Protestants being beheaded on the town square. He worked as a judge at the court of the Parliament. Before turning forty he sold his official position and returned to his little castle and started writing. The term essay means; an attempt, a trying out, a first draft or a test. Montaigne declared that he wanted to withdraw and live in the company of the Muses; he wished to be free and personal in his writings. He writes in the foreword:

> If I had tried to court popular favors I would have appareled better and performed more studious. Instead I want to be seen as I am, simple, natural and prosaic, without anxious emotionality, because it is myself I am painting (Montaigne, 1986, p13, my translation from Swedish).

It is easy to understand his need to express himself while living in the midst of ‘witch-trials’. His essays are reflections on philosophy, poetry and on his own very personal views and wisdom. Montaigne continued to elaborate on the essays his whole life. He published them several times, they were never finalized (Stolpe, 1986).

Zaidie Smith refers to Virginia Wolf when she writes in the Guardian (2009):

> an essay is an act of imagination, even if it is a piece of memoir. It is, or should be, “a form of thinking, consciousness, wisdom-seeking”, but it still takes as much art as fiction.

Lastly I want to quote a Swedish author, Engdahl:

> The essay is a survivor from the world of the ‘lantjunkare’ (noble soldier during the 17th century), the last remains of an old conversational culture that got the kiss of death when time managers became a necessity for every man and woman. In the era of data bases and two minutes tableaus, essays are as

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The essay form is highly valued by these three authors; essay writing is about formulating thoughts that have to be developed in a personal way, their purpose is not to ‘chat up’ readers. It is rather a way of writing that has its source in the deeply felt wish to express something that is not easy to reproduce. This suits my use of dialogic and reflexive writing as a way to find new meaning by making new connections; connections I have never made before. It all aims at gaining a greater understanding of the dialogic process, as well as of the Bjärges family and me.

Engdahl (ibid), a historian and literary critic, says that he listens for the ‘tone’, the ‘center’ of a piece of writing where the wholeness can be heard. Then he constructs his essays with free associations around that tone.

I sympathize with the idea that there is a ‘tone’; I have selected the pieces of conversations because they have moved me, a ‘tone’ has reverberated within me. There have been more connections found in the conversations then I knew when I first started writing them. It is through the writing of these essays I have got a greater understanding of the ‘works’ of the conversational spaces.

Like Montaigne I divide each essay into chapters.

The Bjärges Family

The Bjärges family has been living on the farm since the end of the 18th century, and it is now time for the 5th generation to take over. Oskar was born on the farm and was the ‘natural’ heir since he is the oldest son of four siblings. During his lifetime the milk production on the farm has been closed down and changed into pork production. Elsa who moved to Bjärges when she married Oskar and she was also raised on a farm, in the beginning they lived with Oskar’s parents. At the time they had two sons, but soon after their take-over in 1970 Oskar’s parents moved out. For 15 years Elsa has managed a business of her own on the farm. She produces and sells coats; vests, slippers and other products made of lamb skin in a separate workshop on the farm. Elsa’s business has been
very successful and an important addition to the farm as the return on pork production has severely decreased these recent years.

Staffan the oldest son has never been interested in working on the farm. He has worked as a carpenter since he finished school and is now a foreman at a construction company. He is married and has two almost grown children. His wife and children has not attended any of our meetings. Markus is the middle son and has always worked at the farm whenever he has had the opportunity. He is a mechanic and has worked for ten years at sea with every other week free, and those free weeks he has spent working on the farm. 1996 he bought a neighboring farm that from the beginning has been managed through a common enterprise with the Bjärges farm. With the two farms they set up a piggery with baby pig production on Markus’ farm and they raise the pigs on the Bjärges farm. All the pig feed is produced on the two farms. The whole production is a joint enterprise between the two farms. Markus has a wife and a ten year old son. His wife and son participated in our first meeting.

Anders, the youngest son, has been employed at the farm for about ten years. As a carpenter he has also been contracted for work on other farms when it has been possible due to the workload at Bjärges. Anders is married to Anna and they have two children that were two and five years old when we first met. Anna has administrative employment in town. Anders’ parents and brothers want Anders to take over the farm and there has been talk about this since 1996 when Markus bought his farm. Oskar, Elsa, Markus and Staffan have been waiting for this solution ever since the cooperation began between the two farms. The cooperation has made it possible for two persons to cooperate also in the future.

Anders and Anna live in a summer house owned by Elsa and Oskar, one kilometer away from Bjärges. The house is too small and they urgently need to get a bigger house. All of Anders family has attended our meetings.

**Essays Built on Meetings with the Bjärges Family**

The essays are built on transcripts from the meetings with the Bjärges family and all meetings were recorded and transcribed. There are also field notes and now and again I have used my diary entries made during these five years of the project. The diary contains
reflections after the meetings, reflections developed when talking about the project, or ideas that have suddenly struck me.

A third source that became very valuable are the notes taken after little phone conversations with family members, usually while discussing dates for new meetings. Since the family often changed the dates we had decided on, there were many such chats. I took notes every time and have found that these notes contain a lot of continuous information.

A fourth kind of texts are the summaries that were made after each of our first four meetings. The summaries contain documentation of the set program for the meetings during the first year’s project; a report about the project is found in the appendix.

Writing in the form of essays has given me the freedom to experiment. In some essays I am zooming in on details of the dialogue and in others there is more of a helicopter perspective over a longer period of time. This change of perspective has enabled me to reflect over the way the interactions shaped the development. I perceive language as formative and it is obvious how the dialogues with the family, the close reading of the transcripts, the reading of other narratives and theories, and the writing in itself have co-constructed the knowledge gained in this study.

Three Phases

My contact with the Bjärges family is from November 2006 until September 2011. These five years began with the dialogical meeting in November 2006 and the last meeting was in October 2008. After that there have been some phone calls and four follow-up meetings with family members in different constellations. I sequence the contacts in three different phases.

1. The project phase covers four meetings, from November 2006 – spring 2007. Those meetings were carried out in collaboration with Almi. Jenny Helin and I cooperated in the first two meetings. The first essay is based on the second of these meetings.

2. The continuation phase lasted from the fall of 2007 – spring of 2009; it covers eight meetings, one together with their lawyer at the bank and
one with the accountant in the Bjärges’ kitchen and 13 phone calls. The second, third and fourth essays concern this phase.

3 The follow up phase started spring 2010 – fall 2011 and contains four different meetings. The fifth, sixth and seventh essays cover follow-up meetings with family members.

So what is a Conversational Space?

The reason to create a conversational space is to make it possible for family members, who at the moment have lost their ability to talk about their common future in relation to their family business.

The first step focuses on creating a common context and a genre for the dialogue. It is a complex matter, where nobody is fully aware of all dimensions. Respect is a cornerstone and as Anderson (2003, p4-5) states:

Respect is a relational activity; it is not an individual internal characteristic. Respect is having and showing regard and consideration for worthiness of the other. It is communicated by attitude, tone, posture, gestures, eyes, words, and surroundings.

For this study the surrounding have been very important, during the first project the six families could choose where they wanted to have the meetings. The Bjärges family wanted to meet in their kitchen. This made me their guest and created a special way of ‘inviting’ each other to take the lead at different times, something I discuss in more detail in the second essay. Voloshinov refers to the surrounding when he writes:

immediate social situation and the broader social milieu wholly determine – and determine from within, so to speak- the structure of an utterance (ibid, 1986, p86).

What Voloshinov points out is that the whole situation, what and how things are said and where we meet affect each family member from within. If we reflect on it, is it not strange that it is different to be in a formal office compared to in your own kitchen that it affects the way we think and talk. But it does not state if it is for better or for worse, just that the surrounding really affects what is said and how we relate to it.
So everything has an effect when it comes to establishing what Seikkula and Arnkil (2005) call a ‘common language’, which is created when a new dialogue starts. They also underscore the importance of the safety that is generated when human beings really ‘meet’, it is not a professional trick, it is a deep human ability. The meeting occurs when there is true interest in understanding each other. This is done by listening and appropriating our way of talking and not attempting to understand too quickly. By making pauses, embracing ambiguity, listening and speaking in a self-reflective manner a dialogue is created.

In this way the dialogue in itself is creating transformation and newness that is inherent in these kinds of relationships and conversations (Anderson, 2003, p5).

In a succession process I want all extended family members to be present, at least once; all children, their spouses, as well as the older generation. My experience is that everybody is engaged and wants the best for the family and for the family business. Even though there are as many ideas as there are members of the family. This creates the possibility for a polyphonic conversation around both history and future.

It is important that everybody knows what is going on and it is important to get everybody’s view to be able to co-evolve the thinking around the family business and its future. It is important, not the least, for the person (-s) that is going to take over, to have the mandate and support from the rest of the family. Usually when the meetings start there are a couple of favorite ideas, but they are either unspoken or not compatible, or the person that is thought of as the heir does not want to take on the task. But from what I have experienced so far, everything can be talked about and respected.

Applied Transcription Rules for the Essays

Every essay contains sections of transcripts from the meetings or phone conversations with family members. I have applied a few very simple transcriptions rules, far from the rigorous regime of conversational analysis (CA.) CA is based on systematic cumulative studies, by which ‘categorizing utterances, turns or episodes in terms of taxonomic systems’, produce quantifiable essentials; a kind of science that is generalizable (Linell, 2009, p376-77). The way the transcripts are used here is to, as Hoffman (2002, p181) writes, “listen in order to
speak”. My way of ‘speaking’ in the essays is to be in dialogue with the texts of the transcripts, it is a way to re-visit our meetings. In the dialogues I am including new voices by using theories. In this way a reflective and reflexive way of ‘speaking’ of our meetings is set up.

**The rules:**

The speaker’s name appears before every utterance:

Lisen hello, hello?

Silence is marked by:

Silence

When a speaker does not end a sentence distinctly it is shown as: …….., instead of a full stop. The same applies when a speaker ‘stretches the words’, or is a little thoughtful, and a ‘mini-silence’ occurs.

Distinct expressions of feelings like laughter, irritation etc. is shown as: (laughter) etc.

Emphasized words are written in CAPITAL letters.
Chapter 1  The Cogs Have to Fit the Wheel

This essay covers what happened during the last twenty minutes the second time Jenny and I met the Bjärges family, when we had a reflecting process with two reflecting groups. The aim of this essay is to show how the dialogue evolves, and what Shotter (2008, p30-32) calls ‘joint action’ happens. With this notion Shotter means that when a group of people engage in genuine dialogue and everyone has a strong feeling of belonging and everybody responds to the other participants in a serious way; then they may create a ‘changing sea’ and a new world can open up. In this world new ethical enablement and constraints, privileges and entitlements, and obligations and sanctions are born, in short a new ethos. New ways of thinking, acting and being for everyone involved, this process is not the work of a single individual, it develops when all participants co-operate, and afterwards no one can say who did what. Everybody is a part of it, and there is a change of ethos for all of them. The world is no longer the same. Joint action is an unintended and unpredictable process; it exists in the space between participants and is co-constructed by their dialogue. All of this is what I believe happen in this dialogue, the succession process takes one more step in the Bjärges family; everybody is onboard but no one knows where the journey will end.

The meeting

We were all sitting in the big kitchen, gathered around the kitchen table; Elsa and Oskar, their middle son Markus, their youngest son Anders with his wife Anna and their two children Disa and Emil. We had had coffee together with a variety of biscuits and buns. The oldest son Staffan had joined us after work. The children, Disa and Emil, were running around and taken care of by any family member. There was pea soup in a ten liter saucepan made by Elsa; she had cut up bits of pork while participating in the conversation during the afternoon. Outside the snowstorm covered the roads and there was some nervous talk about traffic and Elsa jokingly said that there was enough soup for everybody if we had to stay the night.
The workshop had started with the creation of a genogram, a family tree, and we had elaborated on how the ownership had been passed down through four generations. We had also talked about what each family member valued most about the farm. Anders said that the most important thing for him was ‘the safety I feel here at home. There is so much that is included in that, we can always come home and have a meal together’ and the others started talking about how all three brother sat under the kitchen table together in the darkness while there was a terrible thunder storm, and another time when they played with bark boats in the flooded cellar. All stories were connected to the dwelling house and most of them to the kitchen.

It had been declared earlier during the afternoon that everybody wants Anders and Anna to take over the farm; it has been talked about for more than ten years. Anders and Anna have not responded to that yet.

To conclude the long and active meeting we wanted to make time for reflections. We asked if they wanted to try something new. After they had agreed, although a little bewildered, we asked them to sit in two circles; I joined the parents and Jenny joined the younger generation. I explained that reflecting is a bit little like gossiping but with listeners. ‘Let us pretend there is a wall of glass between us. We will talk to one group at the time, and the others will listen, then we switch’. Elsa asked if they could not comment on each other? When the reply was ‘Yes when your group is talking, this is a way of listening to each other’ Elsa responded with ‘oops!’ and laughed.

I started by referring to what Oskar had said earlier in the afternoon.

Lisen Oskar you said this afternoon that in earlier times the important thing was that there had been good successions. (Disa hangs around and talks all the time, Lisen asks her if she wants to join the group and brings a chair and Disa crawls up and sits down.)

Oskar This was good (with Disa in the group), yes there have been natural successions, and it has been natural.

Lisen Yes it has been important, that it works.

Oskar Yes.
Lisen  You said natural?

Oskar  Yes I said natural successions; the cogs have fitted in the wheel.

............................silence..........................

Lisen  The cogs have fitted, that way it has kept on rolling in a good way............................ Elsa what has been most important for you this afternoon?

Elsa  The most important thing for me an afternoon like this? (The little girl is talking to grandma) I think it is important that we can discuss like this, that everybody is here and that they are interested.

Lisen  ummm

Elsa  Not everyone has come, they have to work.

Lisen  But those who are here are important

Elsa  umm, in the old time it was just ‘written’ (the succession decision) and then they just told us about it, you couldn’t even see what was written, they said “now the farm is bought!”

Lisen  Now it is bought

Elsa  (laughing)

Lisen  have you experienced that yourself, you also come from a farm?

Elsa  no, I took part in the meeting in my family when my brother bought our farm, you also Oskar? But I can’t remember if I took part when you bought this farm?

Oskar  You signed

Elsa  but it wasn’t like this that everybody was gathered. In the old days there was only a piece of paper on the table that showed that somebody had bought the farm. Wasn’t it? Who was here when we bought the farm, I can’t remember if anybody was here.
what do you think is most important for this family, what makes the cogs fit in? What are the most important conditions?

It is that you have to feel for this; you can’t do anything if it doesn’t feel right.

A feeling of wanting to take it over?

There is something, you have to feel for it, you cannot take over without wanting it. But also, a human being is pretty flexible in a way and you learn. I did not think it was much fun, with two children [to take over].

But you build a good family life your own way, you do not start to say, “Now I have to do this and that” you, you grow into it I think. I think you have to grow into it; it is different if you are staying in an apartment or in a villa, but on a farm like this you have to grow into it. Even if you don’t think it is so good from the beginning, I think you will like it after a while.

You said a human being is flexible

yes quite flexible......I think so, I can’t say that I would consider moving to an apartment, I have never lived like that, I don’t know what that would be like.

So that is what you are approaching, your hopes for the future, you had a lot of ideas of what you wanted to do earlier today.

yes

You want freedom, a motorbike, to go in a camper car, do you have one?

laughs – no, we don’t have a camper car.

do you have a motor bike?

yea Oskar has one, so I can ride around
Lisen you have a lot of dreams, things you want to do..., ok. Shall we let the young ones come in, so we can listen to them?

Change of groups

Jenny The first question I would like to ask is what does listening to your parents make you think of? What do you get struck by? (Disa is talking)

Staffan That the cogs have to fit, to make a generation shift.

Jenny (looks at Markus)

Markus (is quiet)

Staffan (jokingly) didn’t you hear anything, shall we turn up the volume?

Markus no, they want it to go on

.................silence.................

Staffan I don’t think they could sit in an apartment, and this house sold, that wouldn’t work.....

Not as long as they live anyway, they have to stay here.

.................silence.................

Jenny puts the question to Anders by looking at him

Anders I haven’t thought of anything................you can understand that they want this to roll on........................that is what everybody wants, everybody who has a farm like this, there has to be a shift some time................silence....

(Disa is talking)

Jenny what struck you Anna?

Anna ..............silence..................
what should I say (Disa is talking)..................I also understand that
everybody wants this to continue...........................................no, I don’t
know........................what to say (Disa is talking)...........................there is not so
many persons this is all about

Jenny can you develop that a little more?

Anna If somebody shall take over, who shall do it, Staffan said very clearly that he
is not going to do it, Markus has a farm of his own, so it is like, it feels
like.........

Staffan (to Anders) everybody is looking at you (Markus is laughing quietly) that’s the
way it is.

Anna yes it is the way it feels.

Anders We are being squeezed, or how shall I say (a little laughter) squeezed or
what?

...............silence..............(Disa makes noises)

Markus It is like this, but at the same time, nobody can be forced to take over, it’s
about that. It must work, however we will manage, nobody can be forced.

Anna This is terrible for me, I have looked at it from all angles, I can’t see myself in
it no matter how I try....

Jenny do you feel squeezed?

Anna Do we put this on ourselves, I don’t know

...............silence..............

that is the way I feel

Jenny Is it the same for you Anders?

Anders Yes I can feel a little like that..................it is like a job, I like it, you come here
in the morning, then you go home, but then you can come back later
because there is more work to do..................it feels big..........
Jenny: As an outsider, how come Staffan can say no, when you can’t?

Anna: It has to go on and it has to be in a good way.

..............................silence......................

I also like to have a job that you go to and then when you leave it you don’t have to think of it any more, sometimes you have to work late, but so what?! When you leave you can let it go. You could never do that...........

Anders: The security of being on a payroll is that you can go home and let go of work and you do not have to think ‘now I have to do the bookkeeping, then this and then that’, when it is like that you don’t have any spare time. I don’t think it is meant for me to have all that responsibility, I don’t have that kind of energy..........................This is in a way how I feel. If I hadn’t felt like this we would not have to sit here.............................. Then it would already have been decided.

Jenny: The fact that you are an owner Markus...

Markus: No, not of this farm

Jenny: Excuse me, I am a little slow, and you have your own farm over there is that why this succession has to be.

Markus: Yes I own my farm, then we have an enterprise and we are running both farms together. Our parents and me own the enterprise together, the three of us. That is the way we run both farms today. For me it doesn’t matter how we work this out, it is the same job anyway; it is only the ownership of this farm that has to be worked out. Then if they shall have it (Anders and Anna), if we shall own it together or if I should have it on my own or somebody else, I don’t know, but we have to reach a decision to be able to move on. It’s up to each of us to decide, nobody should be forced to take over. That is wrong. This is the way it is. It has to work and it has to work well. It can be hard if the house is going to be empty, but that is something we have to consider if that will be the case. This is what we have to try to find out. We have to have a plan to follow that will make everybody happy.
Maybe you (Markus) and I should buy the house and let Anders and Anna live here.

no, no

That is no solution

That is no solution

What is your dream scenario Anna?

I don’t think I have a dream scenario but I know what I can’t handle....

..............silence.............. (Disa is talking)

......and that is.................

I am scared of the dark, okay it is dark in the summerhouse too where we live now, but that is a small house and you can keep control over it, over all the windows and doors..........here it is so big, there are so many dark corners and cupboards and, I am sorry but I can’t imagine myself living here, I have REALLY TRIED

..............silence......

It was only an example, I thought it would make it easier for Anders and Anna, but that’s the way it is

..............silence....................

I didn’t know she was afraid of the dark.

There is so much that has happened to me when I was a child

so....................

I didn’t know that....

I don’t want to talk about it (tears in her eyes)

Shall we turn off the tape recorder?

No you don’t have to do that.
There is a long pause. This is followed by some communication around the tape recorder; we think Anna wants us to turn it off so we do. When we transcribed the material, we heard her say, ‘you don’t have to turn it off’. The session ends when Oskar, in tears, gets up and holds his arms around Anna and says: ‘What are important to me are you, all our children and our grandchildren and that everybody is living a happy life. That is much more important than what will happen to the dwelling house and the farm’. We were all moved by the moment and had tears in our eyes. After a while Lisen said: ‘We have a lot of time for meetings and we will continue to talk about these matters’. After the meeting had ended everybody stayed around and played with the children. It was late, they had to go home and put the children to bed, but no one was in a hurry. For a while Jenny and I went together with Elsa, Anna and the children to the shop Elsa is running in a small house in the garden, there she has hand crafted fur coats, hats and slippers of her own making. We were trying things on, laughing and having a good time, everybody was relaxed.

Re-Visiting the Dialogue

When going through this dialogue again, I still have a vivid memory of the atmosphere and how important and almost holy this moment felt. Sometime before this meeting Jenny and I had arranged the 19 members of the Hotel family in four different groups, and were very satisfied with the stillness and curiosity that developed during the reflecting process. So we thought when we came close to the end of this meeting it would be good to do the same thing; to have a short time of listening to each other and let every voice be heard to sum up the day. So Jenny and I had a little chat over the kitchen table and asked the family if they were willing to try it. We had now been with the family in their kitchen for two meetings and we felt free to suggest something that might be a little strange, but not so strange that it would destroy the safety we had created. Andersen (2003) warns about making suggestions that will disconnect the family from their inner voices, each other and the facilitators. Anderson is the originator of using a reflecting team in family therapy. His reflectors were a group of professionals who openly reflected together while the family members listened. ‘The team must remain positive, discreet, respectful, sensitive, imaginative and creatively free’ (Andersen, 1987, p424) says Andersen. The aim was to help
family members to change between ‘outer and inner’ conversations, to help the family leave what Anderson called a ‘stuck’ way of relating and instead find a way forward.

During this meeting with the Bjärges family, members were invited into two reflecting groups with Jenny and me as facilitators, one in each group. We as facilitators did not act as experts and we did not reflect by ourselves. What we did was to make a structure where listening to each other was in focus. By serious listening an atmosphere of absolute respect for each other developed more and more during the reflection process. The questions we asked were inspired by systemic and appreciative inquiry ideas and were aimed at appreciating and asking ‘what is most important, what struck you’ and so on. Further it was important to create an understanding of what every person was talking about and we asked follow up questions by accepting and mirroring what was said, to make it easy for the person to develop what they were thinking about. At the same time everybody was intensively listening to each other and ‘inside’ all of them lots of connections was made in the inner speech, as always when we are listening. At the same time in this slow and serene way of talking every person could also listen to themselves in a new way while they were talking. Vygotsky (1986) and Bakhtin (1986) write about how we make new connections in our inner speech when we take in what others are saying in a genuine dialogue, and it becomes possible to start thinking in new ways. I have written more about inner speech in the 7th essay.

Since we wanted to clarify what a succession is about in its very basic sense, we felt that it was the right thing to have the old couple and the young ones in different groups. One party is leaving and the other one is taking over, although there are a lot of overlapping elements. This was the first time ever they have sat down together to talk about the succession of the farm. We also believe Jenny and I as facilitators were helped by being daughter and mother ourselves. In many ways we were acting out the sense of time passing and the different perspectives these two positions give. Jenny might for example correct me if I said something ‘old fashioned’ and the mother in the family could ask for my support as we both were ‘old mothers’. This was carried out in a light hearted, joking manner, but I think it helped to create a context of ‘we all live in families and there are differences in age, attitudes, life situations, and different opinions, but all this is very normal’.

To see how the dialogue is built up, we will start by looking at the transcript from the beginning. The conversation starts with me referring to what Oskar had talked about earlier.
in the meeting during the afternoon, something that had felt like it was important to him, about how good the earlier successions had been. Oskar is reflecting over the words he is using and after a while he finds a metaphor that makes it very clear to all of us how he looks at the history of earlier successions. I only use his words but without doing any interpretation or trying to look “behind” his utterances. I just want to confirm them and in that moment my responsiveness tells me; how all of us feel how simple it seemed to have been in earlier times and how much Oskar wants this succession process to move on, the cogs to fit the wheel.

We have talked about the history of the farm and the earlier successions, in 1925, in 1945 and in 1970 when Oskar as the oldest son took over, something that had, according to the tradition, been expected since he was born. When Oskar and Elsa took over four generations lived together. An old farm-hand, who had been on the farm since 1925, was also included in the house hold as he had been since Oscars grandparents took over. The present situation is different and they have tried to find a solution for about ten years but they have been unable to really talk about it. At that moment I sat close to Oskar and got the feeling of a big question mark arising and I started to wonder what made this succession so different. I began to feel very curious about what everybody was thinking right at that moment.

Once I got the feeling that Oskar has said what he had on his mind I went on to ask Elsa what she thought was most important for her this afternoon. We were sitting with their two-year-old granddaughter Disa in our little circle in the corner of the big kitchen, near the stove and sink. The pea soup in the big pot is now ready and simmering on the stove. It amazes me how Disas chatter, that not is easy to understand, does not disturb us; it is clearly a part of the family conversation. I notice how she is answered by small gestures and she is satisfied and happy to take part in the conversation in this playful way. Disa is a little younger than Jenny’s daughter, so we all find the situation very “natural”. Anna has also told us it is a precondition for her participation in these conversations that her children could be present.

When Elsa starts talking she shows how much she appreciates this situation, that they finally can be together and talk about their succession. She compares it to her earlier experiences and this takes us back to the farm where she grew up and the time when she and Oskar took over this farm. History becomes very present. Elsa goes on to talk about...
how little say she had about where and how their young family should live more than thirty
years ago. Her situation was similar to that of Anna, Elsa also had two children. She was 33
and they had two children when they took over, but they had already lived for a few years
on the farm, Anna is now 32. One big difference between them is that Anna has a job of her
own in town; she is not dependent on her husband for her livelihood.

Elsa continues to describe how it was when she moved in, she did not like it, but says ‘you
can grow into it, human beings are flexible’. But we also understand from what the family
has told us during the afternoon that both the farm hand and Oscar’s parents moved out
soon after they had taken over. In every way Elsa shows us that she has been able to create
a good family life together with her husband.

When Elsa begins by saying ‘I did not think it was much fun’, she then stops and reflects and
then comes something of an attack on her daughter-in-law ‘you don’t start by saying: now I
have to do this and that you, you...........grow into it I think’.

This highlights the very big difference in life situations between Oskar and Elsa. Oskar has
always lived on the farm and has since quite young years had a lot of responsibility on the
running of the farm, according to his own words. Elsa moved in, managed the household
together with her mother- in-law the first years and according to Elsa in earlier meetings,
her mother-in- law was not always nice. So Elsa is looking forward to moving out of the
farm, to have a life of her own. Elsa’s way of addressing Anna makes me a bit nervous so I
bring up a question from earlier in the meeting about things she is longing to do. I do not
answer her or reflect on what she is saying and the moment of reflection is over. Going
back I can see that the breaking of the dialogue made us both start to joke. To continue I
now felt that I needed Jenny’s help, I gave over the leadership to her and the young
persons while the rest of us listened.

Jenny begins by asking all three sons; ‘What does listening to your parent’s makes you think
of’. This way she highlights the generational positions and at the same time she implies that
they are all involved in this succession and that it is important to make all voices heard in a
systemic way (Hedges, 2005). Staffan answers first and gives a quick answer. He answers
with his version of the metaphor of the father; this is what Bakhtin (2006) calls double-
voiced, his answer is directed both to Jenny’s question and the speech of his father. Using
the metaphor of the ‘cogs that have to fit the wheel’, it is Staffans interpretation, he makes
his own utterances. By his rejoinder of his father’s utterance he seems to be agreeing and it feels as if he is strengthening his own voice through the authority of his father when he voices what has to happen to make a division. The father found the metaphor when reflecting over how natural the earlier successions seemed to have been, the double voice of his speech probably had its roots long ago in the history of the family. There is also a question in the father’s utterance, why is it so much harder now? But Staffan with this utterance also addresses his brothers. Staffan is the only one that has clearly declared that he will not take over the farm and nobody is asking him to do so either. He is the eldest son and started to work outside the farm directly after school. Earlier during the afternoon he has stated how important he thinks it is that the farm stays in the family; he and his children often come around and get supplies for their horse and their rabbits. It is also important for him to go hunting with his brothers, something all three of them value very much.

Jenny then nods to Markus, silently asking him to say what he is thinking at the moment. When he doesn’t answer Staffan gets a little tense, and he uses what Bakhtin (2006) calls a trope, he is making a playful phrase by pretending Markus doesn’t answer because he cannot hear and asks if we should turn up the volume. I guess he is using humor to counteract the tension we all felt in this moment.

Markus probably interprets the comment as more ironic than funny and answers quickly, rather irritated. His answer contains a connotation to the parents: ‘they want it to go on’, he is also addressing both his brothers and the rest of the group, and the seriousness of the situation is felt by everybody. An ‘active’ silence follows, everybody is responsive and ‘inside’ the dialogue, the silence gives room for inner dialogues.

It is important to ‘listen’ to the silence as a facilitator, not to hurry, to let the dialogue have its way. Basically, for a dialogue to happen it is necessary to make the forum safe enough, otherwise thoughts and inner speech will never have the possibility to develop. Among other things it requires time and a calm enough atmosphere for it to happen. It is always a risk that you as a facilitator want to do too much, go through a lot of important topics, reach a ‘result’ and to have an easy-going atmosphere. With those, maybe good intentions, you can easily bulldoze your clients giving them no chance of listening to their inner speech and thus new thinking never comes alive. If safety is not established very little will happen that make any difference and you will leave a family with individuals thinking in the same
way as when you first met them. Their needs, of coming together, of talking, listening and thinking together, of being moved by each other, is the only reasons for the meetings.

After the silence Staffan expresses his worries that the succession will fail and the house sold. In his view this is the worst thing that could happen to the parents. He picks up his mother’s ‘I can’t say that I would consider moving to an apartment, I have never lived like that, I don’t know what that would be like’. He wants them to stay in the house, and maybe his wish is for the parental home to stay the same with all possibilities it entails him and his family to have access to his parental home. The notion of “living in an apartment” is often said in this family as if it would mean a completely different life, maybe a modern life, something nobody in the family finds positive; it is something that probably would be considered as a failure. Staffan is worried and in his mind this question seems to be a matter of life and death for his parents.

There is a long silence again, the pace is really slow now, then Jenny gently nods towards Anders, the whole situations feels fragile and very important, as facilitators we are fairly new to the family and we don’t know much of what has happened in the family before we met them. We have during this afternoon understood that Anders and Anna have been seen as the “natural” successors for about ten years. But the succession process has come to a ‘stand still’; Anders has said neither yes nor no to the suggestion.

When Anders answers he says he has not thought of anything. We understand and also feel in our bodily resonance (Vedeler, 2011) that he is overwhelmed with emotions, which are opened up for in this dialogue. As facilitators this calls for our ability to share these difficulties in the moment with the family (Seikkula, Arnkil, 2005, Anderson 1997). Bakhtin (1986) says that everything that is said is always an answer to somebody that either just said something, or something that was talked about in another meeting. It is important to note that what is said is not an individual creation that has its roots inside the head of one individual. On the contrary what is said is, like Voloshinov formulates it, ‘every word is a two-sided act, that is determined equally by whose word it is from and for whom it is meant’ (1986, p86). The aim of the dialogue is to create understanding and it is by active listening, hearing and speaking (Anderson, 2003) that new understanding can evolve.

All real an integral understanding is actively responsive, and constitutes nothing other than the initial preparatory stage of a response...and the speaker

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himself is oriented precisely toward such an actively responsive understanding. He does not expect passive understanding that...only duplicates his own idea in someone else’s mind....Any utterance is a link in a very complex organized chain of other utterances (Bakhtin, 1986, p69).

Our role is to mediate a safe context as stated before, and an atmosphere of ‘this is neither stupid, nor rude, or too dangerous to talk about, it is human and something very common in family life, although it can be very scary’. It can feel as if family relations are in danger, how much of self-assertion is it possible to show? Another aspect also stated by Seikkula, Arnikil (2005) and Anderson (1997) is that there are as many problems as there are voices in a conversation. The polyphony of the dialogue is a very basic artifact of language and this means that there is not one singular solution to look for. Every person in the conversation has her/his own world where she/he has to fit in whatever happens to the farm and the family business, how it affects their life, their values and how it fits their hopes for their own and all family members’ future life. The important thing in the dialogue is to create an understanding of each person in the conversation. The key to understanding is to be listened to. According to Bakhtin (1986) listening is an activity and the speaker is talking into the listening of the others. The speaker is speaking in anticipation of the listeners’ reaction to what is spoken. In this way the dialogue is created by all participants together and what is spoken is collective.

...responsive talk is oriented toward the future: The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word; it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer’s direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation of the living dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981, p280).

This is a very good description of what is going on in the dialogical conversation. How it is created together and how everyone speaks in order to answer the others and at the same time in order to hear their own voices to create an understanding of what they are thinking themselves. In this way we build a common ground, a common language,
When Anna gets the word from Jenny she is very thoughtful and expresses an understanding of the situation and she speaks about how everything points at Anders and her.

After a while Markus comes in and says that nobody can be forced and he asserts her that this will not happen. He has the power to say this being one of the brothers that could possibly take over the farm, and he could lift the burden from Anders and Anna’s shoulders. But this does not seem to be his first choice, he rather wants to cooperate with Anders in the future; and he is in favor of the solution the rest of the family has.

It might be this relief that makes it possible for Anna to start talking about how she feels; she expresses how she has tried for a long time to adapt to the life of a farmer’s wife, living in the big dwelling house. She is also addressing her mother-in-law who said ‘…. I did not think it was much fun, with two children…….you grow into it’. Anna expresses her own hardship, how she has been trying to picture herself in the future on the farm. Then Anna expresses that maybe ‘we put this on ourselves’, maybe they do not have to feel the obligation to take over the farm.

Anders goes on and talks about how he likes the work on the farm but that it feels ‘too big’.

At this point Jenny gets very involved and feels sorry for the young couple that is put on the spot being everyone’s hope for the future and lacking any possibility to get out of it. So she phrases a new question; how come Staffan can say no to the farm when the other two brothers cannot?

Here Anna’s answer comes as a surprise to us facilitators; she says that ‘it has to go on and it has to be in a good way. Nobody is objecting so it seems to be everybody’s opinion that Staffan is not a good successor, it is not a solution even for Anna.

Both Anna and Anders then talk about how much they value being on a payroll and having spare time, not having to take on responsibility for a farm and a business. Anders also says he is not ‘meant for all that responsibility and he doesn’t have the energy for it.

Then Jenny asks for some information and Markus answers how the business is organized. He once again stresses that nobody can be forced to take over, but that it is one and all’s responsibility to make a decision. He also opens up for the possibility that the dwelling
house will be empty in the future. He finishes with ‘We have to have a way to follow that will make everybody happy’.

This is very assertive and does, not press anybody and we are now in the midst of the dialogue and it feels as if Markus has great trust in the process and in the possibility that they will find a good way to go on. He does not go along with Staffans’ worry that their parents could not live anywhere else.

Then something completely new comes into the dialogue, Staffan who is still very concerned about the dwelling house directs a question to Markus and asks him if they can buy the house and let Anders and Anna live there. This is a question that is meant to be heard by everyone, it seems to be addressing Anders’ worries about not ‘being meant for all that responsibility’ and in a way it might be easier for Anna if they don’t have to own the house. Staffan is talking as if the house is the task to be solved. Markus and Anna object, that is no solution, I guess Markus is thinking of the whole farm, the land and the animals, the business. Anna and Markus appear to agree with each other.

By now Jenny is getting really mixed up and she wonders ‘what is your dream scenario Anna?’

At this moment we all understand that Anna is not thinking of her future at all, she is now talking about a secret that no one in the family knows anything about. She has, during all these years, tried to picture herself in this house and the only thing she knows is that she cannot live in it; she is afraid because of something that happened to her when she was a child. Staffan explains that he didn’t know, he only wanted to help.

The way Oskar embraced Anna and in tears said that everybody’s happiness was much more important than everything else, turned our embodied feelings into peaceful happiness. We were assured that everybody was respected and equally important in this process. There was not going to be any suffering victims for the sake of the farm and the business. An important step was taken, although nobody knew what would happen next. The appreciation of Anna, although she cannot ‘live’ the favorite solution the others want, was fantastic. It somehow felt as if we together experienced her feelings of anxiety and fears from her past, feelings that still are alive and limiting her. Everybody had tears in their eyes; there was no blame or questioning of her.
So it was with a happy calm assurance I could say at the end; we will have lots of time to discuss and talk about this further. We had all succeeded in ‘standing the strain’ of the difficult matters that had to be talked about. The relaxed joy afterwards only strengthened the view of everybody being happy although nobody knew what the outcome would be.

These twenty minutes of reflection have been very important for all of us. The minute I sat in the car after the meeting my memories from my own family more than thirty years ago came alive in a new way, I had been moved in a way that made me come in contact with the emotionality of my memories. I saw our experiences in a new light. This is an example of how the dialogue ‘happens’ to every person involved, sets everyone in contact with the persons included as well as to the inner speech of oneself.

Both Jenny and I were astonished by the very great importance, the holiness of the moment. This was of course very confirming for us and it was important to have this experience in the beginning of the succession project. We started to talk in the car on the way back to town about the difference of having pre-prepared exercises and letting the dialogue unfold from what the persons have the need to talk about.
Chapter 2  Silence is creeping in

This essay is built on the 6th meeting with the Bjärges family and it belongs to the second phase of our meetings. One year has passed since we started to meet and the process seemed to have come to a ‘stand still’. Nobody in the family talked about the succession outside our meetings. There was a big silence in the family and also between the young couples when it came to the succession process. We had to find new ways to meet and talk. So it was decided that I would meet each couple separately. First out was Anna and Anders.

In the meeting both Anna and Anders over and over again came back to the same subjects, and after the meeting I did not really know what they had been talking about. The same thing happened to me when I listened to the recording and transcribed the conversation. It made no sense, although my feeling was that the meeting was very meaningful both for them and also for me. I was sure that they talked about very important issues, that I did not think were new to them, but what was new was the way everything was listened to.

So while working with the transcript I became very curious of what themes Anna and Anders had felt it necessary to talk about and to be listened to. Maybe this was also the first time they had been listening to themselves, while talking about these familiar issues.

So what I did was to cluster the topics that came up in different themes, I found seven: ‘When silence comes creeping in’, ‘Taking over the family house’, ‘It only feels/ Traditions’, ‘To make decisions/ To have different views’, ‘Financial matters’, ‘To be squeezed’, ‘Future’.

Then I organized the pieces of conversations on each subject below the headline of each cluster. In this way I have taken away the context of how the dialogue evolved during the meeting and instead focused on the content, on what topics they were speaking of. I did this because I myself felt a need to organize the vast material, from a conversation that I knew had been so important to Anna and Anders, in a way that would make sense to me. I felt I had to be sure of what was so important to them.

- There are several aims to this essay. The first is to show what different topics that could be necessary to talk about in a young family when considering if they should take over the family firm or not.
• The second is to reflect over how these big questions make a difference for the young family when it comes to their way of living and identity.
• The third is to write about what difference it makes to be listened to and to be immersed in a dialogue even though conclusions and decisions are not heard of.

The themes could be read as poems, like repeated mantras that needed to be heard. In the writing I have separated the different times the same topic came up by a double space between the conversations.

**Setting the stage**

We are sitting in Anna’s and Anders’ home, the summerhouse by the sea, a couple of kilometers from the Bjärges farm, we have just had lunch. Their three-year-old daughter Disa is playing with her dolls beside us. We start by talking about the big challenge the Bjärges family and Anna and Anders are facing; it is hard for them to talk about the succession, silence has crept in between them.

Anna: This (the succession) is never spoken about when you aren’t here.

Anders: No

Lisen: That makes me curious, how come? I don’t think it’s strange; you are not the only persons that find this hard to talk about, but what is stopping you?

Anders: I don’t think anybody has the energy.

Lisen: Energy? You get tired from it?

Anders: It feels like, I don’t have the energy to think of it all the time, I make it go away totally, but then I know, Lisen is on her way, now we have to……

Lisen: So if I wouldn’t come…

Anders: And it makes us argue and I yell at the children…..

Anna: It brings everything to the surface, it brings everything up….
Lisen  But how? When I am going to come you get angry?

Anders  No, no, it’s not only then – no……

…………silence………………

Anna  It takes energy. When we have had our meetings at the farm, when we get home after, afterwards we are completely exhausted.

Anders  Mm…

Anna  Then I want to go on talking, something that has come up during the meeting or something I have been thinking……then everything goes wrong…..

Lisen  In what way does it go wrong?

Anna  Yes it goes wrong, because Anders is tired then and I bring up something that he thinks is difficult, or something he said but really doesn’t mean, or doesn’t put so much importance to…

…………silence………………

Anders  We as a family we are well, but we don’t have… we don’t have the joy we had some years ago.

Anna  No we don’t, we don’t – this is hanging over us all the time.

Anders  It takes……shall you do that or that, or don’t give a damn about the whole thing, that’s the way it gets….

Lisen  So not talking about it and not deciding anything is wearing you out?

Anders  Yes, I think it is the same at the farm (for the parents); otherwise we would talk more about it. It goes so deeply into our bodies, if it had been more on the surface we would discuss it more, now the only thing we can discuss is: “Shall we do this or that in the piggery?”, that is easier to discuss.

But THIS IS, we have to sort it out.
The themes

Taking over the family house

Anders  As we said before. I can imagine living there (at the farm), Anna doesn’t want to live there, I don’t know if I want to take over the farm, it is a little “turned-around”. We could ask Markus to lease the farm.

Anna  I am sorry, but I don’t believe in that.

Anders  But that doesn’t help mother and father.

Anna  (irritated) Why do you always have to think of them!? nobody else thinks of them. Why do you have to have that pressure?

Anders  No but, I have been working a lot at home.

Lisen  It is common that the feeling of responsibility comes to rest on someone among the siblings.

Anders  I don’t know if it is a feeling of responsibility, as much as the others (the brothers) have their own places, we only have two cars and two children (laughs).

.......................silence......................

Anders  No, it is complicated, but it doesn’t have to be that way.

Anna  It would be fine if everything had been cleared up, immediately! This takes a lot of energy!

Anders  So, it is US that have the question and the pressure. It would be simple living, just restore the house and move there, that’s the way you can look at it.

Anna  Yes but they (the parents-in-law) have said “if you are going to restore the building then we will have opinions about that”. Then I say; I pull the hand-
brake, step on the brake and reverse away from there!! That’s final; I could tear down the whole house! I could live in that PLACE if you could tear down the house, but that’s something you can’t do.

Lisen But if you own the house you can decide, never mind if they get angry, isn’t that so?

Anna But on a family farm you are just a trustee, that is what everybody says that owns a farm, you just manage it until it’s time for the next generation to take over.

Anna I know what I want, I want my new house. I want it so much!! I can SEE it in front of me; I am inside the house....

Lisen That’s what you want. When you tell Anders, that he has to make a decision, what do you mean by that?

Anna (laughing) don’t know, maybe Anders also wants this house, but not as much as me, like he says, in 25 years, in 25 years he wants this house that I want in 5 years, most of all today.

“**It feels like something”/ Traditions**

Anders If I shall own it, if I just don’t go away from it, or if Markus takes it over. But it feels somewhat – damn it, then I miss something, but what I miss I don’t know.

Lisen I have this feeling all the time – you are not prepared to give up your marriage for a farm?
Anders: Yes, in that case we shouldn’t have got married and had two children. But maybe we should have settled this before we got married, no, I don’t know…….

Anna: I thought we agreed before, but something has happened since you got older. Then suddenly you changed your mind..........After Emil was born, between Emil and Disa you changed your views completely.

Lisen: Does it have to do with being a parent and thinking about the future?

Anders: It’s possible I have that in the back of my mind, if they sometime would like to take it over. Maybe, I should not think like that being born in the seventies that is what those born in the forties are thinking. (Laughing)

Anna: Surely that’s part of it, we have big differences around this, and I’ve grown up in a village with two parents, working Monday to Friday, 7 to 5.

Anders: Sometimes I think I take over, live there but maybe not work there so much.

Lisen: As much as Oskar has done?

Anders: To have it for 25 years, as one step, it’s now we have a family and need a bigger place to live in.

Anna: Do you mean that we shall expose our children to this shillyshallying also?

Anders: It is often said that when you are a farmer, you shall see to it that you have a house that you can move to, after you handed it over to the next generation.

Anna: It is also like this, you only live once, say 25 years, you don’t know, maybe you only live 22 years and you think ”I do this to make my mom and dad happy”, and then you don’t get to experience what you really……

Anders: Um….maybe I want too much....

Anna: Don’t know, or is it me that is stopping it?
Anders  A couple years ago they always said: “Do you want to take over?”, “When you are moving here later…..”

Silence

Anders  I think they have had in their head that I SHALL take over, it has never been anything..., then there are objections, and then the atmosphere gets heavy and it is hard to “dig into it.”

Silence

Anders  It is up to me to answer; yes or no.

Lisen  It is you who must answer yes or no?

Anders  Otherwise Markus takes over; it’s not worse than that.

Lisen  No, it’s not.

Anders  It’s not so damn funny anyway. (Laughing), If I thought “that stupid, shitty farm”, but I think its a little fun, in some ways.

To make decisions/ To think differently

Lisen  What do you mean Anna when you ask Anders to make his decision?

Anna  No, I don’t really know, we have discussed to have a house for many years, and if Anders is burning for something, then he goes for it.

Anders  Yes I did that a year ago, then we was...., and then we were making drawings.

Anna  yes......it didn’t feel like that, it was mostly to make me calm, do you understand how I am thinking? it was mostly because I should.....

..................silence..............................
......should stay calm and nice and quiet. As soon as I tried to dig a little deeper, then it was always me that had to start the talking. He didn’t mean it.

Lisen  It is like when you say “Anders you have to make a decision, you don’t mean it, not for real?

Anna  No not really...

Lisen  You don’t really mean it because he can’t make any decision?

Anna  he can.....

Lisen  That you will be part of?

Anna  Of course he wants me to go with him to the farm, that’s obvious.

Lisen  Yes but it doesn’t seem to be that clear, that makes it hard to make a decision?

Anders  It can be like that.

...............silence.................

But it’s not only that. If I had made the decision 5 years ago, then you wouldn’t have had a choice, then you had moved in with me.

Anna  Or we hadn’t lived together today.

Anders  yes...

Lisen  (to Anna) Then you say no to the farm?

Anna  Yes but both of us have to be involved in it, and if Anders wants to take over the farm then my house has to wait. But I want him to decide now, so I don’t build my castle in the air.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING Lisen Kebbe 2011

Professional Doctorate in Systemic Practice University of Bedfordshire
Financial matters

Anders  It would have been easier if the farming had given a better income.

Lisen   Um

Anders  So you could have a decent salary to live on.

...............silence..................

Anders  It is better to work as a carpenter for 25 euros /hour than to be on the farm and lose 10 euro per pig you send away. It’s negative when you start to think about it.

Anna    I don’t know, maybe I have stopped Anders already; I am told that you have to live in that house for economic reasons if you take over the farm.

Anders  Economically is it better to live in the house even if you have to put 50.000 euros into it.

Anders  There are so many pieces of the puzzle that have to fit for everything to go well; you can only look at the prices on pigs at the moment, that’s the basic income. Thinking about that you would be a fool to take over the farm

...............silence..................

But this is where we stand; we need somewhere bigger to live.

Lisen   You both agree on that?

Anders  Yes we do, I think so (laughing)

Lisen   But where?

Anders  We like it here, if it had been 20 square meters bigger then there had been no problem, it would have been simple to stay here-

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING Lisen Kebbe 2011

Professional Doctorate in Systemic Practice University of Bedfordshire
To be squeezed

Anders It is like I said before, I used to be pretty determined, I said what I thought about things, but since I became a father, it is like I am fading.

Lisen Are you fading? Is it harder to decide things?

Anders Yes, I don’t know why, before I could tell people what I thought, I don’t do that today, I am a little more like, I wait and see. Don’t you think I am like that? (to Anna)

Anna I don’t know….

...........................silence.............................

Anders Before, I didn’t care; now I have children to think about, it can be something like that.......

Anders (jokingly) You can talk like this, but sometimes, when father celebrated his sixtieth birthday, the boiler in the cellar caught fire, I ran down, took a bucket and threw water on it, it was burning outside the boiler. Sometimes I think; why the hell did I do that? That fire could have solved it!

Anna It is like this, you look for a place, look at houses, check materials, you check on everything, and the process keeps running. It is like checking a charter trip and then all of a sudden, no....

Lisen Yes, year after year, you have been looking...

Anders We did that yesterday, looked at package tours.
Anna: Yes, it was the same; we looked intensively on one travel and then, slurpzzz…. Then it was gone, we couldn’t decide, stopped talking about it, very strange!

Anders: Yes, we had almost decided to get passports for the children.

Anna: But if Anders has decided to take over the farm then I don’t want him to let me go round hoping for a new house.

Lisen: Do you want Anders to decide?

……………………silence……………………

Lisen: It is a feeling I have when Anders is talking that he is afraid of losing you.

Anders: It could be like that, you never know. It is not that I want to take over because I love the farm 100%...

Anna: No that’s not the way it is.

Anders: But if I was to do it, then maybe the one I love don’t want to go with me. (Smiling)

Lisen: That is a very high price, worse than money.

Anders: It is not only the money. When I am really tired, no, then I can’t think of it, then I try to turn it upside down and think like this: What the hell, there are not many people that get an offer like this, then I look at it from the positive side, although it might not be so positive.

Lisen: It has both positive and negative sides.

Anna: But it is not the farm that bothers me, it is the house, all the demands and expectations and everything.

Lisen: Um

Anders: But look at it from the economical side, to live in the house, to work a little for Markus and to have something.

Anna: What did you say, one more time!!!! To own the house!
Anders  To own the house and live in it.

Anna  But if you don’t take over, we don’t have to live in THAT house!

Anders  It is the most economic.

Anna  I do not only want to think of the economy.

Anders  No

Anna  To stay there and be unhappy for 30 years, in 400 square meters, that’s not what life is about.

Future

Anders  The entire kitchen has to be thrown out.

Anna  The bathroom as well, the entire second floor is sickening.

Lisen  Everything has to be done up?

Anna  Everything, not to talk about the basement, with water on the floor and all the dark corners and the low ceiling.

Lisen  Can’t you just lock the basement?

Anna  They need to have their work clothes there.

Anders  I can imagine tearing down most of it, but one part that I don’t want to alter is the big drawing room (“salen”, a traditional room for feast and celebration), that is a room where you don’t want to change as much.

Lisen  Is that a little holy?
Anders  Maybe one wants to take it over only because of the children, so they will have the same kind of life I had when I grew up.

Lisen  Um

Anders  I don’t know, it might be like that for Anna too “I want to show the way I was brought up”

..................................

Anders  No, if we were to live on the farm, then I think they had, well Emil would not have a horse, but maybe a rabbit, I don’t know.

Anna  he’s not that interested in animals.

Anders  Disa, I think she would have a little horse, and a little like that.

Disa  I want also to have a lamb.

Lisen  Do you want a lamb?

Anna  It was Emil’s Polly, a motherless baby lamb from last year, which will get lambs this spring.

Disa  Also me, I want one!

Anna  We will see if there will come any.

Disa  At grannies!

Anders  That becomes normal if we live there. Anna has always been horseback riding; it is only since Disa was born she hasn’t had her own horse. Then surely it would also be a little horse there.

Lisen  Um, is Emil more interested in tractors?

Anna  He also likes animals, but it is more like, what to say, when he is in the stable he doesn’t take care of the horses, he wants to do practical things, like cleaning up and throw down straw from the attic to feed the horses and so on.
The ‘poems’

The ‘poems’ above is a way of lifting up content before process, in a way to freeze time. I had the feeling that all the ‘statements’ Anna and Anders were making over and over again, had been monologically repeated during many years, without being listened to, without being changed over time. Both of them were strongly concerned with the way they themselves were thinking and feeling. It was like they were risking their way of looking at the world, their ethos. It had to do with risking the meaning with their lives if they would have to give up their beliefs. Both of them felt depressed, Anders talked about how he had ‘lost his power’ when their oldest son was born six years earlier. Since it was impossible for them to listen to each other their thinking stayed monological, it was not opened for ‘the otherness of the other’ (Shotter), it became static. Anna and Anders did not know how to come back to their dialogical way of being with each other, the way they had lived before.

What do the different themes mean to Anna and Anders?

What was the meaning of the different themes that were so important for Anna and Anders to talk about and to make their partner really understand?

When listening to their different dreams of future lives; Anna’s and Anders’ different ideas about where and how to live and whether to take over the farm or not, I realize that becoming a parent suddenly had changed Anders way of thinking. He was swept back to his ‘roots’ and the traditional farming culture. This is a change he does not really understand or even wants. He says in ‘It feels like something/ traditions’ ‘I ought not to think like that being born in the seventies’. He is saying that he is thinking like those born in the forties, like his parents. Anna had also observed that he had started to think like this when their first child was born.

In the conversation with Anna and Anders I got the feeling, that since their children were born they belong to two different ages. Anna was raised with two parents working outside home; life was divided into working- time and leisure-time. In a life where you ‘sell’ your own labor and you also have ‘time of your own’ the family can make their own priorities. This is the kind of life Anna values highly. Anders is raised on a farm that was built by earlier generations; home, traditions and work place are interchangeable. What you do on the farm is connected to the conditions handed over by earlier generations and with future
generations in mind. This makes *when* and *where* you are, and *what* you do, very closely intertwined.

Giddens (1991) writes about the ‘pre-modern’ and the ‘modern’ life, about the separation of time and place in modern life. Time and space was the same thing in the pre-modern world. In the traditional life on a farm, passing through generations, Anna says you are just a trustee. That means you have the unwritten rules not to change a lot of things and to be prepared to hand it over to the next generation. Giddens states that time and space in the pre-modern times were tied together through the place

‘When’ – was not only marked with the social activities ‘where’, but with the mere substance of that activity (Giddens, 1991, p.26.)

According to Giddens life in a modern society depends on people not tied to special places and traditions. Modern people are mobile, do different things and are interchangeable.

It was striking, how Anna and Anders had very different views on what would be a good family life in the future. The huge question where to live for the next 30 years made their ideas concrete as well as symbolic.

Anna was very clear about her wish to build a new house, on a new site. She could picture the new house, she said in ‘The house’ ‘I want it so much!, I can see it in front of me, I am inside the house…’ I clearly felt her frustration when she said: ‘But I want him to decide now so I don’t build my castle in the air’. But it isn’t only a house; to build a new house also stands for living a modern life, a completely different life from the one Anna imagines will follow from taking over the family farm. She also says: ‘But it is not the farm that bothers me, it is the house, all the demands and expectations and everything’. We do not develop this further but it is obvious that Anna is not interested in a traditional farming life; with everything she has experienced follow with that.

Anders on the contrary has his view on what a ‘good family life’ should be like. As he says in ‘To be squeezed’, ‘It is like I said before, I used to be pretty determined, I said what I thought about things, but after I became a father, it is like I am fading.’ What was earlier an agreement between the partners is no longer a shared view about how life should be lived; valuing the freedom of being able to live wherever you choose and work wherever you decide is no longer a value that has any meaning to Anders.
Identity

These difficulties raise questions of identity. Who am I today? Who will I be if we take over the family farm? Who will I be if we build a new house, on a new site? What will we be as a family? Who am I expected to be if I take over the farm, what are the family expectations, what expectations do others around us have, what have others that have taken over farms said about their lives?

Some years ago all three brothers and their families changed their surnames to the name of the farm; the middle brother had told me the last time we met. The parents did not change their family name. To have the name of the farm as your surname is a very strong identity builder. I have my own experience of this, when I was 10 years old my parents changed our family name to Kebbe, which is the name of our family farm. I remember it as very tumbling experience. All of a sudden I was situated, not only by people I had never met before; in a family, geographically and with the apples and pears that were produced on the farm. My friend the ethnology professor, Ulf Palmenfelt, told me that the tradition to use the name of the farm as a family name has been common in both Sweden and Norway, but today it is only used by some people in a few regions.

When asking Anders about the change of name, the intensions and feelings he had when doing it 12 years ago, he could not name any reasons for it. He reflected on why the middle brother also changed his name because he had already bought his own farm with another name. But he concluded by saying “it must have felt important to us”.

What builds our identity? Harlene Anderson quotes Polkinghorne:

> We achieve our personal identities and self-concepts through the uses of narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story. We are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure of how they will end; we are constantly having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives ... the development of these self–defining narratives takes place in a social and local context involving conversation and action with significant others, including one’s self, (Anderson, 1997, p224).
What is obvious in this family is how strong the “story of the farm” is in Anders life and it seems like becoming a parent has given Anders an obligation to fulfill the hopes from his parents and his brothers, although it causes a conflict with his earlier beliefs and with his wife.

**To listen in a new way**

The way this meeting was set up, was by me asking questions of Anna or Anders, one at the time. Both of them were listening in a very concentrated way and they participated fully the whole time. It was obvious that everything was said with the intention to communicate, not only with me, but most importantly also with each other. The way this conversation is set up, with me as a ‘bridge’ between the two, gives them the possibility to really listen and talk to each without objection or defense; to hear each other and themselves in a new way.

The atmosphere was intense but also at several times joyful. We were laughing when I asked Anna what she meant by ‘Anders has to make a decision’. She really did not know what she meant. The same when Anders got lost talking of why he wanted to take over the farm and that they really agreed on the fact that they have to move to a bigger house. The last seemed to be the only thing they agreed on at the time. The big joke was when Anders talked about his father’s sixtieth birthday, and said it would have been better if he had let the house burn down, and then they would not have to discuss living in that big house. Bakhtin (1984) writes about carnival and about the importance of humor, how it opens up the conversation and makes new connections possible.

I think that what happened in the meeting was that both Anna and Anders had the ‘feeling of being heard’ and they did not need to agree on any of the subjects they were talking about at that moment.

I think Shotter’s article (2008, p1) around listening fits very well with what happened...

...which arouses within them a distinctive and recognizable ‘feeling of being heard’. All these issues are fundamentally ethical issues in the sense that: If I need you in order to be me, if my appearance in the human world as another person of worth depends upon your responsiveness to my expressions.
It had to do with ‘in order to be me, I need your responsiveness to my expressions’ to be a ‘person of worth’ for the other person. I think the importance that everybody could sense in the air during the conversation had to do with these very basic existential matters.

And to put it in Bakhtin’s words

for a human being there is nothing more terrible than a lack of response (1986, p127, emphasis by the author).

A response in this case does not have to do with getting answers or coming to agreements, it had to do with being responsively listened to for the first time in these important matters.

**Coming back to the couple after a couple months**

Some months after this meeting, I met the couple again, with the task to go through the transcript of their conversation for this essay. I told them that I noticed that they seemed relieved, like the pressure had been taken away from them. I asked what had happened.

They told me that they had gone on a vacation to Spain, after our meeting it had been possible to decide on a package tour. This was the first trip abroad with the children, and they had had a very good time and had been able to talk to each other. Anna told me that they had been talking a little before, but earlier they had seen everything so differently that they could never develop any joint thinking. She also told me that they had talked to nobody else about this before; ‘I mean nobody and hardly to each other, but now it’s different’.

I asked Anna if she had given up her thoughts about the new house but she hadn’t. It will have to come later, when we calculated on the costs for building a new house we realized it would take all of our salaries, we would have nothing left to live on.

When talking about what had happened to them they did not say, ‘it happened during our meeting’, instead they talked about what had happened afterwards, about the wonderful trip to Spain for example and how their lives and their thinking had moved on because of that.
Including my own worries

I have presented how the conversation ‘rolled around’ during the whole meeting. It was very emotional. One thing that struck me when I read the transcript was my questioning; three times I asked if Anders was afraid of losing Anna. I question myself whether this is a sign of being ‘too intertwined’ in the family or what it is. But this was a question that had been on my mind the two latest meetings. To me the ten years difficulty of reaching a decision made sense. When I brought the question up during the conversation Anders once answered: ‘In that case we shouldn’t have got married’, Anna responds by saying what could have happened if Anders had tried to force her five years ago: ...we may not have lived together today...’ and approaching the end of the conversation Anders says: ‘then maybe the one I love won’t come with me (smiling).’ This is an example of how my life experience, cultural knowledge and my own worries inspire me to include questions into the dialogue and test if they have any relevance.

Last time when I met Anna and Anders we went through the dialogues that are included in this paper. I told them that I was struck by how many times I had asked if Anders was afraid of losing Anna and I asked what they thought of that. ‘Yes, Anders said, I noticed that too when I read it. I wondered where you got that from; I have never had that thought.’ Anna also agreed, she had never thought of leaving Anders. We were laughing about it and Anders said that’s your worries, and I reflected over if I was taking on parental feelings towards them and worried about if they would be able to handle their situation.

It may look as if it does not matter what I say in the dialogue. It feels as if what is said by me is accepted, it does not disturb Anna and Anders in their thinking. I say things with feeling and in an open way; they do not have to answer me, or each other. The dialogue is an open space where it is safe enough to tell each other what comes to one’s mind. The strong feeling is that everything is listened to with an honest interest. The rhythm of the conversation is rather slow, no talk is overlapping, and there are often small, silent pauses between each utterance.

To arrange this conversation with the young couple separately turned out to be very successful. The meeting helped them to listen to each other and after the meeting to develop their dialogue. After some time it was possible for them to make a joint decision.
The insight that stays with me at this moment, which I believe has great relevance, is the necessity to be listened to. Further I believe that to be able to talk you have to trust the others around you, that they will be responsive to your talking and sincere in their interest. I think what we co-created was a listening space and both of them felt listened to and they guided each other to a greater understanding of each other and themselves. My guess is that the headline of this paper, “When silence comes creeping in”, is pointing at the deeply felt threat that ‘no one will listen to me, so I rather not talk’.
Chapter 3  
A Shared Context can Create Wings for the Succession

This essay is about what happened during the second year we met 2008, what I call the second phase. It has to do with a horse project that Anna and Elsa started that had a great impact on the whole of the succession project. I did not realize from the beginning what was going on because it happened outside our meetings. The following is a long reflection over what a common context can create.

This essay was started on an autumn day. I was frustrated because I wanted to go on with my research project and the Bjärges family had, I don’t know for what time in a row, postponed the next meeting. So after writing a note from the phone call, I started at random, a backwards reading of my field notes. Everything felt ‘stuck’; I did not know how to go on.

Around this time I had done some ‘serious’ reading of Bateson and was ‘full of’ his thinking and fascinated by all his different perspectives and his ways of ‘laying rosters over reality to find meaningful patterns.

However that day I went for a walk by the sea. On the promenade with the low autumn sun in my eyes I met my teacher from upper secondary school. He is old now; when we met in school he must have been much younger than I am now. All the same, at that time, at the end of the sixties, I viewed him as a much older man then I do now.

He gave me a friendly greeting. As always when I meet him an old memory comes to mind. During one of our seminars we discussed a poem written by August Strindberg called “Esplanadsystemet” (The system of boulevards, 1921). At that time I was, together with a lot of other people, passionately engaged in a fight around an old mansion that was going to be torn down. The mansion was situated on the site where the new upper secondary school was going to be built.
The poem centers on a crowd of youngsters that tear down houses. Several stanzas describe how stones and wood and dust are scattered in the air and how the houses are collapsing. Unfortunately my translation does not give justice to Strindberg's poetic pen but it will give you an idea of the “body” of the poem.

/The rotten wood/ as dry as snuff/ is whirling around/ with lime and gravel/

........

/From house to house/ they set out/ from sill to ridge/ all is broken/

After a description of this destruction in several stanzas, an old man comes by at the end of the poem. He sadly asks; /what is going to be built up again? / The youngsters answer:

/It is torn down to get air and light/ is that not enough? /

During that seminar I desperately argued against the ravaging of old settlements, in my analysis I was convinced that old August was as much against the tearing down of old houses as I was.

Not until many years later, when I heard this poem on the radio, (they talked about the cultural life in Sweden in the beginning of the twentieth century), I understood how far apart we had been during that seminar – August and I. My reading of the poem did not have the faintest idea of the situation Strindberg was in when he wrote it, my head was full of my own concerns. Thus two completely different contexts were created from where to understand the meaning of the poem.

So evidently the context we are in decides not only how we interpret the moment we are in right now, it also determines how we interpret the world we are approaching. Strindberg used the old moldy houses of Stockholm and the conglomerated city plan as a metaphor for an enclosed and rotten cultural life that he wanted “to tear down to bring air and light”. – I, on the other hand, wanted to preserve the big, old, pink house in the overgrown park. Us students, we wanted to use it as a café, a library and a music room. I could picture myself with my friends very vividly, enjoying the fruits of culture in the beautiful rooms. The ‘rotten cultural life’ that Strindberg had experienced in Stockholm half a century earlier was a far cry from my reality.
My teacher had probably planned for an interesting discussion where we would compare different aspects of how to look at old houses and Strindberg’s way of using metaphors, as it was a very timely subject. Nevertheless, what I remember from that seminar is how terribly stupid I thought the teacher was since he could not understand my arguments, and at the same time I was convinced that August and I were soul mates. It was impossible for me to reflect over the subject from any other perspective. I was so completely wrapped up in my own situation, the plans for arranging demonstrations and posters to protect the old house that I was unable to ‘hear’ the context my teacher was trying to introduce.

These vivid memories were revisited when I met my teacher and they clearly illustrate Bateson’s writings on context. In ‘Steps to ecology of mind’ (2000) Bateson states the importance of context in communication. He describes context like a frame around communication, a frame that defines how we understand a message. According to Batson communication is meaningless without context. In real life communication context tells us how to value and understand the communication we are in. Peter Lang clearly refers to Batson when he speaks about the necessity to clarify the “context markers” of time, place and definition of relationships, in for example leadership and the conduct of meetings. The list of context markers could of course be much longer since everything we say, the ways we act, and the surroundings we are in, are markers building up the context as well as changing and transforming it. Bateson also writes that ‘at least on the human level there are also “markers of contexts of contexts” for example:

An audience is watching Hamlet on the stage, and hears the hero discuss suicide in the context of his relationship with his dead father, Ophelia, and the rest. The audience does not immediately ring the police because they have received information about the context of Hamlet’s context. They know that it is a “play” and have received this information from many “markers of context” – the playbills, the seating arrangements, the curtain, etc. etc. (Bateson, 2000, p.290).

So the marking of contexts in our daily life is a complex venture and on many levels at the same time. Like in my example from school where there are plenty of context markers, for example being a student that has to go to school, being a teacher who is paid to be there, there are special rooms for different classes, timetables and there is homework. And here is a context on the context; if I had done my homework properly I would have known of

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Strindberg’s context, and I might have been able to go beyond the first thoughts that entered my mind.

However, we can very well be in different contexts when we are communicating, like my teacher, I and August Strindberg were at that seminar a long time ago. Our different contexts made us at that time look at what was at hand in very different ways; and we were unable to clarify what we were talking about.

Bateson (2000, p 187) writes that psychological frames/-contexts are both exclusive and inclusive since they exclude certain messages and include others. So much is said “in between lines”; conclusions are made out of earlier experiences and out of our culture etcetera. So much is never spelled out but is still part of the context and creates the “frames” from where we understand the meaning in a message. So much is taken for granted, we make basic assumptions when we communicate, and all gives meaning to the message. According to Bateson the context organizes all our perceptions that give input from all our senses, which create the information we can dwell upon, the information that makes a difference.

Garfinkel (1967) also talks about how much more that is ‘heard’ and understood when being in the same context. He proclaims the necessity of re-discovering ‘common sense’ to become aware of the workings of the background communication we all live within. Like Bateson he states that there is so much we understand although it is never spoken, matters can be understood from what is unspoken. Matters can as well be understood by attending to the temporal series of utterances and by events that are ‘pointing to’ matters that are underlying and others known about (p40). Garfinkel shows that there is a ‘whole world’ of communication neither told nor heard. He writes of the importance of becoming aware of these ‘common sense backgrounds, which he points at through different experiments he has carried out with his students.

To give only a few examples; students were asked to act and observe their own family from a position of being a boarder or act like a guest in their own home and only speak when spoken to and to be very polite and ask for everything. Another example; they were instructed to engage in conversation and to imagine and act upon the assumption that everything said is determined by hidden motives, (p51). What is obtained, in all these experiments, is an awareness of how deeply our common sense and morality are
Garfinkel tells us how very hard it is for his students to carry out these experiments. The students describe how afraid, embarrassed and ashamed they get and how hard it is to hold one’s position. As Garfinkel writes:

...common understanding does not consist in demonstrated measures of shared knowledge of social structure, but consist instead and entirely in the enforceable character of actions in compliance with the expectancies of everyday life as a morality. Common sense knowledge of the facts of social life for the members of the society is institutionalized knowledge of the real world. Not only does common sense knowledge portray a real society for members, but in the manner of a self-fulfilling prophesy the features of the real society are produced by persons’ motivated compliance with these background expectancies (Garfinkel, 1967, p53).

Garfinkel here describes how our everyday talk ‘produces’ our society. There are no general societal structures outside the individual, no roles that compel people to act in special ways like in the Parsonian no context-in-general view (p10). According to Garfinkel every usage of a context, in everyday conversation is always ‘made for another first time’; meanings in life and in relations are always created in everyday dialogues and are ‘known only in the doing’.

**A Story about Horses**

Back to my story again, when walking on the promenade I suddenly started thinking about my conversation with Elsa and what I had read in the notes from the phone calls and my field notes. Something awoke my curiosity; there was something I had not thought of before. When I came home I looked at my transcribed dialogues as well, and I found something; a story had come into existence in the family, a story about horses.

I have little by little understood that there is a big common interest in the family, an interest in horses that has not been talked about or acted upon in the succession dialogues earlier. I have now understood that there have always been horses on the farm, it is only during the last fifteen years that the stable has been transformed into a carpentry shop. The three sons do not share this interest in horses, but Oskar always had horses before.
was active in breeding and horse driving and Elsa has always been a horse back rider until fifteen years ago. Anna’s father is still raising horses and she has always had a horse of her own until three years ago when Disa was born. This is information I have gathered much later, I did not have a clue about all this when I was walking on the promenade. The only thing I had heard was that it was Anna’s request to hire pasture for her horse that first brought her to the farm more than ten years ago. I had been very surprised to hear that she, since they had married, had kept her horse at her parents’ place quite a distance from the farm.

To illustrate how I have been in dialogue with my texts and how new meaning has emerged when reading, writing and reflecting over what is happening in the family I will show my findings by lifting forward the bits of transcripts and notes I have of this story. I want to give an example of how language really is action if you are communicating within the same context. The first I can find is when I met Anna and Anders and their daughter Disa, and they at the end of our meeting dreamed about what it would be like for the family if they were to take over the farm.

• 22 January 2008, meeting with Anna, Anders and Disa

We were at the end of the meeting, and I asked what they thought it would be like if they were to take over the farm. First they both very vividly talked about tearing out the kitchen and the bathroom, remaking the second floor but saving the big living room, the ‘sal’ that is used only for traditional gatherings. After that Anders started to reflect on why he wanted to take over the farm.

Anders Maybe one wants to take over only because of the children, so they will have the same kind of life I had when I grew up.

Lisen Um

Anders I don’t know, it can be the same for Anna also ‘I want to show the way I was brought up’

.................silence.............

Anders No, if we were to live on the farm, then I think they would have, well Emil would not have a horse, but maybe a rabbit, I don’t know.

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Anna He’s not that interested in animals.

Anders Disa I think she will have a little horse, and a little like that.

Disa I also want to have a lamb.

Lisen Do you want a lamb?

Ann It was Emil’s Polly, a motherless lamb from last year, which will get lambs this spring.

Disa Me too, I want one!

Anna We will see if there will be any.

Disa At grannies!

Anders That would be normal if we were to live there. Anna has always been horseback riding; it is only since Disa was born that she hasn’t had a horse of her own. Then surely it would also be a little horse there.

Lisen Um, is Emil more interested in tractors?

Anna He also likes animals, but it is more like, what to say, when he is in the stable he doesn’t take care of the horses, he wants to do practical things, like cleaning up and to throw down straw from the attic to feed the horses and so on.

Next time I heard the ‘horse story’ was when I talked to Elsa on the phone some months later.

• 28 April, 2008, phone conversation with Elsa

A while ago Anna came and reminded me that I had helped one of my grandchildren to buy a horse earlier. Anna said: “Soon it is the right time for Disa to have a pony, as you have promised her”.
Elsa told me that she took a pony made of glass from a cupboard and gave to Disa, she was joking and said: ‘Here you get a horse from Granny, but this time it is made of glass’.

She also told me during that chat that her relationship to Anna had become much better.

Here is the first ‘piece of evidence’ that a horse story has come into existence through the women in the family. A ‘horse-genre’ is created and it is possible for Elsa and Anna to talk in a new way. I can only imagine the joy and the engagement this create for both of them, horses being their big interest, which, from what I can understand, they have not shared earlier. We can see how happily Elsa responds to Anna’s request to buy her granddaughter a horse, and this initiates the dialogue, (as the story is told by Elsa.)

Genre can be compared to the notion of context. We can never say that we are not-in-a-situation that is outside of all situations (Linell, 2009, p17). And Bakhtin writes:

We speak only in definite speech genres...We are given these speech genres in almost the same way that we are given our native language...when hearing others' speech, we guess its genre from the very first words...If speech genres did not exist and we had not mastered them, if we had to originate them during the speech process and construct each utterances at will for the first time, speech communication would be almost impossible (Bakhtin, 1986, p78-9).

So I would like to say that Elsa and Anna, both being ‘horse-girls’, easily could co-create a common genre with all that it includes of history, unspoken common knowledge and full of memories for both of them, and at the same time hopes for the future. I like to think that they were invited into this context/ genre by the vision that Anders and Anna created when they were exhausted started looking into the future. Disa also participated - very forcefully - in the dialogue by demanding a lamb at granny’s and in that opened up for the life that would be possible if they were to live on the farm.

Elsa had told me before that she wanted to give her grandchildren “one big present” each, like a horse, a motorbike or money for driving lessons. This she had thought of as something that would happen when the grandchildren became teenagers, but the ‘horse story’ had come alive and Anna had started to live the dream to have horses on the farm.
Anna could have bought a horse by herself, or brought one of her father’s horses to the farm, but her talk of horses became an invitation to a dialogue across generations.

The way Elsa answered with a little joke; to give the grandchild a horse made of glass, was an appreciative rejoinder directed both at the granddaughter and the daughter-in-law. Bakhtin writes about the importance of humor and laughter in communication:

Everything that is truly great must include an element of laughter. Otherwise it becomes threatening, terrible, or pompous; in any case limited. Laughter lifts the barrier and clears the path (Bakhtin, 1986, p135)

Elsa also told me, with laughter in her voice, that Disa had said that she did not want to have a new horse because she already had her rocking horse. Joyfully Elsa also told me that her relationship to Anna had become much better.

The third time I heard the ‘horse story’ was in the beginning of the autumn. I had individual dialogues with the father and two of the sons, those who were willing to take over. They had still not been able to talk about the succession details and sort it out. They worked together almost every day and discussed everything but the succession. For me to interview the three men individually was an idea offered to them as an attempt to help them move on. Previously I had always met them together.

8 September, 2008, individual interviews

**Oskar**

Lisen: Do you know what Anders and Markus are thinking?

Oskar Anders had some thoughts about building a new house before but that idea is totally gone now. He is building a stable now; the old carpentry will be turned into a stable again, as it has been before. I guess it is Anna’s dream of having a stable. It is good, Elsa had it before, they can build it as they like.

Lisen Has Elsa been horseback riding?

Oskar Yes she has, I haven’t but I have a big interest in horses, it is a common interest. We have had our adventures with horses......
The same day I also spoke to Anders.

Lisen I have heard you are building a stable?

Anders Yes, we will see if I can continue to do that. We have to make some agreements; silence.

No! We will just go for it. If nothing else there will be a very good new floor in the carpentry.

Lisen When we talked last winter you brought up the idea that it would be possible for Anna and Disa to have horses if you were to take over the farm. Now there is a horse.....

Anders Yes that’s a lot of fun. We have one more pony coming in. Anna met some people on the mainland when she bought our pony, and they didn’t have any place to keep their horse, so it will move in here.

Lisen I heard that there have been horses on the farm before.

Anders Yes, this is the third time this house will be turned into a stable.

Lisen Are you doing this together with Anna and the children?

Anders Yes we try, they can’t do so much, but this is the possibility you have when you are living on a farm. Anna has always had this interest. We started with a pony. It is not so much work with them. It is actually Disa’s horse.

Talking to Anders nine months after we had met at their home as told of in the second essay, it was wonderful to see how happy, ‘strong’ and determined he was. He was concerned about the construction work when we were talking; he was not really sure how to go on, but decided in the moment not to talk about the problems. Even though his father was not really clear about things, he decides to go for it anyway. His feelings of being paralyzed and tired, that he had talked about and showed last winter, were completely gone.
By now it is evident that the whole family is involved in the ‘horse story’, it has gone from talk to action. From what I can understand there has never, at any point, been any meetings or action plans made about keeping horses again on the farm. This ‘horse genre’ is something that has developed through daily dialogues which have come to include all family members step by step. Holquist states:

But one thing should be very clear: in so far as an utterance is not merely what is said, it does not passively reflect a situation that lies outside language. Rather, the utterance is a deed, it is active, productive: it resolves a situation, brings it into an evaluative conclusion (for the moment at least) or extends action into future….Discourse does not reflect a situation, it is a situation. Each time we talk, we literary enact values in our speech through the process of scripting our place and that of our listener in a culturally specific social scenario (Holquist, 2005, p63, italics by the author).

That ‘discourse is a deed, it is active and productive which extends action into future’; is the ‘horse story’ a living example of, the ‘horse-genre’ has made it possible for Anna to take an active part in the farm for the very first time. Earlier (I believe) the farm has only been a place where her husband was been working, now she and the whole family are active in the rebirth of the stable.

- November 2008, interview with Elsa.

I met Elsa for an individual dialogue the second of November and the “horse story” came up again.

Elsa Everybody is helping now, it is going to be the most beautiful stable. Markus is working with the electricity without asking for anything in return, Anders is doing the carpentry, Anna’s father is helping with the smith work and Anna is painting. I am taking care of the children. It is only Oskar that is getting a little quiet, he doesn’t say so much.

Elsa confirms the progressive communication and activity around the stable. Anna’s father is also involved now; it is the first time I have heard of him being active on the farm. You
understand that a lot of the life on the farm will be different in a very short while. At the moment Oskar, who has lived all his life on the farm, has a hard time adjusting to what is going on; at the same time though, he has said earlier that he likes what is happening. Everything now points at the future without anyone actually talking about it. But their relationships are energized and finally the right time has arrived for talks of succession of the family business.

**Reflections at the End – There is Never a New Context**

This is of course my way of seeing what Bateson calls ‘punctuation’ of what has been happening. I mean that the ‘punctuation’ made by the ‘horse story’ gave me a new way of organizing the information provided by the family, and when piecing the information together I discover that a succession process is emerging. This process seems to be moving the young family into the farm in a way that has not happened before, and it is changing the relationships within the family, especially between Elsa and Anna. Bateson writes about punctuation like this;

> (punctuation is) changes in the manner in which the stream of action and experience is segmented or punctuated into contexts together with changes in the use of context markers (Bateson, 2000, p293).

Batson is very technical in his formulation of this concept, but the new focus/punctuation/genre opened my eyes and I gained a new way of approaching what was going on; a new context. When I had ‘seen’ it I continued to ask about the building of the stable and so on. Naturally family members have conversations that I am not part of. I am not aware of all the different themes that are alive simultaneously inside and outside our meetings and that is not necessary. However this time I ‘discovered’ the theme of horses, a common context/genre and I found glimpses of how the dialogical process evolves and co-creates actions in the family which become an important part of the succession process.

Bakhtin writes of contextual meaning:

> …it is potentially infinite, but it can only be actualized when accompanied by another (other’s) meaning, if only by a question in the inner speech of the one who understands. …There can be no “contextual meaning in and off itself” – it exists only for another contextual meaning, that is, it exists only in conjunction
with it….Therefore there can be neither a first nor a last meaning; it always
exists among other meanings as a link in the chain of meaning, which in its
totality is the only thing that can be real….each individual link is renewed again
and again, as though it were being reborn (Bakhtin, 1986, p156-6).

So there is never a new start of a context as I first thought; that a new context was made;
there are rather new links in the chain. The story of horses has been alive all the time, only
Anders made it possible to link Anna and Elsa to this dialogue so they could stoke the fire
and make the dialogue grow to include all family members in both Anders’ and Anna’s
families. And the last word is not uttered; the ‘horse story’ will live on.

When thinking of my contributions to this building of the horse genre, which in its turn has
created wings for the succession process; I think I have helped the family members to come
into dialog by working in the ‘third way’. I have helped them to listen in new ways and to be
responsive to each other in a way they were not before and this has created new
possibilities for how ‘to go on’ in the family. I also think the curiosity and joy I have
expressed, when told over the phone about new developments in the building of the stable
and so on, are part of their conversations. However, it is never possible to tell who did what
in a responsive dialogue where a joint action happens as Shotter says. What I have
described here is the piecing of small ‘news notices’ that have reached my ears about what
is going on in the family in their daily life, outside our conversations. I think this
demonstrates how language is a deed whereby our world constantly transforms.

About my teacher, I met him again; I was eager to talk to him about what I had written
about Strindberg, Bateson and of context. He looked all bewildered and had no comment
or question. But his wife, my former German teacher said: ‘Lisen, you are a student I never
forget, you went to the nurse’s office all the time during my lessons and asked everybody in
the queue to take your place so you didn’t have to return to the classroom’. - We had a
good laugh together and now we chat a little whenever we meet on the promenade.
Maybe one day, my teacher and I will succeed in having a conversation within the same
context.

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Chapter 4  Frustrated Dreams

This essay aims to show how Oskar’s frustrated dream; of a succession process where everybody was satisfied and there was no conflict made the succession process come to something that looked like a standstill. However after six months the conversation opened up again and the ‘cogs continued to move’. But that is only part of the story. The process also involves the horse project, from the previous essay. What I did not realize while writing the horse story was that at the same time the strain among the men was building up concerning the fairness of the coming transactions, everybody was involved in building the new stable which manifested the future in very practical ways. Most of this took place during 2008, during what I have called the second phase.

At the end of 2007, the first year, there was silent frustration and great ambivalence concerning how to go on. We had a meeting in December where their accountant participated to give information about current finances and rules and regulations around successions. The family members most likely had different ideas that they did not talk about. Elsa and Oskar really wanted us to continue with our meetings. We decided to meet in pairs as described in the second essay, ‘Silence is creeping in’ and Anna and Anders started to change their minds. It felt like the young ones wanted action and to decide things; I guess they wanted Oskar to come with a proposition.

During 2008 it was, as always, hard to make appointments. Every meeting was postponed a couple of times and there were many phone calls to change dates. When they called or I rang them I asked how things were going and took notes. During the year I had five meetings with the family in different constellations; one with the whole family, two with the young couple, one with Oskar, Anders and Markus, and one with Elsa. In the spring there was also a meeting with the lawyer that I was allowed to join as an observer and more of this meeting will follow in the next essay.

To get an overview of what happened during 2008, I printed all my notes from the telephone communication (five with Anna, five with Elsa, four with Oskar and one each with Anders and Markus), together with all field notes and notes from our meetings. An interesting picture developed when they were viewed chronologically.
Everything seemed light and happy in the beginning of the year when Anna and Anders decided to take over the farm. Shortly afterwards the situation became really tense and the three men working on the farm did not talk about the succession at all. While the tension increased among the men the women started the horse project that involved everybody in the practical building of the future life on the farm. Still tension escalated concerning how to settle the transaction. We had to find new ways of working together. I proposed what I have called a reconciliation process. At the end of the summer the three men and I met in a new way. After a preparatory common meeting I met them individually for conversations that afterwards were summarized and sent as letters so they could edit them individually. Then all three of them read each other’s texts. The final step in the process was a follow-up meeting where the dialogue could continue. When all the steps in the process were completed the men were able to start talking on their own and I only had some phone calls and follow-up meetings; this is what I call phase three. This essay gives an overview of 2008, further I discuss my line of thinking behind and around the reconciliation process.

The essay begins with summarized notes from calls and meetings, month by month. By inserting the practicalities in the reconciliation process in these notes I am showing how this new way of working was set up. When people are quoted directly it is shown by wider margins, it all starts with a phone call to Anna.

**Beginning of January**  **Anna, phone call**

It’s good to be back at work again, Anders and I have not been able to talk about anything during the Christmas holidays. I almost think we have met you enough; the meetings take so much energy. Markus said earlier that he needs the farm so I think there is no point in meeting any longer, and I don’t think Anders will ever say what he thinks, even if it’s only the two of us you meet.

**End of January**  **Meeting**

I met Anna and Anders in their home. This meeting is presented in the essay ‘Silence is creeping in’.
Middle of February Anna, phone call

Anna has now started to change her mind, ‘maybe I’m stupid, I’ve talked to my friends at work, and it’s good to have people from the outside to talk to. I would like to meet somebody that has been married into a farm for a long time; what is important to think of? I do not want to become a maid.

A week later in February Meeting

Meeting at Bjärges farm with the whole family, except Staffan, Oskar has pulled out figures and taxation documents on the farm. He has formulated basic questions about what to consider in the coming transactions. It’s an open-ended discussion. Anna dances around in the kitchen with Disa and invites Elsa into the dance. The young family is happy and relaxed they are going on a vacation soon. The shift in attitude is apparent.

March Anna, phone call

Anna, Anders and their children have been on vacation and the children have flown for the first time. Anna is happy; Anders and her relationship have become playful and fun far away from everything. They have decided to take over the farm. When they discussed what it would cost to build a new villa Anna realized that it would take all their money. She is going to let her friends come and look at Bjärges, while Elsa and Oskar are on vacation. She then talked about how to make rules together with Elsa and Oskar about using the house during workdays for lunches and so on; to be cautious not to build in conflicts.

March Elsa, phone call

Around the same time Elsa told me that Anna had reminded her of her promising a horse for Disa. Elsa had laughed and taken a glass horse and given it to Disa. Here the two women started the succession process by involving everybody in the rebuilding of the old stable on the farm.

Elsa also told me about going through all the cupboards in the house throwing trash away, old vases she had never ever used before she puts flowers in and gives away for birthdays. Things of value she puts on a table in the kitchen so family members can take what they want, what is left she gives away to a flea market for charity in the village. Then Elsa talked
about all the table cloths made of linen that have been used during big balls in the traditional ‘sal’ in earlier times. Some of them are very worn and mended but she does not want to throw them away, she will make rags out of them. Then there are the big wide table cloths woven specially for the dining table in the ‘sal’, they belong to the house.

Elsa is happy to start the ‘moving out’ process. She also talks about ‘pulling back’, earlier she has been pushing, trying to make everybody do as she has wanted, but now she waits and sees what happens. Anders is much happier, he is not depressed any longer, and Elsa’s relationship to Anna is much better.

**April**  **Elsa, phone call**

Elsa is really worried about Oskar; he is not talking to anybody about the succession, not even to Elsa. He gets angry when she wants him to drive to the rubbish dump, ‘save something for future generations!’ he shouts. It is important for him that there will be a fair deal. Elsa guesses that he does not know how to manage it. ‘This has to be Oskar’s decision’; Elsa states, ‘it is his farm although they own it together’.

**Beginning of May**  **Anna, meeting**

In the beginning of May I call Anna again, I want to meet her and Anders to talk about what I have written in ‘Silence is....’. We go through the text and then we have a wonderful evening with all the 300 baby sheep in the pen. I watch Anders and Oskar working together, with all their tacit knowledge, helping ewes to deliver their lambs. Anna and Anders now discuss a lot how they are going to renovate the house, they look forward to it. But Anna wants it to happen NOW! Nothing really happens, and she is also thinking about if she will own anything herself.

**Middle of May**  **Meeting with the Lawyer**

During this meeting all family members participated. I had asked if I could join them because I thought decisions would be made and I wanted to be there at the conclusion. But that was naïve. The meeting was more of an informative meeting and the lawyer was given the figures on loans and taxation etcetera. He also went through different strategies for a succession. I was there as an observer and more about this meeting will follow in the next essay.
End of May  A Need for a New Kind of Meetings

There is a ‘stand still’, the men do not talk about the succession at all, there is a tension but I do not know at the moment what lies behind it. Elsa has told me how scared Oskar is of conflicts and this makes him sleepless, irritated and quiet. From the meeting with the family and the lawyer I also understood that they have not yet talked about how to make the transactions. Anna and Anders are waiting for an offer but nothing happens.

Now there is a need to find a new way to meet. The tension is building up between the three men and they must start talking about how they are thinking in this situation. I am considering applying a way of working with tensions and conflicts that we have used many times in working groups; we call it a reconciliation process. It starts with a common meeting where we together define the situation and agree on what it is necessary to talk about right now. Together we then make up questions that will be used in individual interviews. Then the individual conversations are summarize and written down. Afterwards people get to edit their own text and finally all will read each other’s texts. This is a way to have a ‘dialogue with delay’ with each other, where each of them in a ‘safe enough’ atmosphere can develop their thinking, their ambivalence and how they like to address these matters to each other. It all ends with a follow-up meeting where the conversation can continue.

End of May  Oskar, phone call

When I talked to Oskar on the phone and proposed this kind of meeting, Markus was also at the farm. They said that Anders was sick and they did not really know. I felt like I was pushing, and that did not work. They said they were interested but they had to wait and talk to Anders. We decided to meet in August, and then we were to discuss how to go on.

End of August  Meeting with Oskar, Markus and Anders

They really needed help now; they had not talked about the succession since Anna and Anders has said that they wanted to take over, although they had worked together on the farm almost every day. They all agreed to try my proposed meeting; they all felt the need to start talking.

We had a short meeting where they talked about how things were now. We then agreed on individual meetings with me. In the following individual conversations we talk about how
they see the situation and what dilemmas they are facing. What kind of solution would they prefer and how do they look at each-others positions. Finally they reflect over what they believe would be the best way to get this process moving.

**Middle of September Individual Conversations with Oskar, Markus and Anders**

We met at Bjärges on a working day and each one came in and talked to me for an hour. Next step in the process was to summarize the conversations and let them edit their own text. When summarizing it is important to follow their way of talking without making it too ‘dis-orderly oral’, that could be embarrassing to read. I try to be as clear as possible with how they view their situation but their ambivalence is also included, what they dwell on and what they do not yet have any answers to. I make sure to include all relational remarks they are telling me about. It is important that they feel this mirrors what we were talking about.

Presented below is about half of the text I sent home to each of them.

**Oskar**

Markus bought the other farm twelve years ago. We wanted to build a farm that could support two families so nobody would have to work alone and there would be no problems with vacations. Markus was working on a farm in New Zealand at that time, we had contact with him and he agreed on being part of this in the future. So since then we have managed the two farms as a common enterprise. We have done a whole lot of construction work and common investments since then to establish a modern pork farm.

I think we have really good competences in our family; Anders as a construction worker and Markus as a mechanic and all three of us cooperate very well when working together. For me it is very important that Markus gets a part of the farm, he has ‘part of his soul here’, and it’s not enough just to cut off a piece of land for him.

I am afraid of future conflicts that are the worst that can happen to a family. I see our family, my wife, our three sons and me as a collective, as a unity; all of
us have to be satisfied. I see the succession process as an elephant’s pregnancy, it has to take at least two years; it is a maturity process.

I think it is good that the stable is being built now; both Elsa and I have had horses before, as well as my father. So there has always been a big interest in horses on the farm. I am also glad that Anna has changed her attitude towards the farm and that feels very good.

When I grew up there were four generations living together. It was not easy for my father to move in. When I took over my father left shortly afterwards, and I will try to do the same.

Everything has moved forward a lot since we started our meetings, I do not want there to be any lack of cooperation. Anders is a little like his mother, he can spark sometimes. But I think all three of them are pretty benevolent. We want as few conflicts as possible, these only drain power, and it is the worst a family could be hit by.

I want it to feel good for all of them. It is Markus and Staffan that is the knot that has to be untied.

I do not want to hide the fact that Markus and I are very close. He has always been here, we are pretty much alike. He can also get angry if he is treated unfairly, in that case I can also get mad but it does not happen very often. Markus was working on a boat and was free every second week; he always came here and worked without any payment.

The solution I am thinking of is that Markus would own one third and Anders two thirds. That would make what they own equal without splitting the Bjärges farm. I think it is hard to separate the house from the land because that would ruin the value of the farm, and to split land and forest from the farm would make Bjärges too small. I know Anders thinks he should have it all, but then he would have to buy out Markus and borrow money for it in the bank. But Anders would never be able to afford that. So this is really a dilemma, I have understood that Anders and Anna want to own the dwelling house by themselves. But the integration of our joint enterprise also makes it hard to
see how that could work. Staffan will get the summer house, a plot to build a summer house on and then he wants 200 years of hunting rights on the grounds, which will do for many generations, so that is easier.

(Lisen) Oskar why is it so hard to talk about all this?

I don’t know, it is close to heart, it’s so emotional, I get scared, and that is why I get so confused. I am afraid of creating conflicts.

Anders

It gets bloodier and bloodier. First we decided who was going to take over and then it was going to be divided. The money aspect comes in, and then everybody wants to take part all of a sudden. From the beginning nobody wanted the farm. But I guess that’s natural.

Nobody says anything, we are waiting for a bid, and I think that’s the common way to make business. Then we would have something to decide on. But it is difficult with Markus, if he will own part of the farm. I think that the best thing is if one person owns it. For Anna and me it is problematic if Markus owns a part, then he will also own part of our house. And if we put private money into the house, he will benefit from that also and he might also have his opinion on what we are doing.

I can understand that it is not fair if Markus doesn’t get a share, the value is high. It is not possible for me to be the sole owner of the whole thing. There has to be some solution. We always work well together; we have never had any problems with that. We just have to figure it out, we have to start talking. I can understand that it is hard for Oskar, he wants everybody to be satisfied, but he cannot figure it out either. But this is the last winter we are going to live in the summer house, we have to move! Maybe it doesn’t matter if Markus owns a part; it depends on how the documents are written.

Markus

I think it might be good that the process takes some time; we do not talk about the same issues now that we did in the beginning. In the beginning we only
talked about the dwelling house. I don’t really know why we don’t talk outside these meetings; time flies and it should not be complicated but...

I want a part of the farm, and that is not popular. Maybe Elsa thinks that it is okay, but Oskar does not say anything, but he must have some ideas.

I am waiting for the energy boost Anders will get when he becomes the owner that will make it different. Now we just do what is necessary on the farms, we have to start thinking of the future now. But everybody has to be satisfied, not only Anders and me. We have to talk I guess, it is important that we can continue talking and cooperating after the succession too.

There must be a solution; it always goes well when we work together, we must be able to figure this out. The solution must be fertile; it has to work for everybody.

We need to talk, we could brain storm and everybody could bring some ideas; we could have a real ‘brainy’ night and share a bottle of whiskey and solve the whole thing. Then a lot of ideas would come up. I know of families where they have not been able to come to a succession and then the parents die and everything has to be solved although everybody disagrees. We have to decide things before Christmas. Anders needs to know how to go on. It would of course be possible for only him and me to meet, but it would never happen...

**Middle of October Writing Letters**

After summarizing these conversations I send them individually to each of them. My idea is that the process starts in the first meeting when we planned for the individual conversations. It developed further during our conversations, which were quite emotional for all of them; Oskar got tears in his eyes when he said that the worst thing he knows is when people are treated unfairly. To read a summary of the conversation will now give them new input to their way of thinking and feeling. To imagine that the other two will read the letter later will give them a new possibility to imagine the others’ situation. Therefore is it also important that they have a chance to edit their letters, they can have changed their minds or I might have misunderstood what they have said. The summaries were sent with the following letter attached.
Hello! Visby 21/10 -08

Here is my summery of our conversation. I want you to read it and then call me and tell me if the text is ok or if you want to change something. I might have misunderstood, or you may have changed your mind.

When I have heard from you, I will send all of you the three texts, so you can take part of each other’s thinking.

If you want me to take part in the follow-up ‘whiskey meeting’ I will be happy to be there, or if you want to meet by yourselves, with or without whiskey that is up to you.

My phone nr 12345678

If everything is ok, you can just send me a text.

Take care

Lisen

Shortly after in October Anna, phone call

After I had met the men separately I wanted also to meet the women; I started by calling Anna.

She was very irritated.

I do not know if I want to meet again, it takes all my free time and nothing happens anyway. We have told them that we are interested. In a normal business deal on the market you have a bid and a counter bid. We have to be able to decide something otherwise we will buy another house. I know Elsa wants to get this done with, she is clearing out the attic, but Oskar doesn’t seem to be interested in making anything happen. I think you should talk to Markus’ wife instead, Anders was there and said something about Markus owning one third of the farm. Then she had said that the kitchen at Bjärges was okay, that it did not have to be renovated.
No, I do not want to meet anymore; but this is on my mind all the time, almost all the time that I am awake.

I just want to have a house where there is space for my children. The accountant also said it was not a good idea for the brothers to own it together. In that case the house has to be separated from the farm, otherwise it is no alternative. I cannot imagine that we will have to ask Markus if we want do something to the house.

**End of October**      **Oskar, Markus and Anders are editing their letters**

Nobody called, so I called them, I felt we were in a hurry and realized how hard the waiting was for Anna.

Anders answered that he wanted to read the text one more time, to think it over carefully, Markus said the text was okay. Oskar rewrote quite a lot. He thought there was too much left out by me. ‘This is psychologically important’ he told me, ‘to have it in the right way’. Oskar and I talked a little over the phone and I said that I did not think the three of them were so very far apart, judging from the three conversations. Oskar then told me that it would be okay for them to meet alone for the follow up meeting.

**Last days of October**    **All three letters are sent to Oskar, Markus, Anders**

I now had Oscar’s letter back, neither Anders nor Markus made any changes. So then I sent the three letters to each of them, each containing the summaries from all three conversations.

A couple of days after they had received the letters we went to a public meeting about successions and I met them again. I sat at the same table as Anders and Markus and asked if they had read the letters and had started talking to each other. They jokingly told me that they had been working together all day and talked a lot, but not about the succession. Neither did they say anything about what they had read. But with a little surprise in their voices they told me that Oskar had decided that the three of them should meet at Bjärges the following Monday morning to talk.
Beginning of November  Elsa, phone call

I called the farm and Elsa answered, I just wanted to hear how everything was going, I was curious.

I am so happy! They are talking! It makes me unbelievably hopeful. It is so fantastic! And I do not think their faces looked too worried either. They started to talk and then there were thousands of questions to discuss. I was there in the kitchen last Monday. I have a way of always moving around, I think it is because I do not understand what they talk about, but I wanted to hear. So I walked around and made food, it has always been difficult for me to sit still.

I think Anders is well now, he is not depressed like he was six months ago. It is okay with Markus as well, he will not give up and Oskar will help him. I think he should have half the farm but Oskar does not like that idea. He thinks they shall own equally much and Markus has his own farm. Oskar does not want the mother farm to be smaller either. I do not want to decide this; the farm belongs to Oskar that is the way it has always been, even though we own it together. The important thing is to care for the farm so it can be passed on continually in the family, which is the logic of farmers. They also say that it is not good to separate the dwelling house from the farm, if you do that you do not get the financial benefits you have when it is managed together with the farm. To split it up also destroys the value of the farm as a whole. But it is wonderful, they are really enthusiastic!

2009, January  Oskar, phone call

Oskar tells me that they have met with both the lawyer and the accountant after Christmas, and both advice against joint ownership. They have seen examples where it has worked, but it can be hard and they have examples of when it has gone really bad.

The next knot that has to be untied is how Anna can be part of the deal. We know many examples of when the woman does not own anything and does not feel involved in the farm. The accountant, as well as the lawyer, says that if you do not work at the farm then you should not own anything either.
Then we had the idea of separating the dwelling house from the farm, that would solve a lot of problems but it does not feel right, it affects the value of the farm as a whole and makes it hard to compensate Markus.

We have talked to a lot of different people and that has been very good. Anders said a couple of weeks ago:

‘Dad, today you stay inside and write a proposition so we can take some action!

This has been a maturity process; ‘it is time for the elephant to give birth now’.

The stable is finished; there are two horses in it now. It has been a real joint labor, even Anna’s dad helped with all the smith work.

But it still lies heavily on me, I will visit Annika [the accountant] and reason with her, I take this to bed; it is hard for me to sleep.

April Elsa, phone call

I had not heard anything from the family in a long time so I called the farm and Elsa answered.

Now we have all the baby lambs, it is fun, a lot of things happen. The lawyer will draw up papers so they will ready for signing. Anders will get two thirds and Markus will get one third, it is the way it will be. Even though we do not have to give Anna anything she will get ten per cent of Anders’ part, so she will have something if is she has to leave the farm.

Anna has said that she is tired of being angry all the time. She also thinks it is strange that you have to talk about divorce and death when it is really something joyful they are deciding.

Elsa then says that she and Oskar are going away during the Easter holiday to the Ice hotel in the north of Sweden. It is the first time they leave the farm when the baby lambs are there, ‘we just leave it!’ They will move out of the house in the autumn. Anna and Anders will start to renew the first floor and the bedrooms before they move in.
The stable is really beautiful; Elsa thinks the stable helped the process along. It gave them something in common that speeded up the succession. Disa walks around in breeches and Elsa have bought pink gloves for her. ‘Anna loves to be with the horses just like I used to, until fifteen years ago’.

**Reflections**

Viewing all the comments it is foremost Anna’s and Oskar’s different views on what the succession is about that catch my attention. In Anna’s world the succession is mostly about a new house to live in. She and Elsa took on the request to do the generational shift soon after she and Anders had decided that they wanted to take over. The women started to live the succession by taking the initiative for the horse project and Elsa by clearing and sorting out old household goods, equally happy over the concrete steps of change.

At the same time Oskar was worrying about how to make a fair deal between his two sons since both wanted to continue farming. As I understand it Oskar feels he has a responsibility from his forefathers to keep the Bjärges farm intact and that includes all the land and the dwelling house. That is one reason why he does not only want, but also needs Anders and his family to come and live at the farm because Markus already has a farm of his own and a dwelling house he has been renovating for ten years.

To cut off part of the farmland or the forest would make the Bjärges farm too small to survive. To take away the dwelling house would be to take ‘the heart’ out of the farm; the farm would only contain land that could easily be sold off and merged into bigger farms. Oskar, Markus and Anders also have the old agreement made in 1996 when Markus bought the neighboring farm and they started to manage the two farms in a joint enterprise. Since then all investments in the enterprise has its collateral in the buildings and land property of the two farms. Most of the new investments made on the Bjärges farm have Markus as one of the stakeholders. When Markus bought his farm there were big hopes for the future. A plant big enough to support two people was created. It was all built on cooperation and had all the stages of pork production within one unit. Nobody would have to work alone in the future and at the same time they would be able to go on vacation without high costs for temporary workers. A fair deal according to Oskar would be to give Anders two thirds and Markus one third of the Bjärges farm and let them own the farm together. In that way they both would own about the same amount of land and they could own 50 per cent each of
the enterprise. So to let Anders take over the farm completely is out of the question from Oscar’s perspective.

This dilemma made Oskar quiet and sleepless. We can only guess that the horse project and the clearing out of the house added to his anguish, things were rolling out of his control.

A Need to do Something Different

In this situation there was a need to do something different. Oskar now had all the decisions on his shoulders, Elsa said that it was his responsibility as it from the beginning had been his farm. The sons as well as Anna were waiting, Oskar was irritated and quiet. During this spring there was a first meeting with the lawyer at the bank. I had asked if I could come along as I thought they were going draw up the papers as Anna and Anders had said they were interested in taking over. This meeting will be covered in the next essay, here it is sufficient to say that I was naïve; the decisions were still a long way away.

However according to the three men, I understood that we had to think in new ways as the meetings we had had earlier had not made the men say what they were thinking. I offered them a way of meeting that I here call a reconciliation process, a way of working I have used many times in work teams where there are tensions and conflicts among the members. Sallyann Roth has been inspirational for this way of working; she has a background as a family therapist and was one of the founders of the Public Conversational Project (PCP) in Watertown, Massachusetts. They started to apply their skills to stalemate public controversies in 1989\(^6\). They bring together committed activists with opposing views on big public questions such as abortion, religious, political and environmental issues.

in which public debate has led nowhere, largely because the opponents construct reality and morality in entirely different ways (Gergen et al, 2001).

Gergen et al.\(^{(2001)}\) refer to PCP, when developing their thoughts around the need for transformative dialogue. According to Gergen our Western tradition fosters singel truths, universal logics, the idea of winning and losing. We also view individuals as context free singel agents responsible for their own actions. We value the idea of the individual’s responsibility highly, which makes it possible to blame individuals when

\(^6\), http://www.publicconversations.org/, 2011-10-23
something goes wrong. This is the foundation when polarized antagonism starts to
grow. To relate this to the situation of the Bjäges family during 2008 one could easily
take the family members separately and blame them for the hardships they were
going through. For example; Oskar, the oldest, was too indecisive, Elsa just wanted to
get away from the farm, Staffan did not care at all, Markus did not dare to take it
over himself, Anders was greedy, Anna was selfish. If you as an expert think you
know what is right and wrong it would be easy to put the blame on any of them. But
if you instead view the process as relational and all family members as responsible
contributors that construct meaning together, my task to facilitate becomes
different.

Instead as Gergen et al.(2001) advice we schould appreciate relational responsibility,
take into account our jointly constructed meaning and our mutual responsibility for
meaning making. What we create together open up new ways of the facilitating
process.

The way questions are asked open up for different converstaions and emotions for
the people involved. Conflicting ideas in a family or a group should just be listened to
and respected, it is futile to go further into the conflict by focusing on antagonistic
ways of thinking. My stand is with Peter Lang who fostered the idea that: ‘conflicts
are frustrated dreams’ (McAdam&Lang, 2009). This idea creates respect and
curiosity. I have often talked to families and groups about looking upon their process
like a meandering trail where there are some ‘big stones’, (frustrations) blocking the
path, obstacles that create questions. ‘What is this’? After examining ‘the stones’,
these might turn into gravel or new ways to walk around them are found, and the
path is lit up by the dream that was hidden by the problems/’the stones’. Often when
you talk about dreams in a family or a work team it is astonishing how similar they
usually are, although people have very different ideas of how to reach them. So to
focus on the future in an appreciative way enhances progress of the process in a
totally different way from analysing problematic isses. This is a lesson from both
Peter Lang (2009) and Appreciative Inquiry (Magruder Watkins, 2001). People should
feel appreciated and valued, to invite people to tell stories that others can be moved
by is a way not to fall into the trap of antagonistic warfare. If a story is personal and
emotional we get interested and empathetic even if we do not agree with everything
the person says. To ‘be moved’ is a high form of affirmation (Gergen et al, 2001), Anna’s story is a good example of this when she spoke about being afraid in the first essay.

As a facilitator the task is to find ways of talking that open up for generative ways of communicating. Roth’s 7 way of working has been very inspirational. On the PCP websight she outlines how to approach, think and listen while interviewing people that are caught up in conflicts, she calls it ‘Listening to Connect’. To Roth it is important that we are open and don’t make assumtions and listen to the exact words the people voice. We should also ‘listen for’ feelings and check if we have understood the meaning. And it is also important to understand what people’s way of thinking means to them. These are some of the basic attitudes Roth highlights. One needs to be respectful and make an interviewed person want to talk about his or her beliefs and ideas. Maybe most important, says Roth, are the selfreflexive ‘grey areas’, where there are mixed feelings and no precise opinions. Such reflections, Gergen writes, when heard by the others in the group seem to encourage similair responses from them, and open up for new conversations other than defending one’s own standpoints and different views.

At a workshop with Roth at KCC in London in 2008, she talked about a new field of work. This concerned families where sever conflicts had made members cut off all contact believing that separateness would be easier to live with. As Roth says in a private mail ‘disconnection develops, when it goes unaddressed, the result is deepening estrangement’. Roth continues:

The foundation of this approach is advance preparation, the meticulously careful and separate preparation of each person involved through exploration of the person’s stories, his or her concerns and fears about connecting, as well as the person’s coexisting desires, hopes, and dreams for connection. On this foundation and working together the therapist/consultant and each client build the processes and structure of the proposed meetings. The aesthetic of the work is a commitment to collaboratively design, cultivate, and support ways for people who have been disconnected to connect. The connection

http://www.publicconversations.org/resources/interview-sallyann-roth;2011-10-23
develops and grows through people finding ways to speak the unspoken and to listen to what has gone unheard.

This way of working, building the process and structuring a coming meeting around what is needed for people to dare and be interested in re-connecting with each after long periods of disconnection has inspired me. People need to feel respected and appreciated, they need a space safe enough to tell their own stories; stories that also include ambivalent and mixed feelings. To make new and hopeful stories possible all of these factors are important.

This inspired me while arranging for the reconciliation process in the Bjärges family. Although the family members were in daily contact with each other, they had stopped talking about what, at the moment, was of outmost importance to them. And as Roth states, when matters are unaddressed disconnection develops. We had met some weeks before to talk about how the meeting was going to be arranged. We had agreed on what questions should be asked and I had informed them about the different steps included. In the summaries above the way I posed my questions is not included and this might seem illogical, but I want to give an account of the background to my way of thinking, to the relational ontology behind my actions. My questioning above does not differ from what is shown in the other essays where more lengthy dialogues are given account for. My emphasis here is on my thoughts that lay behind when I met the three; there were no special words or phrases used.

It is interesting to reflect over how the three summarized conversations from the individual meetings affected the three men. I have asked both Markus and Anders what their thoughts were when they read the summaries and they say that they remember reading the letters but not what they contained. If I had got a letter like that from my father and my brother, I would have saved them in my diary for the rest of my life. But as I understand them, that is not their way of acting. They used them to start talking and then it is history and new ways of thinking are constructed over and over again. It is interesting anyway to reflect over what lines of thinking the three conversations contained.

Oskar was very anxious about writing in a good way and he told me this was a psychologically important matter. He paints the background, sees the family as a collective and speaks about his fear of conflict, and how unfairness is a foundation to it. Then for the first time he puts into words his thoughts around the transaction and the dilemmas built
into it. His whole story is permeated with his thoughts about his sons, their benevolence, how they have always worked so well together; and his wish for a fair solution that will feel good for all family members.

Anders says it gets bloodier and bloodier and shows his frustration. He starts by talking about the succession as an ordinary business transaction with a seller and a buyer and he denies the complexity of the situation. But then he understands the unfairness of his own demands and refers to how well they always have been working together, and he says that this matter must also be possible to solve.

Markus thinks it is good that they have let the process take its time. He is both asking for a part of the farm and waiting for Anders to take over, he already sees him as the successor; and he wants to cooperate with him. Markus also refers to their good collaboration, but at the same time he highlights that the solution must be fertile, it has to be good for all family members. Finally he opens up for a brainstorming whiskey meeting, for Markus it is only a question of time until they find a solution.

No one blames anyone else, only Oskar says that Anders is asking for too much, but he knows that he is a caring person and that they always work well together. Oskar takes this opportunity to formulate appreciative ways of looking at this situation; this way of talking makes it possible for him to break his silence. It does not make him feel as if he is escalating any dormant conflicts. He has been so afraid of conflicts destroying his family; all of them have lots of examples from families that have been destroyed by conflicts.

It is the same with Anders; he has been very frustrated and has felt squeezed between the ideas that belong to his new family and all the complexity of family business succession. Markus is calmer and knows that they can work it out.

As a facilitator in this process I choose not to explore the negative tracks, I do not feed them with more questions. To take Anders as an example, he is the one that is really frustrated and his claims make Oskar scared and probably angry. So I allow Anders to speak about his frustration, I pay attention to his worries about Markus owning a part of their house, but we leave it open, as a worry. I understand and feel his concern. That way I do not see him as a greedy person, something that would have made it necessary for him to defend himself; in this family it is not acceptable to be greedy. I do not ask for any statements or conditions he might have for taking over. This is to be relationally
responsible, as Gergen at al write about. I know that I am in a position to guide Anders’
thoughts in this situation, I choose the way I ask questions, my questions create thoughts
and feelings in Anders by the way I address him. His way of answering makes me
understand and feel his worries in my own body. This is something we always do, we
cannot choose to be objective and without emotions in this kind of situation. Evidently
there is an almost infinite number of ways for asking questions. The questions can either
escalate conflicts or help people find openings in dialogues which others can connect to; no
one needs to attack, but instead feel invited to dialogue.

When Anders feels listened to and confirmed in his worries his thoughts go to Markus and
he finds it unfair himself if he were to get everything. In this situation he also understands
Oskar’s worries. His thoughts and feelings are perhaps not new, but the still moment we
have together is of a new kind. This moment is also special since his thoughts will be read
by Markus and Oskar. The whole situation opens up for new ways of thinking about the
future where all of them have to cooperate. Anders no longer sees everything from his own
perspective. All of them ended with the common perspective; how easy it is to work
together and they draw the same conclusion; they must be able to solve this dilemma too.

After this process it was possible for the family to go on with their succession conversations
without me; now it was on the move. It took one more year during which they had several
meetings with the accountant and the lawyer since they needed help with financial and
legal matters. As I wrote before, I accompanied the family to the lawyer because I wanted
to be there when ‘it happened’, when they made their decisions. But that was naïve. After
the meeting described above it took one more year before it all was settled. I will reflect
over their contacts with their accountant and their lawyer in part three of this study.
Chapter 5  Knowing or Not Knowing

A need for new competences

During the second year of my contact with the Bjärges family the accountant and lawyer came into the process, in this essay I reflect over the difference in assignments various consultants to business families have. There are also differences in backgrounds such as education and practice between an accountant, a lawyer and a facilitator dealing with communication like I do. To reflect over the differences I have used Anderson’s (1987) comparison between her collaborative postmodern approach and what she calls modernist approaches to family therapy. The big differences she is pointing at are philosophical assumptions. One of the basic differences is the way language is approached. If language is seen as representation of individual thinking, or if language is seen as something we co-create within relations. Another difference is the view on knowledge; is knowledge representative of an objective world, existing independently of mind and feelings which can tell what is true and what is false, something objective and fixed? Or is knowledge found in a plurality of local narratives that are contextual and fluid where many different ways of approaching can be equally valued. Is there a grand narrative, a privileged meta-discourse, or are there a manifold of local narratives (Lyotard, 1984)? Is the consultant’s task to instruct the business family to find THE explanation and advice so they can make THE right decision, or is the consultant’s task to involve all family members in generative dialogues so they can find their own way to go on?

The Bjärges family had after almost two years reached a new stage. As the cogs started to fit the wheel the need for knowledge around economy and law was urgent. To be able to go further in their decision making they had to know about their own current finances, what the most common ways to make succession in other families are, what effects different solutions have on taxation, what regulations and laws there are and so on. I had the opportunity to meet both their accountant and their lawyer during two different meetings. Their accountant was invited to a meeting in December 2007 where I also participated, to talk about the current finances in the Bjärges business and what financial
effects different ways of solving the succession would have. The accountant has been working with the Bjärges family for about fifteen years and she knows the family well.

I also had the possibility to follow the whole family half a year later to the bank to see the lawyer. Many of the same things were discussed, this time also to inform the lawyer, who was new to them. The first thing I noticed was that the office was very small and it was hard to find the seven chairs that were needed when we came. It was also hard to fit them into the room which became crowded with the lawyer behind a big desk. It was obviously an unusual crowd that visited the bank. This makes me think of what Ove Lind, the lawyer in the interview from the first part of this thesis said; “the most usual is that the owner comes with his 19-20-year-old son and says; ‘Time has come for the lad to take over, let’s go through the paperwork’.” This was the kind of room that would have suited such a situation. The size and furnishing of the office, the routines and practices in the bank are focused on the owner and the business. It is often said in bank advertisements that the bank takes care of ‘the whole process’, alluding to the ‘soft values’ of the succession espoused from the government in Sweden during the last ten years. But one look is enough to see that it does not include meeting the whole family.

I also want to comment on the way experts are consulted to and the way they are consulting their clients. It is a mutual process. The family is addressing an expert on economical or legal matters, the expert answers with a voice that ‘knows what is true’. The first thing that happens is that family members become quiet, they are there to listen. They do not seem to expect to be invited into a dialogue. I noticed how the lawyer asked a lot of questions, I am sure he would have welcomed a conversation with all family members, but that did not happen. After the meeting in the bank was over we went to a café on the other side of the street. At once everybody started talking, they compared what they had heard, and that was very different. The whole café became very lively, I joined the conversation. They had all got a lot of information that they were very interested in talking about. I am sure that if the lawyer, who was a very nice and friendly man, had come into the café he would easily have been included in the conversations. The context immediately changed when we crossed the street and entered the café, a place for relaxed chatting, as well as intimate conversations about personal matters. I see this as an example of the importance of the context and what you invite your clients into. It is not as easy as asking questions; the whole setting and the idea that the clients are the central figures is the foundation, they are
the experts on their own matter. It may seem paradoxical as the family needs the knowledge the accountant and the lawyer possess, but the accountant and the lawyer are not experts on the very special and complex lives, ways of thinking and needs the family has. The accountant and the lawyer do not know how the information they give is taken by every family member. Family members have the need to process and discuss the information with each other and with the professionals, to make it fit into their way of thinking and feeling. The ‘experts’ have a lot of different information that can be added when questions came up. The ‘experts’ have to understand that every number and every transaction that is talked about arouses lots of different responses within each family member. Family members have the need to integrate the different facts of law and economy, with the dreams of the life they will come to live in the future. They have the need to do this in common dialogues where new thinking can emerge and conflicting interests can be addressed.

**To Know or not to Know**

I perceive knowing as a relational process (Gergen, 2010). We generate knowledge in our relations in our everyday practices. Anderson (1997, p4) writes about the therapeutic relationship and I think it has bearing also on how we as facilitators in different branches perform our consultancy. Here I will adjust her writing to business family consultancy.

Anderson describes some basic ways of thinking and acting in the modernistic tradition when it comes to the relationship between an expert (a professional) and a non-expert (a client). In the modernist tradition the consultant is a knower that has the ability to discover and collect information about the business family. The consultant is trained to think that there is one truth that they know of and it is the consultant’s duty to inform the owner about that. This consultant has also meta-knowledge of what is best for the business in the long run and what decisions the owner should make. It is also an important task for the consultant to make family members change in the way that is best for the business.

Anderson contrasts the modernist way to the systemic, collaborative and postmodern way of approaching clients. By appropriating this to family business consultancy; the expertise is shared between the consultant and the family with the consultant inviting the family to a collaborative relationship where different perspectives are held by all participants. A collaborative consultant expert is a ‘not-knower’ who is in a ‘being-informed-position’,
always opened to the generative knowledge created in dialogue with the family. The collaborative expert is focusing on generating possibilities and relying on the contributions and creativity of all participants. He/she is an expert that puts her ‘not-knowing’ to work, who uses uncertainty as part of facilitating a generative and collaborative dialogical process. Knowledge can then evolve and change for all participants (including the consultant) it can emerge as a natural consequence of the generative dialogue and the collaborative relationships.

These two stretched descriptions of different ways of working describe what I think is the problem with the consultancy business families in Sweden can get. It is well known that there are problems, so many successions are failing and the reason for this may by manifold, but the request from the family business research team in Jönköping University was to ask for process knowledge within the professional society of consultants. I think it is necessary for professionals working with family businesses processes to do it in a relational and dialogical frame and to understand that there is no difference between family relations and business matters - it is all flooded with emotions. This is what I have been emphasizing in the essays in this study.

The view of family business as two separate and competing systems, the emotional family system and the rational business system, is written about in family business literature. But my experience from consultancy is that consultants know about ‘the messy family relations’ but do not think it is their business to address them. That is something the family should take care of themselves. Instead their duty is to address the business, often with knowledge gathered from big business which connotes the family business’ way of conducting their affairs as un-professional (see the family business research chapter in the first part of the thesis.) Included in the paradigm of ‘what is best for the business in the long run’ is the rational business paradigm of the ‘economic man’ which states that all business resolutions should be rational and that all human beings are narrow self-interested actors.

From what I can understand this is the background to why all consultants I have met, including the accountant and lawyer of the Bjärges family, strongly advice against co-ownership. There is a built in hidden narrative or belief that sooner or later the siblings will be competing enemies, if not before then when spouses come in who have no understanding of the business. They always tell how many examples like that they have
met. I guess it is true; those would be the ones asking for help, they who can manage to cooperate maybe take care of their own business.

Another way of approaching co-ownership is to see the working together as a generative process that deepens relations and help partners find a common ground. To be two people working together must be on the positive side when challenges are building up, when somebody gets ill, and not to speak of the possibility to get a break from work.

It is obvious that these kinds of experts and their knowledge are needed in succession processes and my research proposes a new integrated approach for consulting to business families.
Visiting Elsa and Oskar in January 2010.

Both the formal and the physical successions were now completed; Elsa and Oskar had lived in this house for about two months; the summer house nearby the sea. It was almost exactly two years since I had visited Anna and Anders here, also in the middle of the winter with lots of snow; it felt special to be back.

‘It’s not easy to move from a castle to a hut, there is so little room for everything Elsa said when she showed me around. All the walls were wall-papered and their carefully selected paintings were hung. A fire was lit in the renovated fireplace. It was the same house in the middle of a pine tree grove, very close to the shore, but it was apparent that the people living here now had gathered their favorite belongings from a long life. Maybe it was a little cluttered but everything was arranged in a nice and cozy way. Elsa had finally got to set up her own home. When she moved into the farm ‘the table was already set’ as she had told me before. Elsa and Oskar invited me to the kitchen table which was laid and there were onion pie and lamb racks. Two hunting dog puppies that Elsa was taking care of during the days for Staffan were running around.

Oskar  I have only been here for two whole days.
Lisen  Where are you then, at the farm? (Oskar: yes)
Elsa  But you are here at the weekends, we unpack things.
Lisen  You unpack, is this the first time you are leaving ‘home’ Oskar?
Oskar  no it’s calm and...

............silence.................
I don’t think you can see anything here...
Lisen  Is it too calm, nothing happens?

Oskar  It will be different in the summer, now you can only see the tree tops, but that’s the way I feel right now.......but when I come out on the road then I feel.......Ahhh, Ahhhhhh (Elsa is laughing).

Lisen  When you come out onto the road and it opens up?

Elsa  It has been so dark down here, before the snow came, it was soooo dark.

Lisen  Then you haven’t been here so much?

Oskar  Yes, but not during the days, I go to the farm a little later than I did when I lived there, around eight o’clock

Lisen  What are you doing on the farm Oskar?

Oskar  I take care of the sheep, but there is as much work as you like, you only have to be healthy, then it’s nothing.......  

Lisen  This is what you want, to go on working?

Oskar  Yes now I have more time to take care of the stable, now when Anders is taking care of the pigs.

Lisen  Before it was you that were in charge on the farm?

Oskar  Yes before it was me that was there, I didn’t think of the responsibility. But now it’s Anders, he makes an effort and goes at it in a totally different way than he did before, in another way than I did.

Elsa  Is he? (Oskar: O yes) that’s good.

Oskar  So everything has gone well. So we are more free here, when we lived at home there was always something that was bothering us, but if you’ run away from home’ then there is nothing that you have to take care of.

Elsa  I feel almost thoroughly rested now, we were quite tired before we got away...

Lisen  Yes, so you can really relax here?
Oskar  I don’t think I have ever had such a low weight in my whole life as when we were moving out, we slept here and there, it was very confusing for a while. 

......... A little later ..........

Lisen  So for you the burden isn’t as big any longer when you don’t have to be responsible for the animals?

Oskar  Burden? But it has matured and I think it has been like that for everybody, even if it has taken too long, but on the other hand it has matured for everybody, so I hope they feel the same way.

Lisen  When it was over [the decision made] then it was really over.

Oskar  We joked about that we are experts on successions.

Elsa  Maybe it has to take such a long time.

Where do you eat during work days?

Lisen  How do you manage the meals?

Elsa  I have been thinking like this 

.............silence.............no................silence ......

I didn’t know if it was that important that I did the cooking, like before. I asked Anders and Markus if they wanted to have lunch if they could come here. It has been like that a couple times. ‘Yes, yes, yes’, they were very interested to come, then I asked today and then they both had food at home. That’s the way it can be. There is nothing that must be... This time of the year I am not on the farm for so long, in my workshop, only a couple hours per day, and then I go shopping and pick up Staffans dogs.

Oskar  That’s the way it is, we take it easier, we need that.

Elsa  I don’t want to wait on everybody every day, that’s not the way I like it.

Oskar  No but you don’t have to, that’s not the way anybody sees it.
Lisen  Nobody has to...

Oskar  And when Anna has been home she has invited us for lunch.

Elsa  Yes this has happened a couple of times; it might be different in the springtime when everyone is in hurry then maybe I.....

Oskar  But I notice at lunchtime how everybody is waiting for mother to say something...

Elsa  But it won’t develop into a habit. They are not nagging about it but they are thankful if I invite them.

The agreements of the succession

Lisen  How was the agreement, were you satisfied with the results?

..................Silence..................

Elsa  It was Oskar that decided this, he has to speak for himself if he is satisfied or not.

Lisen  Were you content with the resolution Oskar?

Oskar  Content...yes I was.... yes pleased, I think I was, everybody seemed content.

Lisen  So all boys were satisfied?

Oskar  Yes Anna got ten per cent of the farm instead of dividing the house she didn’t want it to be like in other families where the woman that moves in doesn’t get anything.

Lisen  That she shouldn’t own anything?

Elsa  To be able to own only the flowerpots as she put it that is also wrong, you could say.

Oskar  And Markus got one third, Anna has a tenth........
Elsa of Anders part, if she should want to leave she will get the money from her ten per cent, which is a little okay anyway so she can get somewhere to live at least.

Oskar We thought that was a good solution, we talked a lot about if their marriage should break up or so.

Elsa We were almost stuck on that, at the end it felt sickening.

Lisen A bit like saying that they are going to get a divorce?

Oskar Yes, but you have to say that she has matured very much, that’s something you notice, I think so anyway.

Elsa Yes I think so too, it was probably a good thing that is has taken such a long time.

Lisen Yes there is a lot that has to be solved.

Elsa umm, um... I think so. We celebrated Christmas in the ‘sal’ (the big traditional living room on the farm) as usual and so.....

Oskar ...... as usual? We have never celebrated Christmas there before!

Lisen You haven’t?

Elsa No we haven’t

Everybody is laughing

Oskar No we have celebrated in the kitchen before

Elsa yes it was like this, everything that we didn’t know where to put when we were packing, we just threw it into the ‘sal’, so maybe it was because they wanted us to take it away that they decided that we should celebrate Christmas there.

A little later

Oskar And Staffan is getting a piece of land by the water if he ever wants to build anything there and then he will get our house sometime in the future,
whether it will be here or somewhere else. Then we have a bond, but in this way there has been a minimum of money on the table.

The First Time Oskar is Away From ‘Home’

We talked again about the fact that this is the first time Oskar has moved away from home, but that is not the case for Elsa; in what way it is different for the two of them to move out of the farm?

Oskar Yes it is a big difference, but this has been going on for a long time, we knew about it, we should really have moved out ten years ago and then you…..you only have to accept it, it’s nothing to worry about. And then not to interfere with the things which you aren’t responsible for. They ask things, it’s easy when they discuss, to, like the other day when they discussed the bathroom, of course I have views…but I learned from my father, when it’s over it’s over, he stopped interfering when he moved out.

Lisen You learned from him...

Oskar When he moved in there were two generations that still lived on the farm and he came as a man from the outside into the home so it was tough for him at times.

Elsa yes it must have been

Oskar yes it must have been

Lisen Was it the same with your mother, did she stop interfering when you moved in?

Elsa No, she really interfered too much, she always had ideas about everything. That has bothered me very much, I don’t think of it today but....

The phone rings and Oskar goes away to answer.

Lisen For how long did you stay together?

Elsa It was only for two three years, so they didn’t stay for so long.
Lisen  But she had opinions?

Elsa  Yes of course she did, she had been living here with her mother, no other ladies had moved in earlier, so they had a lot in this house that was their deeds, a lot of things that were to be held in trust.

Lisen  That had to be taken care of in the right way.

Elsa  In the right way and what she had brought there should remain...

Oskar  (Who is back again) how can you say that?

Elsa  She never said anything so you could hear it, it was always when you were not at home, like with the furniture in the ‘sal’;’ look out so nobody comes and takes it’, she was shouting. She was never kind. She has temper. But she never said anything so Oskar could hear it. She was smart.

A little later

Lisen  Have you learned from that?

Elsa  Yes, I have learned, I will not have so many opinions. Of course you always think a lot, but you don’t have to say things in THAT way.

Oskar:  Then it depends if you get the question too....

At the end I asked Elsa and Oskar if they thought there was something that I could have done differently in our meetings to make the process better.

Oskar  We or you?

Lisen  No, could I have done anything differently to make it a better process?

...............Silence.........................

Oskar  I don’t know, it has been difficult, it has taken too long, but it hasn’t been your fault, you have facilitated the process all the time, one couldn’t say anything else, you can bring that along.
Elsa: I am not sure, if there had not been a continuation, if we had stopped when the project was over after one year.

Lisen: yes you told me not to desert you...

Oskar: No (protesting) it had surely, in one way or another it had to be, but to have someone in the background that pushed us has been good.

Lisen: But maybe there had been some other solution, do you think so?

Oskar: (takes a deep breath) But it was, what took such a long time, was to decide if we should separate the house or not, and that Anna felt that she didn’t get anything.

Lisen: Yes, but at that time they had decided to take over already.

Oskar: But you were talking to her, I don’t know what you talked about, but I understand that it has been positive.

Lisen: I have met them twice together.

Oskar: But I understand that it has been positive, it is so important to be able to talk...

Lisen: Yes it changes things

Oskar: Yes then things happens, as long as you go around and only look at each other like we do now and again yes you know it from your job... To be able to talk, to get it off your chest. (Lisen: yes, it’s my job)

Oskar: And to listen, it’s like that in all processes.

Lisen: yes, this is no different.

A little later

Oskar: I call it all a maturity process that has gone in the right direction all the time, there have been many meetings, there have been tears sometimes, yes it has been like that...

Lisen: yes there were a lot of emotions in the beginning

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING Lisen Kebbe 2011

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Oskar: There were a lot of emotions that had to surface, some things that you maybe did not want to talk about. That’s the way it has been...

..................Silence.........................

Elsa: Something else that took a long time was that you wanted Markus to have one third of the farm.

Oskar: Yes, if it had been clear that Anders did not want to take over then it had been easier and gone faster. But it has been the idea from the beginning when Markus bought the other farm that we should be able to work together and be able to have free time and so on. This has taken some time to sort out.

My Reflections

This was the first meeting I had with the family after the formal succession was over. It was Oskar that had asked for help with their succession. Elsa and Oskar have been the motors in the process from the beginning. If Oskar was the initiator, Elsa was the one that kept everything going when it became difficult and asked me not to desert them when the project year ran out.

Elsa had moved into the farm about forty years ago and she now really wanted to have a home of her own. As she and Anna have said earlier: ‘these dwelling houses are only something that shall be passed on to the next generation, be taken care of, it’s never your own’. It is different for Oskar, in this conversation he speaks about his difficulties to stay in the summer house and how he is able to breathe when he jumps into the car and heads towards the farm. For him the farm is so much more than the dwelling house, it’s the stables, the animals, the land and the working relations that are the same as family relations; the farm is his home. You can notice in the beginning of this conversation that he alters between calling the summer house and the farm ‘at home’. Oskar is going through a transitional time when we meet and as much as it is difficult he is also very content with where they are now. He is pleased when he can see how well Anders is taking on the owner role and that ‘he goes at it’ in another way than before and in another way then Oskar did. Elsa is also very pleased to hear this.
However, when I ask if the responsibility was a burden for him Oskar does not pick up these words. As he says he did not think of it as having the responsibility, it seems that it has never been heavy for him, but he jokingly says that he has ‘run away from home’ and when he does not see the farm nothing bothers him. This sounds uncomplicated, he trusts his sons and it is okay for him to be their farm-hand. Oskar returns over and over again to the long maturity process, how they should have moved out ten years ago, how they were all well prepared. What is hard for him in this transition is to move out from the farm and to settle in a new home. The moving out process has been confusing, he has never had such a low weight and he experiences an enormous feeling of ease when he takes the car and goes to the farm in the morning. But in the next instance he says that they are freer now and that it is needed.

For Elsa her living on the farm has only been for a period of life and she has been longing to set up her own home for a long time. This is the same idea as Anna had; the living on the farm is for a period of life, a period when the farm is ‘held in trust’.

Something that has hit me from the beginning of this project is the big difference in being an ‘indigenous Bjärges farmer’ or an ‘immigrant’ to the Bjärges farm. In our early meetings Elsa spoke about how ‘it has not been so easy…but you get used to it, you create a family life of your own’.

Elsa also talks about her mother-in-law, who has not been kind, and the difference it makes between them because Oskar’s mother was born on the farm and so was also her mother. There is a straight line of female inheritance (since there was a ‘lack of sons’) until Oskar was born.

**The Solutions**

It was a complex dilemma that had to be solved, and there had been a standstill for ten years when we first met. From the beginning I could see how this was tormenting them. For Oskar it was hard to sleep at night, Anders seemed depressed and Elsa was struggling with what it would be like if they never could move out of the house. It was also obvious that Elsa and Anna did not have much contact.

The old way of ‘doing the succession’, to just let the ‘cogs roll in’ as decided by tradition did not work this fourth time. Something else was needed.
As Taplikis (2008) writes:

The rewards of collaborative decision-making are substantial. – Decisions will not be alien arrivals – they will carry the voices of the participants. When decisions are implemented they will represent logical and values in which the participants are already invested – ‘when it’s over it’s over’

The resolution of the succession is not so much a question of economics it has more to do with keeping the farm in the family and the possibility for the two brothers to cooperate, something that was planned more than ten years ago. It was also important for Staffan to be able to stay connected to the farm and of course, for Oskar to keep on working.

A more economical way to handle the succession would have been to let Markus take over and in that way expand the farm, to sell the dwelling house for a good price and develop the farm. But this way of talking has never been heard of in the Bjärges family.

To be fair was important to Oskar; Markus had to have his share. But to split the farm into two equal parts was never an option either. That way the ‘mother farm’ would have been too small, and there would be a risk that it would be bought by another farm and no longer exist. Oscar seemed to have a ‘duty to’ his heritage it must be possible for the ‘mother-farm’ to live on. The farm was like one of the heirs that had to be treated right as well as the three sons. It is like the farm is a ‘super addressee’ (Bakhtin, 1984) that has the voice of the old fathers. It might have been that voice that Anders heard when he became a father, and which made him think and feel in new ways, although he had other plans together with Anna.

Oskar is talking about a long maturity process and today, looking backwards, he believes that in order to make a good succession it has to take time for everyone to find their own place in it. Oskar has good knowledge of the importance of dialogue; he says that it is necessary to be able to talk and to listen, that is needed in a maturity process and it is what makes things change. It is also impressive how all family members continued to do that until everybody was satisfied.
Chapter 7  
Roller Coaster of Inner Speech

This is the second follow up essay and it tells about my meeting with Anna and Anders in their new home. They have since one year taken over the farm. I met them with their daughter Disa who at this time is almost six years old. I wanted to ask about their experiences from our meetings and what our dialogues have meant to them.

This essay is divided into two parts. The first covers the beginning of our conversation when I asked them what had made a difference for them in our meetings. The second part of the essay is about the end of the conversation when I wanted to hear about if they thought I should do anything differently if I were to have a similar project again.

The First Part of the Meeting

Arriving at the farm the sheepdog welcomed me, I wondered if it was a new dog, it seemed so lively. It looked like the same breed as the one Oskar and Elsa had kept but it wasn’t as shaggy and lazy. Later I understood that during the generational shift of their homes they had also shifted domestic animals. The young family had left their cat in the summer house and taken over the dog that obviously had become livelier.

When I had come in to the house I noticed it sounded differently in the big kitchen, it was almost like an echo. It was not yet rebuilt as was planned earlier, but it was ‘cleaned’, the armchair by the telephone was gone, the table with all the winter cactuses was not there any longer, and there were no piles of paper in the wooden sofa and the work benches were cleaned out and gleaming. Here and there, nice flower pots decorated the big windows. The kitchen had changed its identity.

Anna and Disa welcomed me and showed me around in the house. Anna proudly told me of all the improvements they had started to make even before moving in. The first thing they had done was to furnish three bedrooms on the first floor; insulation, new wooden floors and new wallpaper. We went upstairs to look. Disa was very eager to show her pink room with a Barbie doll trimming all around. Disa told me that she had helped carrying and holding all the wallpaper when her daddy had decorated her room. Apart from these three
bedrooms, there is a dressing room and a big playroom for the children. In the wide hall Anna said she had been longing to throw out the filthy wall to wall carpet from the seventies but now she is happy she didn’t. The hall has turned into an indoor training camp for soccer and roller-skating. Apart from all this space there is a large attic and in two of the cupboards in the hall Elsa and Oskar still have a lot of clothing, books and a loom. Anna believes that they won’t ever collect their last belongings.

The old problem of being overcrowded is completely solved and there is no doubt that mother and daughter are very happy with their new life in the dwelling house on the farm. They are step by step making the house their own home, ‘colouring’ it in their own way. After the tour of the house Anna, Anders, Disa and I sat down in the kitchen with coffee and buns. Disa is sitting at the table and alternates between writing and watching a film, both parents help her alternately with spelling.

We started to talk about our earlier meetings and we especially went back to the early spring evening two years ago when they took me to the enclosed pasture with around one hundred ewes that were lambing. The children showed me their “nibble babies”, the ones that had been abandoned by their mothers so they had to be bottle-fed. Anna also made me aware of how Anders and Oskar cooperated without words, only with signs and sounds when catching two ewes that had problems with their deliveries. The men had to act as ‘midwives’, trying to save the ewes as well as the lambs. I stayed in the light and chilly evening, while Anna took the children home to bed, and watched Oskar and Anders struggle. Anders has during the last years taken over the midwife deed from his mother; I am told that he is able to stand on his knees for a long time and has the thin and sensitive fingers that are needed. One of the ewes was rescued successfully but the other one had to be shot, the lengthy delivery had taken too long and life was fading out. We talked about these memories that concerned ordinary activities for Anders but for me they were both tough insights of what farming life can contain as well as a beautiful example of cross-generational-farming-family-business life. The cooperation between father and son, the mutual respect for long experience and young alertness made a big imprint on me.

Then I asked Anna what it was like living in this big house which she earlier had said she could not do. She told me that she still is afraid of the dark and when Anders is not at home she locks the doors and stays with the children. But it’s not as bad as she had thought from the beginning. She says it is like before you have children and you know how to do
everything; you have ideas but it is never like that in reality. Now when her parents in law have taken most of their things away and she and her family have put their touch on the house it feels different. She sees the living on the farm as a choice of life they have made for a period of time, when they get older she still wants them to build their new house.

The big problem from the beginning, as Anna sees it now, had to do with Elsa’s and Oskar’s constant pressure during the fifteen years she has been a member of this family. For Elsa and Oskar it was so self-evident that Anders and Anna should take over the farm but they never asked if they wanted to, it was just the way it should be.

The Dialogue

I asked what it was that became different when we started to meet:

Anna: People from Gotland are a little like,…. we don’t talk about our opinions on things and what we think, we don’t want to hurt anybody and we don’t want to risk that words are misunderstood. I think it is like that.

(Anders goes away to answer the phone in another room.)

Lisen: What do you think would have happened if we hadn’t started to talk?

Anna: I think we still had been sitting in the summer house.

Lisen: That you still had been living in the summer house?

(we are both laughing)

Anna: Yes, this is what I think.

Lisen: Wouldn’t it have moved on? Would Oskar and Elsa still have been living here and wanting you to take over and you would NOT have done it?

Anna: Yes that’s what I think.

Lisen: But what was it that made the big difference? What was it that MADE the difference when we started to talk?
Anna: I think it was that you took part and guided us, even if you didn’t decide what questions we should talk about, but you have opened GATES for us, that is the way I think it was. That has been the most important part.

Lisen: Yes........So a Gate was opened for you?

Anna: No, for everybody, I don’t think it was only for me; maybe I express myself wrongly but...

Lisen: No you don’t...

Anna: I believe it was like that for all of us, if it hadn’t happened I don’t think we could have talked about it. Then it had been – ‘ok, shall we move out of this house’......and then we would have been cross with them because they were taking everything for granted. But in this way everybody has been allowed to show their feelings, it has been like a roller coaster everything we have been thinking and reflecting and the way we have been feeling......

Lisen: Um........You have told me before, after the meetings here, that you really were tired...

Anna: yes, we really got very, very tired.

Lisen: I didn’t see it while I was here.

Anna: No maybe it wasn’t when you were here, the meetings usually were on my day off from work, after the meetings we went home and I couldn’t do anything those afternoons. I merely EXISTED the brain was working full steam.

Lisen: The brain worked full steam afterwards?

Anna: Yes, when you interpret things, it’s enough that somebody says something and then you interpret it in the wrong way, then it maybe becomes something that wasn’t meant....

(Anders is coming back)
Lisen: Um...............How was it after the meetings to talk about what had happened?
(Anna: at home?) .... yes at home, was it possible....

Anna: After the meetings, when we had met here........

Anders: I think it was quite SILENT...

Lisen: So you were silent when you came home......

Anna: ........yes.......we had heard different things, things that I understood in one way, Anders had......it’s all about interpretations, what you respond to....

Lisen: Anders do you also think it was quiet when you came home, and that you couldn’t continue the conversations?

Anders: Or was it further back.........?

Lisen: Was it like that in the beginning?

Anna: In the beginning the lid was put on immediately.

Anders: You didn’t have the energy

Anna: You didn’t have the energy

Lisen: It took some time before it started to move...(Anna: yes)

Anders: Yes it was quite silent most of the time; it was at the end when things started to happen.....

Lisen: Do you know how I remember it? I think things started to happen after I had visited the two of you in your house? I have everything written down so I remember it well, both of you said a lot of things directed to me, over and over again, we met during several hours, but you were listening carefully to each other, but you did not talk directly to each other.

Anna: Um.........I guess it was to get it into yourself.
Lisen: Into yourself and to make the other listen?

Anna: Yes ....and maybe to somewhere register what you had said yourself.

Lisen: To register for yourself what you yourself were saying?

Anna: yes...... that’s the way it was.

**My Reflections and Recollections when Revisiting the Dialogue**

What overwhelms me when listening to the recording of this conversation is how the dialogue is inter-woven; it floats back and forth between us. Sometimes I notice how I misunderstand, don’t follow up their lines of talking, make too quick assumptions that do not connect and I realize that I did not notice it at all, while it was happening. But all parties were willing to re-connect and the dialogue starts to flow again. This mutual responsiveness Shotter describes like this:

> For it is in the way that people’s responsive utterances connect.... And in being irresistibly ‘moved’ or ‘arrested’ by their reactions, in finding ourselves spontaneously responding to their responses, that we are dialogically provided with an initial, crucial grasp of their unique world. (Shotter 2010, p63)

This conversation both moved me and surprised me very much I got a ‘crucial grasp of their unique world’. When Anna told me she thought they would still be living in the summerhouse and no succession would have been made without our conversations, I was overwhelmed. Here the realization came up that until that moment I had had no real “proof” of if Anna and Anders had valued what we had done. I had noticed that things had happened, but life is very complex and the amount of time we had spent together, compared to everything else that had happened to them during these four years since we first met, were like drops in the ocean. This meeting was of a new kind; to meet my need for feedback and for orienting me in my way of working. I feel grateful for their willingness to share their view of what has happened through our conversations.
Cultural Traits

Anna starts by referring to the culture of Gotland when giving a reason for why they had not been able to talk about the succession before we met.

People from Gotland are a little like,…. we don’t talk about our opinions on things and what we think, we don’t want to hurt anybody and we don’t want to risk that words are misunderstood. I think it is like that.

It is hard for me, being part of the same culture, to value if people from Gotland are more afraid of hurting each other, of being in conflict, than other people. To get some perspective I read ‘Svensk Mentalitet’ (Swedish Mentality) by Åke Daun, a Swedish professor of ethnology, who in a study has compared Swedes to people from the other Scandinavian and European countries, as well as people from the US and Japan. He writes;

A further explanation of the Swedish quietness might be the tendency toward conflict avoidance in face –to-face interaction. Like the Japanese (Daun, 1986), Swedes are much in favor of harmony in social intercourse and tend to avoid delicate issues. One should not bring up subjects of controversy in friendly settings. This personality orientation could also account for a certain degree of passiveness which could inadequately be interpreted as an anxiety to general communication….

This phenomenon is probably part of a more general cultural complex: a tendency to interpret all behavioral elements (what to do and say, how to look and dress, etc.) as true signs of their social identity. Therefore, a Swede has to be careful about what he says, so that he or she will be judged in accordance with his interests. This pattern has been described as an implication of a low-context culture [a homogenous culture]. In such a culture people tend to think that everything is interrelated and that most other people express their ideas and feelings in the same way as they do themselves. In a low context culture the individual believes that he generally knows other people; he takes it for granted that he can easily put them into the right contexts or categories (Daun, 1989, p256-257).
Daun gives a cultural explanation in line with Anna’s expressions and this is something I also recognize very well from being a Swede. Without having any references of it I would also think that people living in rural areas have these traits even stronger than people living an urban life where intercultural interacting is greater. This puts words on something I have been struggling with during these four years. Elsa said very early when we met: ‘We never talk about sensitive matters in our family’. Is there a strong cultural bias in these difficulties? For a psychologist it is tempting to come with psychological explanations. In family therapy it is common to think that fear of losing ‘love’ from family members is behind the resistance of open conflicts. This is also what I thought was the reason for Anders’ difficulties to decide whether to take over the farm or not as mentioned in the previous essay ‘silence is creeping in.’ But at that time both Anna and Anders laughed at me, they had never thought of divorce at all. The difficulties might have to do with not knowing how to talk in this kind of situation where everybody knows there are a lot of different ways of thinking and a lot of emotionality involved. Is it because we usually do not have this kind of ‘talking-experience’, knowledge, on our repertoire? Do we think it is improper for families, over the generations, to have intimate conversations in our culture? At transitional times in life like at baptisms, weddings, funerals etc. we have institutionalized rituals where usually priests, or other professionals, are performing the symbolic act of transition. Boscolo and Bertrando (1998) describe two kinds of rituals from a time perspective. They call one of them ‘dis-continuation rituals’, it is used in relation to important events in life, often transitional rites. The other ritual is repeated over and over again; it creates continuation in the life of groups or families and its function is to strengthen the unity of the group. The dis-continuation rites mark the transformation from one period of time to another. According to B&B’s definition the rite is forming or gestalting, and gives symbolic meaning to the transition in a comprehensible way (i.e. p233-57).

In the rites it is permitted, and also expected, of family members to express all kinds of feelings. In these formal institutionalized events we can relax, no family member is responsible for the act, and we can just be together in the moment. So when I, a ‘talk-person’, come into the home of the family to help them to communicate about the succession, the setting might have almost a religious context where it is appropriate to ‘open up’ and listen to each other. Boscolo and Bertrando state that families often define therapy sessions as holy times (p239), something that also over and over again has struck
me during my work with business families. A moment that symbolized the succession was when the family was seated in two reflecting teams, in an old and a young group. Maybe the seating of family members was an important factor for what happened during our first real dialogic moment.

**After Ten Years of Being Stuck, Things Start to Move**

Anna describes how the question of succession was totally ‘stuck’ before we started. They were never asked about what they wanted; it was only taken for granted that they would take over. This is what she now believes was the biggest reason for the stand still. Anna has earlier given an example of how the succession could be talked about in an indirect way. Elsa and Oskar once said: ‘Here we have some wallpaper, we have to fix the hall, don’t you like this color, and it will be nice for when you move here....’ And Anna and Anders could not answer, but their whole bodies were revolting. There is also an expression Anna had when talking about something the parents-in-law had said that she was opposed to; ‘....then I step on the brake, rip up the hand brake and go reverse!’ This was her very explicit way of expressing how she could feel sometimes.

This way of talking in an indirect way, like ‘over the head’ or ‘on the side’ of the persons involved is something I recognize from my surroundings, a monologic way of talking. A way of saying what is at your heart without opening up for dialogue, without expecting any response, more like making a statement (Bakhtin). Thinking of it – it is a way I sometimes talk to my (almost) adult daughters when I want to influence them on something that I know they do not agree with. - Thinking of it I can feel their silent frustration and my urge to make them do what I want. It never works. And I know from the start that it does not, but at the moment I do not have a better way to express that I am very concerned and I ‘know what is best’ for them.

So what was it that became different in our conversations? Anna said that I ‘guided them’ with my way of talking without telling them what to talk about so the ‘Gates’ could open. She also said that everybody has been thinking and reflecting a lot and everyone has been allowed to show their feelings. She describes it as going on a Roller Coaster. The dialogue that is created corresponds to Shotter’s notions of the chiasmic structures of dialogue. As a first step in the dialogue he assigns:
...the simple activity of looking over, visually, the scene before us – with the aim in mind of readying ourselves to move about in it (Shotter, 2010, p138).

The setup of our meetings and the family’s benevolence towards them made it possible for all family members to ‘readying themselves to move about in the dialogues’ and not to ‘throw themselves on the handbrake’ defending themselves without allowing any connections; but instead opening up for a new attitude towards each other.

Shotter also writes about dialogue;

This is to look on our surroundings, I will say, with a certain respect for their own nature, for what so to speak, they have to say us, rather than for what we have to say them (Shotter 2010, p129, italics by the author)

This has to do with the ability and the will to listen to each other; the facilitator is there merely to facilitate that process. Facilitating means in this context to create a sincere, curious, responsive atmosphere and really loving to be there with them. The goal of the dialogue is to reach a greater understanding of each other in the family. Seikkula and Arnkil write referring to Bakhtin:

...understanding always emerges from an activity and most important is the construction of rejoinders to utterances. In the dialogical conversation the family is creating their shared reality. The aim is to gain better understanding of what the others are saying, which in turn helps the speaker to get a better understanding of himself (Seikkula Arnkil, 2005, p98, my own translation from Swedish).

In the conversation my role is often to formulate questions and answers. That might seem as a very domineering role. But as Anna expressed it; ‘you guided us but without telling us what to speak about’ so my role has been to ‘feel my way into’ what needs the family had at the time. It has nothing to do with any super natural skills, but what I did most of the time was to just ‘mirror’ their utterances and maybe let the questions go around in the group, and to keep on asking more about what I hear, to widen the perspectives and to get thicker descriptions as White & Epstone (White, 2000) writes about. With descriptions that are ‘wider and deeper’ makes it possible for the person talking to understand her/himself in new ways and it is easier for the others to get involved and to be moved by each other. In
this way the spiral of dialogue rolls on and a unique genre (Bakhtin, 1986) develops in the family. This facilitates in itself the dialogue and opens up for new thinking and new possible actions.

Another source of inspiration when planning and conducting these meetings has been Voloshinov (1996).

The whole situation becomes a part of the speaker’s inner structure. When he starts to talk, the speaker forms his utterance in accordance to his mood and how his body feels. Everything in the surroundings influences his state of mind; how warm it is, how the room is furnished, what tones of voices are used, who the participants are etc. All of these particularities become part of the speaker’s inner structure, which immediately changes the moment the utterance is answered (Seikkula, Arnkil 2005, p95, my translation from Swedish).

This shows the importance of how the meeting is organized, that it really feels inviting for all family members. But also tone of voice, the way we are speaking, the way we are preparing ourselves before the meetings, everything is communication and part of the dialogue. For example Anna had stated that is was a condition for her participation that the children were welcome, and they have had a great influence on the atmosphere. This quote also tells us how the context is co-created over and over again during the whole meeting in accordance to how the dialogue develops. I am also reflecting on what difference it makes to be in the homes of the families. It is obvious that being in someone’s home often bring a lot of disturbances to the conversations, but maybe it is a way for the family to decide what context and what pace they like in the meetings. To be in a room which is specially designed for family meetings puts a spot light on the succession process and family relations, to be in one’s own kitchen, with children running around can maybe slow down the process and make it more pleasant. And according to Anna and Anders the pace does not seem to have been too slow.

Vygotsky

Anna is talking about the Roller Coaster and I have toyed with the question what it was fuelled by? I guess it was fuelled by all new and old thoughts that were awakened.
According to Vygotsky a thought is;

“Thought…..; it is engendered by motivation, i.e., by our desires and needs, our interests and emotions. Behind every thought there is an affective-volitional tendency, which holds an answer to the last “why” in the analysis of thinking (Vygotsky, 1986, p252).

We can understand that all thoughts that were called forth by their desires and needs, interest and emotions, now when the ‘Gates’ were opened and everybody had been readying themselves to ‘move about’ in dialogue with each other, were overwhelming. Anna says that the ‘opening of the Gates’ was a prerequisite for being able to talk. So everything starts to move when they felt it possible to allow themselves to get immersed in the dialogue and open up for all the new feeling and thinking that followed.

I was not aware of the big changes in their way of thinking around the succession that our conversation opened for. I guess I thought they knew what they wanted and that they just did not dare to tell each other about it. And now I realize that a whole new process was opened for. I think Anna talks about the workings of the dialogue in a very poetic way and the enormous difference it made.

To create an even stronger understanding of the ‘powers’ that are let lose during the dialogues I want to include Vygotsky’s ideas of inner speech to widen this reflection further. First I will give a little background to the notion of inner speech. Vygotsky, as well as Piaget, found that preschool children organize their behavior by talking to themselves while playing, and they both call this egocentric talk. This talk is developed out of the social talk the child has developed in dialogue with its caretakers since the day the child was born. Successively the egocentric talk turns into whispering and little by little it disappears around the age when school begins. Piaget thought that the talk was no longer needed and therefore gone, but Vygotsky found that there is an unbroken chain of development through egocentric talk, which develops into whispering with a successively more and more condensed syntax, where every whispered word contains loads of meaning. Little by little the child starts to think the word instead of whispering it. In this way the transformation into inner speech has started and it continually develops all our lives and is a very important part of our thoughts and our language. The functions of egocentric speech and inner speech are similar;
...it serves mental orientation, conscious understanding; it helps in overcoming difficulties; it is speech for oneself, intimately and usefully connected with the child’s [the persons] thinking (Vygotsky 1986, p228).

Inner speech is speech coming from the outside going inwards; speech for oneself. External speech comes from the inside going out, turning thoughts into words; speech for others. All forms of language are constantly floating between others and oneself in very complex and diverse processes.

But while in external speech thought is embedded in words, in inner speech words die as they bring forth thought. Inner speech is to a large extent thinking in pure meanings. It is a dynamic, shifting, unstable thing, fluttering between word and thought, the two more or less stable, more or less firmly delineated components of verbal thought....

That plane is thought itself. As we have said, every thought creates a connection, fulfills a function, solves a problem (Vygotsky, 1986, p249).

This wholeness of external and inner speech and the social interconnection of our consciousnesses are what inspire me when I reflect over what Anna is telling me. Her words are to quote Vygotsky ‘only drops of her consciousness’ inside herself she was probably flooded by inner speech. When she says that she told me the same thing over and over again during our meeting it was to hear herself, and surely the inner speech that was evoked every time was not the same, it only sounded the same to me, only listening to her external speech. This way of thinking makes it understandable that the dialogues told about in the essay ‘Silence is creeping in’ made such a difference for both Anna and Anders, since both of then continually repeated the same stories over and over again. It was of course kea stories of great importance that was opened up and available for new thinking.

Thinking like Vygotsky makes it understandable why Anna says that she only ‘EXISTED’ when she came home after our meetings. Their brains were working ‘full speed’ and they were exhausted. Even if they could show feelings in our meetings it was probably not okay to continue the discussions after the meetings and take the risk that uncontrollable situations would arise. We can note here that Anna and Andres ‘put the lid on’ and earlier the others have told me that they never talked about the succession although they were working together almost every day and talked about everything else. I presume that all the thinking and reflecting and all the feelings that they knew would be aroused if they started...
to talk about the succession and this created a silent agreement among all of them to save this topic for our meetings. It might be that they were afraid of destroying the process that had started; a process that gave all of them hopes of arriving at a collective agreement eventually.

Close to the End of the Conversation

Lisen: There is one more thing I would like to ask you, if I were to work with a project like this some time with other families, is there something you think I should change, do more or less of, or anything? Maybe you haven’t thought about this but what do you think right at this moment?

Anders: But it has been quite good, hasn’t it?

...............Silence..................

It was a little like this, the first times we met, then we didn’t know what it was like; then it could be like; “Oh, no, is she coming again”; now we have to talk about everything that so is so difficult again, but now looking in the rear-view mirror I think, I would not like to have it undone, a lot came out in the open during our meetings, it would have been different if there had only been one child...

Lisen: Then it would have been simple?

Anders: Now when we are all involved and with our families and.....

Anna: But I think it is like..(helps Disa with something) ehh.... it awakens things, and I don’t think there should be too much time in between meetings. But it depends on the time schedule you have.

(Talk about how long we have been going on and what age the children were from the beginning and the phone rings again, Anders goes away.)

Anna: But like Anders said it was really a hard strain in the beginning, it stirred up a lot of things that you never had thought of before; there was a whole lot of
questions that the others had that I had never thought of and I had questions that maybe they had never thought of either. And then when you had been working on it and put it behind yourself, then you came back again Lisen. “Oh NO!” and it became difficult again; that is the way it has been. But maybe it’s only for OUR family it has been like this; it has really been both tiring and fun and.......But of course it’s different for each person. But I don’t think you are able to understand from the beginning that it’s going to be such a Roller Coaster.

Did we have assignments to think of between the meetings?

Lisen: Yes, from the beginning there were assignments between the meetings, we had planned it like that. But no family, not only yours, ever looked at the assignments.

(Laughter)

Anna: Yes, no, I guess it gets too much, it gets too turbulent...

Lisen: Does it get so turbulent that you need help from someone from the outside to handle it...

Anna: yes, I think....

Lisen: What is the difference when someone like me comes?

Anna: Yes, but, everything becomes, you awaken things inside us that no one has thought of – Disa, Disa, close the door!

(After a while)

Lisen: Something I have been thinking of is that the meetings have to feel safe enough for you to dare...

Anna: Yes that is right. (Lisen: Did it feel enough...)
Anna: Yes I think so……. otherwise none of us would have dared to open up as we have...

Lisen: yes you really did, not the least you...

(Anders comes back)

Anna: if you feel secure....

Lisen: It is something I have been thinking of, that it has to be safe enough for anything to happen during the meetings, how was it for you....

Anders: I think it has been good, I think it has been safe enough, enough to be able to talk, it hasn’t been like we have been afraid to say anything.

Anna: No it hasn’t been that feeling (Anders: no) Maybe it has been when we have been in the big group that one has not wanted to say something, or that you don’t think of it.

Lisen: With you Anders it felt different when we were just the three of us in your house, which is not strange, it must be different for you who are sitting in the middle between both your parents and Anna?

Anders: yes, yes the decisions I make have consequences for all of the others.

Lisen: yes it creates consequences for everybody (Anders: yes of course) How did the pressure feel?

..................Silence......................

Anders: I don’t know if there was such a big pressure .......really... like....

..................Silence........................)

Lisen: do you remember you said you felt.....I don’t remember your words, but that it felt like a burden, that it was hard to think about the succession, it went around in your head...
Anna: It is so long ago, he has put that...

Lisen: It is me; I am listening to these recordings and reading what I have transcribed, so I remember

(Everybody laughs) - But it is of course not in your head.... (laughter)

Anna: It’s like we have let it go.....

Anders: But whatever decision I had taken........ it had been....

.............Silence......................

but the way it is now, I don’t think it is a burden for anybody...........but maybe it has created a lot of work for you Anna.....

Anna: Yes, I do a shift here before I go to work, another one during the day and when I come home I have to handle everything that has not been taken care of during the day. When I left the summerhouse in the mornings it always looked the same when I came home at night. It makes me sometimes feel like a maid.

Anders: And when I do the vacuum cleaning you say it’s still gravel under your feet...

Anna: It’s the litter from the cat box......but everything is ok.....

This last part of the conversation gives further illustration to how this process has been for Anna and Anders. I think it is moving when Anders talks about how difficult it was to ‘talk about everything’. It was obviously not this couple who asked me to come, it was Elsa and Oskar. But they mutually took the burden of going through with it. Anders is also pointing to the complexity of everybody being involved with their families. It would have been simpler if there only had been one child in the family. This is obvious, but I want to point to the complexity that opened up for a big family and the questions of family relations, maintenance, and fairness, places to live et cetera, all that is involved.
The suggestions Anna brings up; to have less time between meetings to have assignments were both thought of from the beginning. But we failed, in all of the six families, no one ever did the assignments and meetings were often postponed, especially in the Bjärge family. I guess the assignments could, of course, have been planned from the beginning with every family. To try to find assignments in cooperation with every family and every occasion would certainly be different. But at the same time, as Anna says, it was too turbulent. But I think now of the possibility to have assignments that don’t bring up new questions, but rather invite the family to ‘in a way that is not too strange’ (Andersen, 2003) talk about what was said at the last meeting, or about their future or something else; to help them create a ritual of continuing might be helpful.

A significant question in this part is Anders’ talk of the important decisions he had to make. Although this couple really have been working through everything together it is obvious how different the process has been for the two. The questions they have been struggling with have been totally different, as for all family members. The deeper I go into this kind of dialogues I am struck by how individual the questions are and how much they have to be worked out together and synchronized to be able for the family to come to a common solution. There has to be a dialogue with the possibility to incorporate the different perspectives and develop new ways of feeling, thinking and acting. To me it is amazing how much of the ‘Roller Coaster expedition’ is going on inside each person over long periods of time and never spoken of. And as Vygotsky says ‘each spoken word is only a drop of the speakers’ consciousness’. At the same time the new intertwined family life is coming into being, a common genre is created where their special mix of different persons, different experiences and ways of talking fit in.

Something else that strikes me is that what has happened during our conversations is mostly forgotten. I have it all on tape and most of it transcribed. That is a very ‘unnatural’ way of relating. That is my way of doing inquiry. But they have ‘let it go’. And when I try to ask Anders a question about ‘the pressure’ I thought he must have felt, he does not recognize it any longer, and instead he talks about ‘the way it is now, I don’t think it’s a burden for anybody’ and then he takes the opportunity to ask his Anna if that is right. I get moved by the fantastic responsibility that everybody has taken for each other during this long process of waiting for each other and finding ‘the best way to move on’ for all family members.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING Lisen Kebbe 2011
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Chapter 8   The Brothers

This last essay deals with the final follow-up meetings with the two brothers, Markus and Staffan. It has been of vital importance to me that family relations are enhanced during the succession process and that all family members are satisfied with the decisions. Therefore it is crucial to find out how the two brothers are thinking and reasoning around the succession. Markus has already got one third of the farm and Staffan, who has not been involved in the same way, will mainly receive his share when the parents are gone.

Markus’ farm is situated one kilometer from Bjärges and I met him on the farm in the beginning of December in 2010. Our meeting took place on the same day as the meeting I had with Anna and Anders. My meeting with Staffan did not take place until September in 2011 and we met at his work. Below are summaries of our conversations with my added reflections.

Markus   It’s Better to Be Two

First Markus showed me around, he has made beautiful renovations himself, and then we sat down in the kitchen. Markus had his lunch and made some coffee and sandwiches for me.

We talked about the decreasing price on pork, which is the main production on the two farms. The prices are lower than ever before. Markus expressed how important it is to really burn for what you are doing when running a farm, if you don’t your result is easily affected in a negative way. In hard times, like there are at the moment, and you lack that drive it is easy to get the idea you should turn to something else. But if you love farming you keep going even in times of hardship.

Concerning the transfer he says that they had to come up with a solution without money on the table since it is impossible to operate farms of this size with a lot of investments. The lawyer and the accountant disliked this way of thinking. But they decided anyway that Anders would own two thirds and he would own one third of the Bjärges’ farm, thus there would be no splitting of the farm and no one was bought out. Then Anna would have ten
percent of Anders’ share. Staffan will get a piece of land by the sea where he can build something for himself and he would also get the parents’ house after they have passed away. Anders and Markus have bought their shares from the parents by signing IOU:s and in this way not a single SEK has needed to change hands.

The bank evaluated the farm and Markus says he nearly fainted; the market value for the farm is very high. It is important to have the possibility to borrow money for future investments. He makes a comparison with a farm in a nearby village where they invested four million Euros in a milk plant and have six people employed. We could invest that kind of money in a wind turbine and then sit at home and just collect the money, he says.

- Markus, do you think it is fair that you got one third and Anders two thirds of the farm?

What is fair? It can never be fair, but this is okay. Apart from the farm we own the enterprise and manage the two farms through equal shares. All the buildings and machines are included in that. Our lawyer and our accountant were not happy about our joint ownership. But I know of a lot of families where this works well. If you cannot work together you should not start anything like this. It would of course get complicated if there was a conflict.

- So Markus what has happened so far, have you become closer or further apart during this first one and a half years?

Markus laughs, we work together every day, he calls me and I go there and he comes here, it’s several times a day. Then we meet during the weekends with our families. Earlier Anders went away to work as a construction worker but he does not have the will or the time to do that now. It’s good to be at home, it’s luxurious to be able to be at home when the kids come from school, I can go inside and take a cup of coffee with my boy, and then go back to work again, how many can do that today? And then they have to be taken to different places, we have time for our kids. Anders likes this kind of life too. Anders is also much more engaged in the farm now when he has the responsibility.

- Markus, who came up with this solution with the different percentages?
I don’t know, but we never considered any other solution. If Anders would have bought me out, I would have been happy – without any debts, but he would not have been able to manage his farm that way. We have a dream, we would like to build a bigger stable, have more pigs and be able to employ somebody so we can do something more outside the stables, but it’s not the right time now. But it’s good to be two, I could have taken over the whole thing, but it was never my favorite solution, even if it had been good for me financially. It is better to be two owners, if anything happens, we like to cooperate. If I would have owned it myself and had to have someone employed, they only work eight hours, that goes fast, then I would need one more....

- From what I understand it is important also for Staffan that the farm stays in the family?

Yes I think so; he likes to be able to come here and to feel welcome. He doesn’t say so much, he isn’t likely to kill anyone by talking so to speak, but it is important for him.

- What do you think would have happened if we hadn’t had our meetings?

I don’t know, Anders and Anna were very skeptical from the beginning, especially Anna. They said no. It took a long time before it changed. But I think it was alright. If Anna hadn’t said no, we hadn’t found this solution; it had maybe been quicker, but in another way.

- If you reflect over all the times we have met, do you think I could have done anything differently?

Markus thinks for a while, and then he says that it has worked well the way we have done it. But in another family it could have been more difficult. There could have been someone that was very dominant, that would have been different. But you have met us all together, in couples and separately, in different ways and that has been good. In some families there might also be someone that has been talked into taking over since childhood and maybe he doesn’t want to do it. Something like that would be hard to know from the beginning. And if you do not want to take over you cannot cope, this is what happened on this farm that I bought fifteen years ago. The son that had taken over it had just had the farm a couple of years when he went bankrupt. The farm had been in the family for ages.
- You and your brother were really good at postponing our meetings, why was that?

Markus laughs, well we really have a lot to do, and there were six of us, it can be hard to coordinate everybody. But to sit and talk, it is not what one is made for. I think we are like that all three of us and also our farther. It was a little hard before we had found a possible solution, a line to follow in the discussions.

- Do you remember that I met you individually and that I wrote letters to the three of you?

I remember reading letters but I do not remember what I read.

- After that you started to talk by yourselves, I did not have to come anymore.

Yes maybe it was solved then, but I remember that we started to talk more and more, hanging around while working, when we began to see a solution. From the beginning when Anders didn’t want to take over we couldn’t talk about it at all, you cannot force anybody, they have to decide. It was the first alternative all the time. Later we had a few arguments around how to solve it. That discussion took another year. But I think it has to take time, you have to be able to think it over, be able to change your mind several times, not to hurry. We have been lucky to have you and that you have put up with us. It’s not many that are granted such help. Without you we would not have been able to find such a flexible solution. I hope you also got something out of it.

Staffan Evaluating the Emotional Bonds to the Farm

Staffan is the oldest brother he has participated the least in our meetings. He attended the two first times we met and then he came to the first meeting with the bank when I also took part. Staffan declared from the beginning that he had no claims except for a plot of land where he would be able to build a summerhouse in the future. But he is very closely connected to the farm which he spoke of the second time we met 2007:

Staffan I like to work between 7-4, here they have to work all the time.

Lisen Is that the reason why you don’t want to work here?
I have never had any interest in farming

(jokingly) Sometimes you say that you are going to be a handyman here.

Is there an attraction in it anyway?

No not at all, no attraction.

But what does the farm mean to you, what do you value about it?

It is my parental home, it is very windy, no, it’s something, something that one just wants to stay in the family.

Although you don’t want to do it yourself is it important for you that it stays in the family?

…………….Thinking………………

There are important hunting grounds.

Yes it’s the way it has become, it’s my land, and it’s OUR land.

You feel it even though...

I feel it here (he punches towards his heart), that’s just the way it is.

I meet Staffan at his work place. He is rebuilding a villa together with a work mate. I am writing full time on the thesis to finalize it, but I have to talk to Staffan to hear if he is satisfied with the decisions made in the succession process.

It’s nice to see him and he jokes with me; ‘does it takes such a long time to write a book?’ ‘Do you have to write it in English so no one will be able to read it?’

We talk about when we met five years ago and Staffan wanted Anders to take over:

Yes I think he wanted to move there all the time; it was just difficult for his wife.
Lisen Did he talk about that?

Staffan No, not to me anyway, but I knew it anyway; otherwise he would never have taken part in these meetings. But it’s always like that with him; it takes a long time for him to decide things.

Lisen What is the difference for you now that they have taken over?

Staffan I do not come round the way I did before, before it was my territory as well as the others, now I have to ask for everything.

Lisen Can you say a little more about the difference?

Staffan If somebody else had bought it I would had never have gone there anymore, but when Anders owns it, it still is my parental home, even though I cannot do what I want. But that is natural, that is the difference. I think I am there almost as much as before, I have free firewood, and I can just borrow a tractor and go into the forest myself. And they give me a pig every year...

Lisen So you still feel you are a part of it?

Staffan Yes I do, then we have the hunting together, I have three dachshunds and during the hunting season we go out two, three times a month. Earlier we had the soccer. All three of us lived for soccer. I played together with Anders in a league until I was almost forty. Then I was too old and the hunting has taken over instead. (He is now 43)

At the end Staffan said that he thinks the succession has been very successful and that everybody is satisfied including his children and his wife. He also said that he believes this succession would have gone just as well without our meetings; he thinks that Anders was not mature enough earlier.

At the end he tells me about some old brothers in the neighborhood that still are angry with each other after thirty years. If Staffan stops to talk to one of them, and another brother comes by, they don’t even look at each other; it has something to do with inheritance and money, and Staffan can’t understand how they think.
Staffan is satisfied with what he has been promised; he has had no other claims but a plot of land. They have nothing in writing but he trusts his brothers, he will inherit the house the parents are living in when they pass away. It is a bit of a shame because it’s now he could use the money, but that’s the way it is for everybody. He tells me that if they would have had to take out a mortgage on the farm, money to buy him out, nobody would have been able to run it. It is more important for him that the farm stays within the family. He is also happy for his parents; it was good for them to get it settled.

Reflections

What is significant of these brothers are how much they value relations. As Markus says he could have taken over the farm himself, but it was never his first choice he wanted to cooperate with Anders. ‘It is better to be two’ as he says, he also laughingly tells about how many times they meet during a work day and then they meet with their families during the weekends. Staffan also speaks about how much he values being connected to the farm and from that we can understand that a great deal of their lives is lived together in different ways.

Having gone through and pondered this succession many times we know it has been a complicated puzzle to make everybody satisfied and both take in the demands from tradition as well as from the future. Something that has also complicated the picture has been the fact that no money could change hands, because there was no money, only a fortune tied up in the farm. When I asked Markus if he thought the deal was fair, he answered that there is no fairness, but he thinks they have got a good deal that works for everybody. Staffan says the same thing, he who has got the least; he values the possibility to still be able to come ‘home’ even though it is not the same. He is happy for the sake of his parents, that everything is settled for them.

I believe language is performative; it creates the world we live in, and our relations. It is important how we talk, and how we as facilitators influence the way family members talk to each other. The important thing has not been what I think would be a good way for shifting ownership into the next generation; the important thing has been to help the family members to talk to each other. I have been completely certain that everyone in the Bjärges family had lots of knowledge and ideas about how to enter into the future; lots of different ideas. I have also trusted the family members’ abilities to enter into dialogues.
with each other and that their ideas would fertilize each other into new ways of thinking. From the beginning I had the idea that such a process would also enhance family relations. It is nothing strange in that, it is what happens all the time in families when ways forward are found, in work groups when good teamwork works wonders, in schools where good lessons happen, and so on everywhere.

The idea that brothers cannot own anything together is like a mandatory story of future conflicts that will sooner or later destroy the business. As I have understood the logic this is built on, the brothers cannot foresee what will happen in the future and the demands that will turn up. Especially if their spouses coming in and having demands that the brothers cannot handle. In this family we have met one spouse, Anna, and she has had demands that were hard to handle. But as Markus says a year after they have finalized their transactions: “If Anna hadn’t said no, we wouldn’t have found this solution; it had maybe been quicker, but in another way.” He appreciates her contribution to the process.

As the Bjårges family have listened to each other; dialogued the different ways of thinking they have managed to find solutions that has made everybody happy, as we have seen in these three follow up essays.

Finally I will take into account social construction and the transformational powers of language. We live in the world we co-construct, in the stories we develop together, we create our reality. If the wellbeing of their way of living comes from the joy of relating and the feeling of “it is better to be two” then the rationality of “maximizing my own utility” and the logic of ‘economic self-interest’ is far away.

It has been my aim in this study to see succession as an infinite conversational process which makes it possible for family relations to grow and develop. It possible to alter how facilitated a process that has taken into account what is best for family relations as well as for business. After have met all family members I must say that ‘mission is fulfilled’ when it comes to the Bjårges family. It has been possible for them to make their own decisions which are good for both family relations and the business.
Part 4
Approaching the End and Viewing the Future

This final part of my study consists of four parts. To start with I will look back and summarize what has come out of this study and how it is affects my practice today. First I examine what I have found the most important when facilitating the succession process in the Bjärges family, in practice as well as in theory. These reflections concern my way of using and appropriating theory and take a closer look at my understanding of what has happened. To illustrate my reasoning and to visualize the conclusions I have drawn, texts from part one and two as well as the essays in part three are used.

My reflections begin with my dialogical and systemic way of working and the way it has developed during these five years of study. I am especially fascinated by the fact that a dialogue seems to have ‘delayed workings’, how it continuously transforms a person’s way of thinking, feeling and acting and how it opens up for new dialogues and an infinite number of new ways to cooperate.

Secondly I go through some practicalities and describe how I have been managing and how we have been co-creating the conversational spaces in the meetings for the process to develop in a good way.

Thirdly I reflect over the differences that are prevalent between my systemic dialogical way of working and other consultants working out of systems theory with more of a business perspective. The implications these differences have for practice are examined in this part.

The fourth chapter includes an invitation to future work in a new way, a way I call the 3rd Way. The 3rd Way is my proposal for how multi-professional teams better could serve the needs business families have.
1. Dialogue with Delay

I have found during the meetings with the Bjärges family that it is true that conversations are the most important way to construct meaning, as declared in all social constructionist theories. However I have here found something that I want to point out, I call it dialogue with delay. There are three cornerstones that I think are important to take into consideration to be able to understand how the dialogues become generative and work in a delayed sense. The first is the emotionality of dialogue, the second has to do with inner speech and the third with the multiplicity of experiences family members are having when entering the conversations and all three together make for tremendous polyphony. I will here make an account of what I mean by dialogue with delay.

Human beings are intentional agents and we create ourselves and our environment in continuous communicative interaction (Anderson, 1997). This is an active assumption; I have experienced that family members are not passively waiting for everything to fall in place during the succession process. On the contrary all family members exist in a meaning-generating language system where they co-ordinate their behavior to one another and make sense together in many different ways. However when I from the beginning met the Bjärges family this was not how they approached their succession process. In these situations when there is an urgent need for dialogue, for family members to come together and co-construct their future, it is so common that they do not to know how to go about it or they do not dare open up for the needed conversations in the family. Like when Elsa said in the beginning of the process when I called her and asked if they had continued to talk about the issues that had come up during the last meeting: “No, as you know, we don’t talk about sensitive things.” The conversational spaces I have helped them to open up have made it possible for family members to enter the succession process in new ways. I think Anna gives some clues as to what has happened to them during our meetings. Anna speaks of the Roller Coaster and the Gates that were opened for all of them during our meetings:

I think it was that you took part and guided us, even if you didn’t decide what questions we should talk about, but you have opened GATES for us, that is the way I think it was. That has been the most important part....if that hadn’t
happened I don’t think we could have talked about it. Then it had been – “ok, shall we move out of this house”...and then we had been cross with them because they were taking everything for granted. But in this way everyone has been allowed to show their emotions, it has been like a Roller Coaster everything we have been thinking and reflecting and the way we have been feeling....after the meetings we went home and I couldn’t do anything those afternoons. You merely EXISTED the brain was working full steam.

By the conversations family members really got involved in the succession process. As Anna said “gates were opened” and if that had not happened they would not have been able to talk. I believe she is talking about a shift in how they relate to each other in a larger context, and that makes it possible to take an active part. As she puts it otherwise they would just have acted on what her parents-in-law were offering them and “being cross at them”, not actively co-created their future together. My point here is to show how the conversations have created new ways of relating to each other, and it is those transformed relations that make new ways of talking and acting possible after and between meetings.

However dialogical studies are usually done in a ‘here and now’ setting, with people in for example a therapeutic conversation. Shotter (2008, p5) is stressing “the ‘first-time’ nature of all our everyday understandings”. The transformation of our stories is thought of as happening during a special event, in situ, in the dialogical conversation. These moments/processes are named in varied ways; ‘once occurrent events of being’ (Bakhtin 1991), ‘joint action or chiasmic responsiveness’ (Shotter, 2008), transformations (Anderson, 1987), ‘transformations happens when persons are touched by each other’ (Andersen, 2003), ‘in polyphonic dialogue understanding is shaped’ (my translation from Swedish, Seikkula, 2005). All of these descriptions have heightened my understanding of the transformational power of language and dialogue. The above has all taught me to look for, to become aware and to anticipate (Shotter, 2008) dialogical transformations. During the conversations with the Bjärges family it has sometimes been obvious that a magical moment has occurred to all family members at the same time, a moment that has transformed the scene for everyone and where each person has got a new perspective. It was like that during the ‘kitchen reflections’ in the two groups the second time we met the Bjärges family described in the first essay.
Nevertheless when I have written about longer processes; like in the second essay where Anna and Anders are talking, in the third essay about the horse story and about the reconciliation process in the fourth essay, I have realized that ‘deep transformations’ have happened over time. That is what I mean with dialogue with delay. But as I understand it transformations are trigged during the conversations. It seems like special relations are built during dialogue that makes new ways of relating and talking with each other possible which successively lead to new transformations and actions, which lead to new transformations and actions and so on.....

When I met Anna and Anders together, written about in the second essay, they made me totally confused by the way they talked about the same things over and over again, and never answered each other. They were both talking to me, but at the same time I had a strong feeling of me only being a ‘bridge’ for their messages. I could not pinpoint any ‘once oncurrent event’, it was nothing like the magical moments we had experienced during the reflections the second time we met with the whole family. The meeting felt very meaningful but I had no idea what had happened. Nothing was unraveled or decided upon, however was everything spoken of and listened to. After we met again a few weeks later I noticed the big difference in both of them, their depressive moods were gone. Hence another kind of slowly evolving transformations in and between meetings had occurred.

**Emotions Ticket to the Roller Coaster**

As Anna said “we have been allowed to show emotions, it has been like a Roller Coaster” this points to how important she thinks the emotionality has been in our conversations. In a traditional view emotions are seen as autonomous, located within each individual and it is believed to be important for people to name and express their emotions in order to feel good. To instead view emotions as narratives that are holding our stories together and coordinating our bodies and actions; to view the performance of them as communication gives new openings (Fredman, 2004). Viewed in this way emotions performed during conversations are complex communications which contain the person’s history and context and at the same time new expression offered to the participants in the dialogue. I do not regard emotionality as a request for me as facilitator to inquire into the origins of the emotion or to name them. If strong emotions are showed I rather try to make the moment still, slow the pace of the conversation and make it possible to silently explore the
communication the emotions carry, and ‘not to be afraid’ of what is happening. This way I am silently responding to the emotion by being moved by it and experiencing it in my own body and making my own connections to it. Not many words are necessary to communicate that I ‘understand’. By not talking I make it possible for the others to also be moved and to respond in their unique ways. In my view everybody’s experiences are so complex; to try to put words to them would only risk interrupting what is happening in the moment.

In the moment when we have this feeling of being really listened to and understood, we also understand ourselves. And reciprocally the others understand themselves by understanding the other. There is always an ongoing, unfinalized meaning making process and this process involves reflexive movements between certainty and ambiguity in a dialogue (Vedeler, 2011). Bakhtin teaches us that the world is an open space where meaning can never be a completed product. Thus a family conversation becomes an open space during the dialogues, a space where it is possible to experience ‘not knowing’; a space where you dare be open, where your utterances will touch the others and you will be touched by theirs, which in turn will determine your next utterance and so on. We draw on the utterances from each other; nothing is ever understood in itself. Bakhtin (1984) says that it is not only our thoughts we take into the dialogue, but also our fate and our unique individuality. When we speak in the dialogue we always formulate ourselves out of this individuality and in anticipation of an answer from the others. The spoken is simultaneously directed to the future and to what has not yet been said. There is beauty in every utterances that ends by giving space for the others responsive understanding (Bakhtin, 2001).

It is difficult to take in all aspects, but what I have gained is an understanding of the enormous multiplicity of dialogical processes. I have to ‘really be there’ and help create a safe enough space where the conversation can go on. Important here is to emphasize how interdependent all family members are on each other and what enormous possibilities there are for fruitful conversations. Shotter adds an ethical dimension when he says (2008, p1)

[About being heard] … I need you in order to be me… my appearance in the human world as another person of worth depends upon responsiveness to my expressions.
When Anna is talking about her Roller Coaster I understand it as metaphor for the unexpected strong emotions that were awakened during the conversations. Viewing her emotions as relational, as invitations for the others to respond to, and not as something to analyze and look for the roots of, opened up for sharing the moment which meant a lot to her and to the others in the family. If my thoughts had been that this was something that Anna needed to investigate on her own, she would have continued to stay outside the Bjärges extended family, as she had done before, (for example by keeping her horse at her father’s stable far away). This way everybody shared her pain and she felt confirmed. Everybody had tears in their eyes, Oskar went up and hugged her and affirmed that everybody’s happiness was the most important. To be able at this moment to stay in the emotionality and share it with everybody, to keep it as an open space as Bakhtin (1984) says, is what I find one of my most important tasks as facilitator. This openness makes it possible for all family members’ consciousnesses to interact and all the unmerged voices create a potential for new meanings to develop (Vedeler, 2011).

Bakhtin says that everything is understood as part of a greater whole and there is a constant interaction between meanings in a reciprocal way in the dialogue and the meaning is shaped and re-shaped in relation to the local micro circumstances. In this way when Anna talks about her fear and it is in a new way, in a new context, it is not a representation of what she felt as a child. What made this occur was, as I imagine, the responsive understanding that already was communicated during the meeting; it was the voice and culture of the meeting at this special time. All of the responsive understanding she met; the polyphony of meanings in the kitchen at that moment, made a multitude of new openings possible for Anna as well as for the others.

**Inner Speech**

Inner speech as described by Vygotsky (1986) is the second cornerstone in ‘dialogue with delay’. Vygotsky writes that every thought is ‘engendered by desires, needs, interests and emotions. Inner speech serves to orient us and to make us understand things; it is speech for oneself coming from the outside. While external speech comes from the inside and turns our inner speech into words and is spoken to the people we are relating to. There is a constant dynamic, shifting, unstable fluttering between word and thought. Further Vygotsky says that every thought creates a connection, fulfills a function, and solves a
problem. This is very much in line with the thinking of Shotter and Bakhtin, but it takes it one more step into the hurly burley workings of social construction of language.

But while in external speech thought is embedded in words, when it comes to inner speech words die as they bring forth thought, it is speech almost without words, it has more to do with sense than with meaning and it have an almost unlimited possibility for change. Most important in Vygotsky’s theories is the infinite flexibility imbedded in our language that is dynamically changing while we are talking. This is what is at work in conversations and gives me another understanding for the enormous complexity when six persons are immersed in sincere dialogue and really responding to each other. We can understand that it is only the ‘top of the ice-berg’ that is revealed. When Anna talks about how tired she was after our meetings and how her head was “working full speed” I understand it as her inner speech making connections and finding new ways to understand different matters and new ways of thinking, feeling and imagining the future. It has all been ‘born’ during the dialogue but the generative ‘workings’ have just begun.

**Multiplicity of Experiences**

The whole succession process in a business family holds an enormous multiplicity of experiences, and this is the third cornerstone for making the dialogue generative. When we meet in the conversations everything is there, everyone is having their own contexts and their own basic assumptions on the matters we are talking about through their special experiences. I will only give a few examples and start with the individual experience of time; where in life each individual is. Does the succession process mean starting a new working and family life or is it about retiring and beginning a life as a supporter instead of being in charge of the family business. When it comes to history; have the generations before me handed down something that I value and want to include into my life and pass down to my children? When it comes to philosophy of life; what do I see as essential in life, what makes a good working and family life? Where do I want to live and how should life be organized to fit my values. All of these and many more different basic assumptions, attained in different contexts, are at play at the same time. We can see it in the second essay where Anna’s and Anders’ put forward their different values and philosophies of life when talking of where and how to live. In the essay about the frustrated dream of Oskar we can follow Oskar’s ‘obligations’ to his forefathers to keep the farm together, there is no
other solution for him, but there is no one else in the family that has this need. In Anna and Anders view the dwelling house is like any house, where they want to live and be in charge of everything themselves. This idea of only holding in custody, where the house is seen as the ‘heart’ of the farm is not intelligible, at least not to Anna. These differences are part of the whole succession transaction; is it an ordinary business transaction, or something else? It is also shown in the first essay when Elsa recounts what it was like to move into the farm about forty years ago; “you don’t like it from the beginning, but you will grow into it”. This is not the way Anna wants to live her life and neither of the men in the family expects her to; to go against her will, to sacrifice herself. To give one more example; Markus wish to have Anders as a business partner, he uses his knowledge of the difference it makes to own your own business when it comes to commitment and ways of thinking. Here his experience is obvious; experience that is alien to Anders and Anna, who value having spare time with the children. Since all of these basic assumptions have been silenced during the last ten years, they have become monological within each person. This creates separateness between family members and it is necessary for them to engage in dialogue to develop their relations in a way that will make it possible for them to co-create the future of their family business.

The feeling of everybody being far apart and the fear of not being listened to if making an attempt at talking, is from what I can understand some of the matters that keep family members from trying to talk to each other; as Bakhtin (2006, p127, italics by the author) phrases it:

For the world (and consequently, for human being) there is nothing more terrible than lack of response.

When families engage in dialogical conversations, it is a new way of communicating and something new happens, I once again refer to Bakhtin (1986, p156-56) here about contextual meaning:

It is potentially infinite, but it can only be actualized when accompanied by another (other’s) meaning, if only by a question in the inner speech of the one who understands....Therefore there can never be neither a first nor a last meaning...each individual link is renewed again and again, as though it were reborn.
To become aware of our own contexts, of our experiences, we have to understand that we are situated in the living surroundings of our traditions. To become aware of our old experiences, Gadamer (2006), they have to become alien to us and seen in the context of our traditions. Gadamer explains that our experiences are not fixed, they rather changes us and gives us continuous perspectives, and as we reflect over them our thinking and feeling connected to our old experiences transform. It is a reciprocal process. It is when we can understand and move between different ways of viewing our experiences that what he calls ‘fusion of experiences’ happens and our perceptions of situations and ourselves is expanded.

When we do not talk about our experiences, what we have learned long ago, the foundations of our thinking are thought of as something ‘natural’. Ones we start talking about them and we are understood by other people responding to us, we can at the same time start listening to ourselves. As Anna formulated in the follow up meeting when I asked what happened when I met them, as described in the second essay when they talked about the same things over and over again; “It was to get it into yourself …and maybe to somewhere register what you had said yourself....That is the way it was”.

In this way the old basic and unspoken assumptions that have become monological, can serve as new meaning when they enter the conversation, and they can open up for renewed telling’s and re-telling’s as “language plays through us, as words, sounds, rhythm and gestures and evoke new verbal and emotional responses” (Cunliffe, 2001, p128).

The conversational topics come up over and over again, but they are never exactly the same, they are always in a new light. It is my experience that new meaning is created successively. The possibility to express vague and ambivalent meanings, not having to know exactly, not having to make quick decisions, opens up for the exploration of new ideas. This is what Roth (2011) wrote of as so important in her reconciliation dialogues. Additionally it also opens up for further elaborations, when relations change and people get closer and more interested in each other. This is obvious as regards to the relations between Elsa and Anna. From the beginning Elsa thought Anna just had “to get used to” living at the farm. After the meeting when Elsa expressed this opinion her interest and understanding for Anna has grown and Elsa has now more joy in her relation to her daughter in law.
As indicated before, family members are in most cases unaware of their basic values, especially in a ‘low-context culture’ as Daun (1989) calls it, where people takes for granted that everybody thinks approximately the same way. Differences in values are thought of as something that the persons ‘just wants’ or the way that person ‘is’. Like when everybody was waiting for Oskar to start talking about the succession details. They thought that he did not want to move away from the farm, when in fact he did not know what to do because he was terrified of conflicts destroying family relations.

We can now understand what happened to Anna when both Anders and I listened to her; it enabled her to reflect over her own experiences and assumptions. Parallel to this Anders did the same. Their utterances were on the surface directed towards me, but they were in fact addressing three listeners. As they also listened to themselves and put into words their own way of thinking, and they clearly became aware of earlier experiences and traditions that they had held for TRUE. In this way their belief systems opened up and new ways of thinking became possible.

As it seems they did not know of the new thinking at that moment, it evolved successively as it had become possible for them to engage in dialogue again after so many years. The ‘workings’ of our meeting had a delayed and generative effects and their relation seamed to evolve successively.

So I agree with my ‘textual friends’, listed in the beginning of this section, about the importance of novelty of the utterances in the dialogue, but the responsiveness to what has been uttered goes on so much longer than the actual conversations. The dialogue develops a new kind of relationships between the participants, where I believe responses to new and former conversations are experienced. The continued generative dialogue with delayed workings, give rise to further new dialogues and new actions. In the following section I will summarize how we have co-created the conversational spaces to support the succession process.
2. The Co-Creation of the Conversational Spaces

During my contact with the Bjärges family we co-created our ways of being together. From the beginning they wanted to have the meetings in their home, in the large kitchen of the dwelling house. I understood that this was their ‘natural’ place for meetings. As time went by some rituals evolved little by little. An important part was to have a meal together.

During the two first meetings we only had coffee and buns, further on we always started with a meal and had coffee in the middle of the meeting. When Gergen et al, (2001, p7) write about the Public Conversational Project they point at what they believe is one of the most important contributions to their success, namely that their meetings started with a meal. They say that when people exchange greetings, smiles, handshakes; when they can chat about children, work, music taste and so on; then rhythm of conversation, eye contact, eating together; all help to develop a platform for conversations; a mutual dance.

This is an apt description of how our meetings started. I also feel that being their guest, as indicated by the meal built our equality; at first they are ‘leading’ the meeting by being my hosts, then I take over and become ‘the leader’ of the conversations. In this way our positions go back and forth and I am of course in a sense their guest the whole time.

Something that has created an atmosphere of acceptance and relaxed joy has been the talk with the children around the kitchen table as they either participated in our dialogue or were playing beside us. Disa who was only two years when the dialogues started was around us most of the time, while her older brother Emil often played or watched television in a nearby room. Their presence contributed playfulness and was a living reminder of the future we were talking about. And Anna had stated from the beginning that a prerequisite for her participation was to be able to bring the children. It also amazed me that their chattering and their asking for help did not take away our concentration in the meeting they were part of the wholeness. This relates to Voloshinov (1986, p93):

\[
\text{The organizing center of any utterance, of any experience is not within [the individual] but outside – in the social milieu surrounding the individual being.}
\]
I do not think we shall underestimate the external arrangements, the social milieu of these meetings and how they have influenced the content of the conversations and not the least created a safe and creative space. The space has been familiar, but the conversations have been very different from the way they have been talking around their kitchen table before. But it may well be that the well-known made it possible for the un-known; to communicate in a way they never had done before in the extended family.

This was done by inviting family members to a new way of being together, a way of communicating colored by emotional presence, reciprocal learning and compassion. I responded to their dialogue “by offering myself in my most genuine voice” (Vedeler, 2011) as Vedeler puts it. This way of being is contagious to the others and it cannot but make something of importance emerge. In these conversations there have many times been holy moments; moments full of love and of immense importance to the whole of the family. As Anna said; “you took part and guided us, even if you didn’t decide what questions we should talk about, but you have opened gates for us...if that hadn’t happened I don’t think we could have talked”. In this process, I listen with compassion, curiosity and with an interest for every person, the business and in their history. The conversations gave them a possibility to come into dialogue around what was most important for them.

It is often said that men do not talk about feelings as Markus states this in the follow up conversation; that no one of the men in the family can talk about emotions. This is not true, since when invited into a dialogical conversation where talk is facilitated, this is the ‘normal way’ and a language game (Wittgenstein, 2002) is created where it is ‘natural’ to talk about emotions. This way of talking is, I suppose, uncommon, especially in everyday male conversations. However, Markus and the other men expressed themselves well during the dialogical meetings.

In order for new kinds of relations to develop the most important objective of dialogical conversations is to create a space where everybody is seen and listened to, where everyone can take up what they find most necessary at the moment. In this way family members are enabled to continue talking to each other in new ways. However, as we have seen in the essays, it is no ‘piece of cake’; it requires time to start talking about ‘sensitive matters’ outside the family meetings.
From the beginning the succession project contained four meetings as is described in the report in the appendix. These were planned out of an Appreciative Inquiry structure. I have at times thought that these were of no real value, nothing really changed during those conversations. But I think I am wrong there. These conversations that dealt with the Bjärges’ history, future and the present in the business/ the farming and the family, were all carried out in an appreciative manner and were also part of what has created engagement, pride and future oriented thinking into the conversations. It also created a body of common stories that we came back to many times during our meetings.

What has been very important has been the possibility of having fun and laughing during our meetings. Bakhtin (19876, p135) writes about the necessity of humor and laughter:

> Everything that is truly great must include an element of laughter....Laughter lifts the barrier and clears the path....Laughter makes things close and familiar.

Laughter has never been far away when we have met, and family members have sometimes laughed at themselves when they have listened to their own utterances. However, joking can else be a way to slip out of something that feels too difficult to deal with. Nevertheless I see that kind of joking as a good way to coordinate the rhythm with all participants; the process will always move back and forth between laughter, stillness, tension, relief and so forth.

An important task for me as facilitator has been not to be scared of the emotions involved in the dialogues. From what I understand family members have been afraid to talk about matters they have different opinions on. We have seen that Oskar was so afraid of conflict that he could neither talk nor sleep. Both Anna and Anders ‘put the lid on’ when they came home after our meetings. I think they saw me as a warrant against conflict and complicated emotions taking over the conversations. My way of not regarding emotions as personal but rather as part of the relational process also lifts blame from individual family members and makes it possible for them to share what has previously been difficult to talk about.

Here is also the relational responsibility (Roth, 2011; Lang 2009; Gergen, 2009) I wrote about in connection to the reconciliation process in the 4th Essay. To make each person feel respected and valued, not to favor anybody’s ideas, and to be genuinely curious and interested in what family members are talking about. Never looking for blame and antagonistic thinking; instead I have been concentrated on making it possible for every
person to reflect and ask questions to enable them to include what Roth calls ‘grey areas’. By being able to talk about ambiguous feelings without precise ideas of how to go about it, it makes others responsive and they can dare to answer in the same way. In this manner a dialogue develops where every utterance builds on what earlier was said, if not in the same conversation then some other time, but always in a responsive way.

Further I have found it important to have a ‘motor’ in the family, someone that really thinks it is very important to continue. When tension builds up one of the most usual reaction is to postpone the next meeting. My understanding is that the actual meetings have not been so difficult; it is more a question what can happen in between meetings that causes tension. This I have described in the fourth essay called Frustrated Dreams, when Oskar got scared and the young ones openly showed their irritation over his indecisiveness. Their first reaction was not to turn to me; instead they waited for each other. Except for Elsa, she stayed in contact with me firmly believing our meetings made a difference. She negotiated the different times with family members and I guess the process would have stopped without her.

To me it was important to remain with the family until they were able to have conversations on their own. That was my goal, and although I was curious about the outcome I intended to leave when I was no longer needed. In my experience from other families there is always somebody that takes responsibility for the continued process and uses the contact with me to get some extra ‘supervision’. In orthodox thinking this would be seen as completely inappropriate, as if I sided with one person. I disagree, I engage in dialogue with those who desire it, there is no problem for me if I have diverse contacts with family members. Several times we have been joking about how Markus and Anders postponed meetings; any feelings are accepted as long as nobody feels forced to participate. It is up to each individual family member to decide if she/ he want to participate or not. I can only offer my facilitation and initially I have been asking for participation from the whole extended family. This study has taught me, however, that it is not necessary or even good to have the extended family present at every meeting. This is something I initially thought was important. As my study has proceeded I have found it important to be open for the need in the family and of the process. But if the most important result from the conversations is to develop new kinds of relations, within which continuous dialogue can roll on, and then it is important that all family members are
involved in the conversations, even if not on every occasion. When there is a ‘stuck-ness’ I think it is important to try to work in new ways. Family members must feel that the process is in motion, so they do not lose hope of reaching a good solution. Maybe the tension that built up within the Bjärges family during 2008 was almost too much. Perhaps it would have been better to have had the reconciliation process earlier. I cannot say what I could have done differently, but I think there is a risk to endanger the process if family members have the feeling that “this is not working” too long and hopelessness spreads it could lead to family members withdrawing from the process. What I understand as the most important feature in my way of working is my ability to co-create a safe enough space for all family members where hope is developed and all matters they find important to bring up “fits” within the process.

To summarize

In communication studies communication is always written about as contextual, but it is usually described solely through short experiences of dialogical moments in for example therapy. In my writing about ‘dialogue with delay’ I want to point at the importance of context when we are communicating. For example my historical studies in connection with this work show that the old fideicommisssary philosophy is still at work; and also how a common interest in horses can give wings to the succession process. Just as ideas about the family as a collective set Oskar’s context in the reconciliation process, when he spoke of how he wanted the succession to proceed. These are but a few examples, there are many more in the essays that describe how the context is part of and plays into what is happening in the dialogue; and what between meetings could start to slowly evolve beyond ‘ones occurrent events’. This is my addition to the scope of how dialogical conversations are viewed and an expansion of the studies of dialogical moments.

In the next chapter I will start to look into the future and on what basis we can find new ways of working with business families. But first I will draw out the differences between working within systems theory or what I call the ‘traditional way’ of consulting to business families and the dialogic systemic way of working.
3. The Two Circles; a Cookie Cutter Model

Above I have discussed my systemic dialogical way of working with facilitation in conversational processes in business families. But the legal and financial advice is also essential for business families, and lawyers and accountants are much needed in succession processes. However, what I want to address here, as done in the fifth essay, is the way consultations are performed. In research literature the two (or three) circle model is used to describe the uniqueness of businesses organized as family businesses. In systems theory family business is characterized by two separate competing, albeit to some extent overlapping systems. On the one hand we have the business system where decisions are made according to what is ‘good for business in the long run’. The other system is the family, and a family is seen as emotional and built on relations and priority for decision making is ‘keeping the family together’. Tagiuri and Davis (1996) even state that within the business system there is a healthy level of internal competition, whereas in families all forms of rivalry are suppressed to keep the unity. I have found this view to be very common among scholars as well as among consultants to family businesses.

When applying ideas from Holmquist (2002), Sundin, (2002), West &Zimmerman (1987) and viewing the two systems approach through gender lenses it is undoubtedly male marked, as written about in the 3rd chapter in part 2. The whole field of business and entrepreneurship is unmistakably male marked when we are ‘doing gender’ and keeping cultural traditions. By the same reasoning the family system is marked as female, and as stated earlier, according to gender theory the female gender is subordinated the male gender. In family business research, as well as in the field of consultancy to business families, it is obvious that this gendered hierarchy is well established when one examines what is taken into consideration in consultancy to family businesses. Helin (2011) states that family matters are regarded as interfering with business and thus make family businesses unprofessional. In accordance to this way of reasoning, the lower valued family matters are not addressed in the consultations.
Although there is often an awareness of the importance of good family relations for a well-functioning business and likewise succession, there are usually no attempts made to meet the relational needs families have. Family relations are seen as something to be dealt with privately prior, or parallel, to requests for consultancy in succession matters. Consultancy addresses mainly ‘what is best for business in the long run’ and there are rarely any discussions about how this affects family relations. If discussed at all it is often from a negative angle; interfering spouses destroying decisions or how joint ownership sooner or later will ruin both business and family relations.

To use ‘cookie cutters’ (a metaphor created by Kevin Barge in supervision) and thus punch out two different systems is perhaps a harsh smile for Cartesian dualism. Nevertheless, having family business viewed as a construction of two competing and separate systems makes consultancy impossible without taking a stand for or against either business or family. The dilemma is solved in traditional consultation by only addressing issues concerning the business. To clarify my way of thinking I will show in a table below how different ontologies have different implications for consultations to business families.
Below is an overview to the effects differences in ontology gives on different topics. To clarify the differences I have maybe exaggerated the dissimilarities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Systemic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theories used</td>
<td>Systems theory, agency theory, role theory or unaware of theoretic influence</td>
<td>Systemic, social constructionist, relational, dialogic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal of process</td>
<td>To find the right solution, two competing systems; what’s best for the business wins</td>
<td>To help family members find their own way, where multiple possibilities are possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are invited to participate</td>
<td>Owner + successor</td>
<td>The extended family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultants involved</td>
<td>Accountants and lawyers</td>
<td>A facilitator of dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language view</td>
<td>Transmission view on language</td>
<td>Language as ontological and performative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View on change</td>
<td>Change happens through advice is listened to and acted on</td>
<td>Transformations happen in a dialogical process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next generation owning</td>
<td>One owner, co-owning seen as mistake that leads to conflict</td>
<td>Whatever fits in the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairness</td>
<td>Questions of fairness dictated by owner with advice from consultant</td>
<td>A relational question, does not have to do with equal rights, a relational question</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chart above intends to illuminate that, consultants from the ‘traditional’ and ‘systemic’ fields of working approach succession processes from different angles. It is as if they were wearing different glasses. They differ as regards to topics addressed as well as to people involved. However, their competences are complimentary and it is evident that a business family needs all three competences.

**Fairness – a relational logic**

Family business literature often brings up the importance of fairness in succession transactions. This makes it very interesting to summarize how the financial assets were divided in the succession of the Bjärbes family. The market value of the farm was estimated to about 1,500,000 EUR and that was divided into unequal parts. One third of the farm was allotted to Markus and two thirds to Anders, Staffan would inherit the parents’ house estimated to be worth 10 percent of the value of the farm. This agreement might be perceived as unfair. However, the succession was successful since all family members were
very satisfied with the outcome of the process and family relations had deepened. When I asked Markus if he thought it was fair to get only 1/3 he just answered that there is no fairness.

I can only find that in this family the members do not try to gain as much wealth as possible for themselves, their reasoning is relational and in stark contrast to the one fancied by the ‘economic man’. Their gains are manifold, the emotional ties between family members as well as to the farm are deepened and Anders and Markus can continue to manage the farm they own together. Oskar is free to work when he feels like it, albeit without a salary. Since he got his pension he has more money to spend privately than ever before in his life. Elsa is happy about her new home and has handed over her fur business to her sons, although she will continue working in it for a low percentage of the profit. Anna is also happy with the agreement, the ten percent she received from Anders’ share seems to have made her feel safe as well as visible in the family.

If Anna and Anders had not moved into the farm the house would have been empty or sold to tourists and the Bjärges farm had been something very different compared to now, when everything roles on in about the same way. Almost two years has passed since the succession and everyone has found their new way to relate to the other members of the Bjärges family. For me it has been an amazing experience to witness how well they think they have managed their succession process.

The experience I have gained during this study makes me strongly disagree with the assumption that there are two competing systems. We do not have to use ‘cookie cutters’, there is an option to view family and business as a whole. I would like to see business consultancy and facilitation to the succession process carried out jointly and with a dialogical conversational approach. In the next chapter, the last one, I will outline a new way of consulting to business families that I have called the 3rd Way. The 3rd Way consist of a multi-professional team who jointly meets the family, to make it possible to meet family members and their needs from their ‘inside perspective’.
4. Meetings in the 3rd Way: A New Way of Working with Family Business Successions

In the beginning of this study of facilitating successions in business families, it was obvious to me that I would help families cope with their relational matters during what I thought was the beginning of the succession process. It was also clear to me that they would consult their accountant and lawyer at the end of the process to figure out the ‘hard facts’. At the time I did not realize how totally intertwined business and family are and that succession is an ongoing infinite process often spanning several generations within the family-business-life. When I after some time came into the Bjärges family I realized that they were continuously ‘living’ their family business. But ‘the cogs didn’t fit’; ways of living in the two generations and values guiding the roles of husband and wife were not the same any longer. The Bjärges family members did not know how to handle the clash between the ‘old and the new’; the bond between the generations was at risk and they all wanted to find a solution to the succession of the family farm without jeopardizing their family relations.

“The cogs have to fit the wheel” Oskar said the second time we met. A metaphor often used by the philosophers of the Enlightenment to describe the divine and predefined order of life. I guess Oskar meant that in earlier times the cogs had automatically fitted the wheel and the world was predictable. The Bjärges family now needed help to involve family members in dialogue; to make the wheels start moving again and find ways for the next generation to take over.

After having worked with these issues for several years I can now envision a new way of approaching successions, a 3rd Way. There is a need for dialogical facilitation interwoven with legal and financial competence enabling family members to continue living their family business life without having to keep different aspects of the process apart. It is not necessary to ‘cut out’ family needs from business needs and dwell on the succession using only ‘one eye at the time’.

My vision of the 3rd Way of working involves a multi-professional team working in a systemic and dialogical way. In multi professional meetings each professional will let go of the idea that there is only one definition and one single solution to the situation the family is in. Seikkula (2007) points to the impossibility of a singular definition of the problem a family is facing since the difficulties can be viewed from a multitude of perspectives. Each
family member has her/his own take on what difficulties the family is having and each professional sees what he/she is trained to see. Seikkula refers to consultations as on the ‘border’ between different competences with different ways of thinking. During ‘border’ meetings the different perspectives play an important part as they open up for polyphony of viewpoints.

The philosophy of the 3rd Way is built on a dialogic systemic way of practicing. In the traditional way the lawyer and the accountant are considered as experts in control of the consultation. They have a ‘bank of knowledge’, as Freire (1970) would call it, to be used to clear the path and spell out how to solve the succession dilemmas. In the 3rd Way the consultation is seen as a conversational space where family members, lawyer, accountant and facilitator are co-authoring the dialogical process, mutually learning and being moved by each other. The responsibility for the meeting is shared and the facilitator assists in the dialogical process. In the moments that are created self-reflexive dialogical opportunities emerge (Cunliffe, 2002). In these moments family members, as well as ‘experts’, can view themselves in the perspective of their old ‘taken for granted’ ways of thinking, and at the same time experience how the others are responding to the dialogue. The fusion of horizons that Gadamer (2006) speaks about may happen. In this way family members as well as ‘experts’ become aware of their basic assumptions, their traditions, and the way they have been poising their life in relation to others. Several such moments are presented in the essays; when Anna spoke about being afraid in the first essay; when Elsa in the same essay, said that you have to get used to living on a farm; when Anders reflected over wanting all of the farm in the 4th essay and when Oskar said how afraid he was of conflicts in the same essay. In these moments family members dared to be spontaneous and responsive to each other and they collaboratively created openings for emotional spaces where new thinking and acting could emerge and new aspects of their relations could develop. In this way all participants co-constructed the continuation of their family life as well as their family business life.
Within the legal domain

Some time ago I met a young man, a law student since a few years. He told me a ‘secret’ about what it is like to become a lawyer. Nobody tells the students about these basic rules he said, but successively it becomes clear to you how to relate to your future clients. The law in itself is vast, it has so many facets and is pliable and there is never one singular answer to a legal dilemma; the law has to be interpreted. However, when you advice a client it is your duty to be self-confident, to pick one answer and act as if this is the only solution to your client’s problem. He told me that it can look as if the lawyer is a robot, but behind his armament he is a living and feeling human being that knows that his opponent can be just as to the point as himself with his claims, but that is something that must never be revealed.

This exaggerated description of the role of the lawyer is the opposite of how I envision the role of a dialogical facilitator. Theories are used to orient the facilitator in the dialogical process, to make her/him able to coordinate in a good manner, to be able to ask questions that are apt and useful for the evolving dialogue. The facilitator does not take sides with anybody; instead she/he uses theories to avoid ‘getting stuck and blind’ to what is happening. The facilitator’s task is to create a safe enough space where participants feel at ease to come into dialogue with each other. The facilitator’s task is to open up and the lawyer’s task according the young man and what I have experienced myself, is to eliminate opportunities and to point in one direction.

Within the financial domain

Among accountants the ‘economic man’ paradigms are still prevalent according to what I have found in my conversations with accountants. This seventeenth century idea from Hobbes, that every (male) human being wants power for himself and that private property is the most important base for that power. Fifty years later Locke underscored that landowners are best suited to rule countries. A hundred years later Adam Smith stated that economies and societies will develop because all human beings have an economic self-interest and this will in turn create future social harmony. These are the basic assumptions
still adhered to by consultants helping business families today. They might be exaggerated and more recent winds may have changed the values some people are holding, but I have been surprised when visiting official meetings, talking to accountants and reading family business research literature that so little has changed since the succession in my family of origin 35 years ago.

The importance of private property, the assumptions that every man is striving for power and has economic self-interest in focus are still basic. The ideas that siblings cannot co-own and spouses are greedy and want as much as possible for their own family, are ‘truths’ still guiding the consultations offered to business families. These ‘truths’ are still basic assumptions all make interferences on the psychological domain but are foreign to me as a psychologist. I find it peculiar that adults are obliged to be jealous and constantly engaged in a struggle for power. This even overtrumps the visions of Freud and his views of the dark side of the human soul.

Within the facilitation domain

To work according to the 3rd Way is something never heard of before in the context of family business successions. I have experience from multi professional teams in psychiatry and treatment conferences where all professions meet to develop understanding and set up treatment plans for the patients. Seikkula (2005) writes about ‘border meetings’ where the team meets with the patient and her/his network. Within the law sector there is ‘collaborative law’ which aims to resolve family disputes without taking divorce cases and cohabitation dispute to court. In these processes there are financial as well as family therapy experts involved and the parties have one solicitor each. The parties agree from the beginning not to use the process to go to court later on. This is a way of working with family conflicts that is spreading all over the United States and Europe. In Sweden there are family courts provided by the social services when children are exposed to sever conflicts due to parents’ inability to settle divorce disputes. In these examples from psychiatry and collaborative law there are deep problems, people are sick or they are in a conflict and need mediation. In succession processes this is usually not the case. People are most of the time healthy, reasonable and loving. There are good possibilities to open up for rewarding
conversations but often it is hard for the families to do it on their own because of the high emotional density and the fear of conflicts and of risking family relations.

Although the facilitation is not therapy, since there is not that kind of need, it is nevertheless good to use therapeutic competence in the facilitation; to focus on each family member and listen to them with ‘compassion’, to ask questions that help family members to join the dialogue and to create a ‘safe enough space’ where participants can respond in a spontaneous way to each other. A dilemma however is that most therapists I have met are not interested in businesses. It is not only a neutral disinterest; rather business is often seen as shallow, ‘capitalistic’ in a negative sense, and above all it is not interesting. This has surprised me and I find therapists just as ignorant as lawyers and accountants who do not see the emotional and relational aspects of business. Not seeing and taking into account the legal and financial sides of family life is equally naïve. A movement of 3rd Way of working with business families calls for education for all professional categories.

**How does the 3rd Way Work?**

Within the 3rd Way of consultation families are viewed as founded on love. This has a totally different relational logic; this is an emotional one which makes the hard core ‘economic man’ rational paradigms alien. Certainly there can be rivalry between siblings, with a lot of fights between them, but this is not the sole aspect of a family’s relational universe. My experience is that mature siblings that get the possibility to meet in dialogue around these important matters usually are able to find constructive ways to go forward. This is shown in the Bjärges example and in the follow up essays, the 6-8th, where we can follow the line of thinking of all three brothers when they talk about the relational logic that has made everybody in the family satisfied with the succession. Notable is also how very satisfied the parents are. They have succeeded in the hard task to get a good solution that makes it possible for them to carry on working as long as they wish and their sons will go hunting together on the grounds of the family farm to which all three still feel very connected.
What has to be established?

A **dialogical** space has to be created. If the meeting only becomes a situation where experts inform and if the listening of the ‘experts’ to family members only is used to find opportunities to tell them what they think from the beginning, it is a monological way of communicating. Dialogues, on the contrary, are moments when all parties are listening to each other in a slow, responsive and indecisive way, feelingly taking in what the others are trying to express. According to Bakhtin (1986, p68) all real listening is a responsive and an embodied activity. The answer to an utterance is an embodied response to what is heard and the speaker appropriates the speaking in accordance to the anticipated answer from the listener. In as much as the listener becomes the speaker. By this way of approaching dialogue Bakhtin is pointing at the intertwinement of the speaking and the listening and how both are equally important in the unfolding of a dialogue. In this light the whole idea of giving information does not fit. It is the task of the facilitator to open up for the responsive listening that brings the conversation into unknown territory and where every person contributes with what is awakened in them and every person becomes visible.

And if the ‘pieces fit the puzzle’, if the utterances unfold in such a way that they are anticipated by the speaking and listening parties, and if they develop in an organic way and not in a preplanned manner, a chain, with each link connected is be established. A chain where what is spoken of before and what will come in the future is linked. If this happens there will be a feeling of being heard and a feeling of trust will be established (Shotter, 2009). What is so very important is that it becomes possible for family members to speak of what they find most important, the risk is always that when ‘experts’ are involved they are expected, by both parties, to set the agenda.

For this kind of unfolding unguarded conversation to occur it is of vital importance that a **shared social situation** is established. The current social situation, what is created in the moment, “determine from within - the structure of an utterance” (Volishinov, 1986, p86). It is in this shared circumstance, where everybody belongs that the openness to the others becomes possible. In order to reach this kind of dialogical situation we have to come away from giving advice; from informing family members of ‘how to do’ and instead view them as knowledgeable persons. To give advice with set standard formulations, as ‘truths’, without openness for the responsiveness from family members creates a social situation of alienated family members that have to be enlightened. There is always the risk of unequal
relations, something that is easily co-created by all participants when some are seen as experts.

Instead a special genre (Bakhtin, 1986) has to be created that includes all family members and ‘experts’ on an equal basis. In this special dialogical space it is the facilitator’s responsibility to show and ‘live’ an attentive listening where family members are centered. In such a space a genre is co-created by all participants as the dialogue unfolds.

A genre is recognized and understood by the intonation of the very first word spelled out (Bakhtin, 1986). Therefore family members will know from the first word uttered if the meeting has the possibility of being a safe place for them to look for new meaning, new understanding of themselves and of each other in their highly emotional succession process; or if it is a meeting where experts have gathered to inform the ‘ignorant family members’ of how to best solve the succession matters.

A meeting of the 3rd Way will take place on ‘the border’ (Seikkula, 2007) where ‘experience’ of different kinds will make it possible to reflect on what is said from many different angles. But it is crucial how the knowledge is handled by the ‘experts’ and Tom Andersen, (in Shotter, 2009, p34), talks about teams where the professionals are reflecting together on what the clients have said, he suggests:

‘Maybe our talk [the reflections of the professionals] will bring ideas that could be useful for your conversation’. We did not say ‘useful for you’, but ‘useful for your conversation’ (Andersen, 1992, p58, italics by the author).

This way Andersen does not suggest that the family should take what the ‘experts’ are saying as advice to live by, Andersen rather sees the ‘experts’ as people that can help family members to come further in their family conversations. Andersen views the family conversation, the dialogue, as a way to co-construct the new reality for the family.

Of importance to get the 3rd Way of working to work is to establish a dialogue in a genre where all family members are listened to and where the knowledge of the ‘experts’ is used as ‘food for thought’ in the ongoing dialogue of the business family.
To Summarize

Below are listed some important issues to take in consideration when establishing a multi professional succession dialogue:

- Establish a genre where all participants in the dialogue feel ‘at home’ and are ‘seen’. The team are inspirers for the family conversation not experts that know ‘what and how to do things’.
- The genre could be elaborated on through an informal start of the process by a meal or something of that kind. Context is also set by conversations around how the process will be carried out.
- The facilitator has the responsibility to set the stage of the conversation and starts the listening process and it is important that all participants are recognized as able to co-author the conversations.
- The conversations are not pre-planned; matters talked about stem from what family members need to talk about.
- All participants are seen as learners who continuously develop ways of relating and understanding themselves and each other by reflective and reflexive ways of dialogical talk that is facilitated.
- The consultants/experts’ are continuously reflecting over if they are silencing family members by their ways of talking and acting.
- The facilitator and the consultants are working from within the conversation, supporting all family members’ ways of talking, feeling and acting. It is through the safe and open space in the dialogue which the facilitator is concentrating on, where family members respond in a spontaneous way to each other, that reflexive thinking including old experiences and basic assumptions can become visible and ‘open up’ for transformations and new possibilities.
- Indecisive utterances are welcomed. These are utterances Roth (2011) called ‘grey areas’, where persons talk of matters they are not sure of and of emotions that are confusing. During these moments facilitation is very subtle and slow.
- Social realities and the sense of self are created between us during the dialogical practices and activities, in these ways infinitive possibilities to shape and reshape relations between family members are created.
To know how to go on with each other has to do with relational actions, with synchronic coordination. Gergen (2009) compares it to skilled tango dancing where each movement is coordinated with the movement of the other. Oskar once said: “if this project also had included an accountant and a lawyer it had been perfect”. I envision conversations where everyone’s embodied engagement and special competences are imbedded in the dancing. In this way the succession process can proceed by its own veins, and questions and problems not thought of initially can be consulted to as they arise and a multitude of ways of going further can be opened up. Like in the Montessori preschool my children attended, the teaching and the materials were there when the child was eager to know about them, it was never forced upon them. In the same frame of mind the philosophy of the 3rd Way could also be further developed by using the creative pedagogy of Reggio Emilia where the children are supported to use a hundred languages (a hundred different ways) that although hidden are always there to be used to actively explore the world (Brulin&Emrikksson, 2005).

It is self-evident that when business matters are addressed so are family relations, all family members are affected during the succession process in different ways and we are all the time co-constructing our social and relational worlds. I agree with Seikkula that it is not necessary for the whole network to be present every time to have a relational perspective, but one must always bear in mind that there is not just one single individual we are working with and this perspective should be carried also in twosome dialogues.

**Benefits Gained by the 3rd Way of Working**

- Family relations develop and are enriched.
- Equal interest is attained family and business matters as they are intertwined.
- The taking over of the business is legitimised by all family members.
- The long term concern and strength imbedded in family relations is utilized within the business as well.
• The influence of business matters on relations is acknowledged. The dualistic separation of family and business is avoided and the relational aspects of business matters are an obvious part of the dialogues.

• Successions are reached in small businesses that might otherwise have failed due to relational difficulties.

• The continuation of businesses are facilitated and the risk of involuntary close downs are minimized; this is important for personal reasons as well for local and national society.

• Successions are performed where each family member feel comfortable with the relations to each other and to the business.

So I propose that we throw away all ‘cookie cutters’ which cut through the bloodstreams of family businesses and view the business as a dead object. The most common way to organize business all over the world is as family business and this fact needs to be valued and recognized. Today crowds demonstrate on Wall Street and in big cities all over the world, to oppose the immoral way of doing business void of relational and ethical considerations. It is fantastic that family business do not adhere to all rational advice they are getting, but go on with their ‘messy and conglomerated’ way of combining family and business. We as servants to them have to follow their relational logic, instead of imposing big business rationale on their way of living their business.
Postlude

Tears in Norway

When writing my ethics chapter my reflections made me realize that my whole study is ethical, and I like the way I have been working and writing during this whole process. But when I started to write about the catastrophic succession in my own family, I saw that this whole study had my own understanding, of what had happened in my family of origin, as an aim.

A conflict arouse during the succession of our family farm, the farm that was going to be split between my sister and my brother and the family members ended up in different camps. Since then our family relations have been organized accordingly and our brother is the sole owner since thirty five years.

When I was writing that it had taken me five years to become aware of that I had been in a hermeneutical spiral with everything from a deep embodied emotional involvement and - when I was going to write – to philoso........

That word made something happen.

I felt how I had stretched as far as I could in the loops of the spiral; how I had used all my powers to work with the history of the philosophy of science, how I was almost trapped there, all to create an understanding for what had happened in my own family so very long ago.

My tears came, first slowly, I was surprised.

Suddenly I felt the grief of our destroyed family relations. I cried.

After a while I felt calmer but was totally filled by the enormity of this, I had thought about calling my sister to tell her that I am writing about her, I went outside in the light rain and felt the crisp mountain air. I dialed her number. She didn’t answer.
Back in the cabin, I continued to write, about Gadamer, to become alien to our own traditions to be able to see.

Then I called my sister again, I went out into the sunlight; the sun that so rarely shows itself in the Norwegian mountain world.

We talked a little about everything. She asked how my writing was going; I had earlier sensed that she had been a little worried about me, if I could handle the big task I had taken on myself. But I could comfort her, after these two weeks at the ‘writing atelier’ under the protection of the Måfå research group it was going well.

Then I told her that she is part of what I am writing; that I am trying to understand what happened to us and I think of it as if we were operating within different language games. Then I gave her a couple of examples of what happens when people are in different language games, she got what I meant. But when I connected these explanations to our succession she became distressed. She said: “How could he do it, to ONE person, how could he!? He was so high and mighty….it just HAD to be the son that took over the orchard”.

I said it is sad how it has affected our family relations.

She said it is sad to see what happened to the orchard.

We talked about our mother.

My sister said that she trusts me, she does not want to read what I have written, and in any case, she cannot read in English, “I trust your good judgment”, she told me.

“Yes you are described in a good light”.

“That’s fine, I trust you”.

I went back to my desk in the cabin, I felt connected to my sister and to my writing, now it was easier to continue.
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Appendices

Professional Doctorate in Systemic Practice

Program Handbook Excerpts on Description of Course Ethos 2006

A program for **people in practice** providing opportunities for developing sophisticated ways of working, creating exceptional relational achievement. The award of the degree is subject to the presentation of materials used in innovative practice(s), together with a 20,000 to 30,000 word commentary inter-relating the practice(s) to research literature, making a portfolio overall of some 40,000 to 60,000 words (maximum)

The Professional Doctoral Program is unique, in that it focuses on practice as developed by the participants in the program, often working together as members of the research school.

The program is designed to include innovative material in the formulation of novel, maybe daring, practice(s) that create energy and life enhancing "nourishment" for both the practitioner and the situations they work in, as well as for the people they work with.

Through the application of reflecting processes within the on-going conduct of the practice, attention to the crucial details of the practice will grow out of the interests and enthusiasm of the practitioner. This will reflect back into the program, so that as the practice research develops, so specific methods of working will be created, refined, savored and shared with others within the program’s research school.

The practice will be innovative, creative and grounded in relation to those who might benefit from the methods used. Ethical reflection will be included as a central part of the evolution in the program. This will entail broadening and deepening the focus for the practice. The program will provide for creating and expanding relationships between practice and commentary and theoretical considerations, such that new theoretical commentary and theoretical considerations, such that new theoretical dimensions are fashioned out of the reflection on the developing practice. The practice will make a
contribution to the learning of others through the innovative and refined activities in working with others - another aspect of the program's research school.

The background to the program is based on the perspective that managers, leaders, consultants and therapists, for example, create excellent practice through engaging with clients, other people at work and others in similar fields that may possess a diversity of practice. At the beginning of the program participants will form learning contracts with other group members so that, through the engagement with each other, learning is developed and the course of practice is formulated with each other in the research school program.

Thus participants of the program draw on each other’s resources and knowledge. The groups that are formed will be central to the learning. Course staff will facilitate the learning events and processes together with program participants. Course staff will be available for coaching, advice, tutoring and sharing in the processes of the program.
The First Succession Project

What our business is; drawn by a grandchild in the Hotel Family,

Texts above the picture from left: Good Food and service; Big family; Economy
Money; safety and peaceful coziness
Background

This is a summary of the report of the Almiproject “Preparatory conversations for generational and ownership successions.” The project was initiated in June 2006 and it finished in June 2007.

The fact that a big number of family businesses in Sweden are approaching generational and ownership succession is the base for this project. It is important that successions are carried out in a professional way, both to save the companies and safeguard job opportunities, but also to protect the families and family relations. Today established consultants can help families with financial and legal matters but there is no “natural” actor that can help with preparatory conversations; conversations that simultaneously take business matters, ownership questions and family relations into consideration. This is unfortunate since research, as well as, praxis show that for a good succession it is crucial to cover the whole situation.

In this pilot project families approaching succession in their business have participated in assisted dialogues in order to ease the succession processes.

The aim of the project

The basic idea of the project is to conduct preoperational conversations with the extended family as a preparatory part of the succession. The project’s overall purpose is:

1. To help business owners with their successions by developing a common language and creating forums where those involved can talk about the business, the ownership and their family situation, as well as setting up ways for continuing the succession process after the project.
2. To learn from this pilot project and collect inspiration around how guidance in this area can be developed.
Work group

The project is jointly owned by Lars Erlandsson (Almi Gotland). Lisen Kebbe, psychologist and doctoral student at KCC in London and University of Bedfordshire, and Jenny Helin, economist and doctoral student at International Business School in Jönköping.

Method

The recruitment of the families has gone through local knowledge and participation in the project has been free of charge for the families. It has, however, been of importance that the participants were willing to give feedback to the project group throughout the project to safeguard the learning process.

Planning of the conversations – focus on dialogue

Prior to the project an overall planning was established concerning the content of the meetings and what kind of “process tools” that were going to be used (see beneath).

Nevertheless, focal points have been adjusted to the needs of each separate family and the development of each separate meeting. The fundamental notion has been how we look at dialogue in meetings. Our belief is that as human beings we socially create our reality in interaction with others. Thus, central in this project has been not only what has been discussed, but the process of the actual conversation in itself; how each separate conversation has been carried out. An important element of this has been that everybody has been given the opportunity to speak, everyone has been listened to and all opinions have been respected. It is our hope that this way of working has deepened family relations, enhanced the succession process and made all family members supportive of this process.

We met one family at the time. We encouraged them to invite all family members (in one case the business was going to be taken over by a person outside the family) or as many as they wanted to, in some families it varied from meeting to meeting. We had four meetings in six families, a total of 24 meetings. The first preparatory meeting lasted for about two hours and the following meetings three to four hours.
The meetings have had the following content:

First meeting: Introductory meeting for the project.

We presented the project as a whole at the first meeting and what it would mean for the family to participate. The current situation in the business and in the family was discussed, and if the family believed this project would be useful for them. They were informed that the project was a research project and what that would entail. This meeting usually ended with a decision when to meet next time.

Second meeting: Discover what is and what has been.

First we talked about the family members' individual goals for the succession project. In an exercise everybody was asked to speak about their strongest memories connected to the business. After that a genogram was created, in which family members were placed in relation to the family and the family business. Creating a genogram together was a good way for discussing family relations and to talk about earlier successions. The genogram was completed with a time axis where the most important events in the life of the business were discussed. This meeting ended with a reflection of what had been said and how it had it felt to talk about these issues.

Third meeting: Visions, inventory of resources and possibilities.

The third meeting focused on the future. We let the family work in different constellations where they created a vision for the business from three angles; first from their own personal viewpoint, secondly from a customer’s point of view and thirdly from the perspective of the family’s and the business resources. From these pictures of an imagined future we talked about how the different individuals saw their connection to the business in the future.

Fourth meeting: Concluding and plan of action
The final meeting was focused on concretizing their vision of the family business and family life. We created time plans and decided who was going to be responsible for the different activities. An important part was the “inventory” of knowledge that was needed to realize the plans. Future roles were discussed and elaborated upon. The meeting concluded with reflections over their succession project and with evaluation questions, which were answered in writing.

Participating businesses

Participants in the project have been The Potato Business, The Vegetable Family, The Hotel Family, The Milk Family, The Bjärges Family and The Gas Family.

These families are all family businesses; they are owned and ran by families. All are local businesses, although some of them have activities and customers in other areas. They are all approaching succession in leadership and/or ownership. The table beneath is an overview of the participating businesses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line of business</th>
<th>Milk Family</th>
<th>Potato Business</th>
<th>Gas Family</th>
<th>Hotel Family</th>
<th>Vegetable family</th>
<th>Bjärges family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change of leadership and ownership within the family</td>
<td>Change of leadership from owner to employee.</td>
<td>Change of leadership and ownership of half of the company, within the family</td>
<td>A very early, yet undecided stage</td>
<td>Partly Change of leadership and ownership within the family</td>
<td>Change of leadership and ownership within the family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Farming/ Animal breeding | Farming/ Potato plantations | Engineering | Tourism | Farming/ plantation | Farming/ Pork production |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present generation</th>
<th>From third to fourth generation</th>
<th>From second generation to an employee</th>
<th>From first to second generation</th>
<th>From second to third generation</th>
<th>From second to third generation.</th>
<th>From fourth to fifth generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Particip. in the meetings</td>
<td>Mother, father, two sons and their wives and five preschool children</td>
<td>The owner couple, the employee and his wife</td>
<td>First mother father, 2sons, 2daughters, 2 not taking part.3 spouses Rest of meetings: mother, father and the three children that work in the business.</td>
<td>Three siblings that are owners with their spouses. Their 7 grown up children, one spouse and 4 grandchildren</td>
<td>Mother father and their two daughters</td>
<td>Mother, father, their 3 sons, one spouse and three grandchildren.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key questions in the meetings</td>
<td>How will the succession proceed?</td>
<td>Finding new roles after the succession</td>
<td>To start talking about the succession</td>
<td>To start the succession process in the big family.</td>
<td>To prepare for the succession mentally</td>
<td>To find ways forward in the succession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location of the meetings</td>
<td>On the farm in the kitchen</td>
<td>In Lisen’s office</td>
<td>In their office both on Gotl.+ in Stockholm</td>
<td>In the hotel’s conference room</td>
<td>In their office on the farm</td>
<td>On the farm in the kitchen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Milk family

Needs at the beginning of the project:

To gain knowledge about how succession processes can be carried out. To engage in a process where everybody in the family is involved making sure all family members are satisfied with the plans for the future. The father will retire in four years and the parents wish that the two sons will take over the farm together.

Decisions made at the fourth and final meeting:

During the conversations the family finally decided to get rid of the cows. It was a hard decision to make because the milk production had been the most important source of income on the farm, in the future beef and mutton will be the main productions. However, this was a necessary decision due to health reasons.

The family also decided that one of the brothers and his wife will take over the farm; the other couple will be compensated with a larger property of woodland. The takeover will be carried out in 2012 when the father retires.

Follow up conversation in June 2008 with the mother:

The milk cattle were sold and it was decided to go for beef cattle and pregnant animals have been bought successively during the year. During the winter the father was kicked in the face and badly injured and the family thought of closing down the farm. But he is well again and the family now has a “new life”. They don’t have to get up at five a clock to milk the cows and do all the strenuous work. One of the daughters in law has had a liver transplantation but is now fully recovered.

To sum up; the family has been through some very tough times and they are now looking forward to celebrating the summer. The plans for the takeover of the farm are still valid.
The Potato Business

Needs at the beginning of the project:

In this family an employee had already taken over the business when this project started. They have an agreement where the buyer owns 90% of the business, but he does not own the land and the dwelling house. Payments are made according to a seven year plan. The former owners are still active to some extent in the business and they still own 10% of it. This arrangement was made because the banks were hesitant lending money to buy an agricultural business that did not include farmland.

The two couples involved, the former owners and the former employee and his wife (who is not working in the business) have a great need to talk about their changed roles; shall the former owner continue to live on the farm, how much involvement does the new owner wish to have from the old ones and “what shall we do with the rest of our lives?” The wife of the new owner wanted to know more about the business and get better acquainted with the old owners.

Decisions made at the fourth and final meeting:

The possibility to talk about their different ideas about future and “having enough thinking time before talking” was much appreciated by the two couples. For the first time all four of them sat together in peace and quiet. This was of great importance especially for the young couple since the wife is not active in the business. Now she feels informed and a part of what is going on. It also made her feel safe to hear that the old owners are very pleased with her husband and the way the business is handled. They also discussed where to live in the future and how to cooperate, as well as the transition of important business contacts.

Follow up conversation in June 2008 with the new owner:

“Everything goes well, we have had two really good years and we are investing 4.5 million Swedish kronor (around 450,000 Euro) in a new technique for storage, new machinery both in the packing hall and for the fields. It all has to do with getting the potatoes up faster. The old owners have been on vacation several times this year and it has been a great feeling to
stand on my own two feet. When they have returned home they have been very satisfied with how I have been running the business and that feels very good”.

The Gas Family

**Needs at the beginning of the project:**

The father and the mother own the company jointly. Both of them work full time in the company. The father is going to retire and he wants to give his part of the company to the three of his six children who are working in the company. The other three will not be involved in this succession. There was a need to talk about this in the family.

**Decision made at the fourth and final meeting:**

The family has started to communicate and the three siblings have decided to have regular meetings around the running of the company. The oldest daughter will be CEO. The father will contact a lawyer to organize the succession and to arrange compensation for his other children. During the conversations one of the sons has taken the opportunity to clarify the kind of working conditions he needs if he is to remain in the business, something he feels no one has listened to before.

**Follow up conversation in June 2008 with the father:**

The oldest daughter has functioned as CEO in the company; formally the succession will take place next turn of the year. The youngest daughter has started to work in the company and will also be a joint owner. The situation for one of the sons has taken a turn in the direction he wanted. A lawyer at Skandia (an insurance company) has assisted with the planning.
The Hotel Family

Needs at the beginning of the project:

This project was very timely because the owner family has for ten years asked their accountant to help them plan for their succession but nothing has happened. They want to gather their whole big family (18 persons, three generations) to get ideas how to proceed and to find out who are interested in taking over.

Decisions made at the fourth and final meeting

By making the genogram and having conversations about old memories, (all family members had been working at the hotel at least during the summer season) and lively visioning, the already immense commitment to the hotel grew. A lot of discussions followed; can the whole family stay as owners and can the hotel still be run in a professional way? The family is planning a family council, as well as starting a web forum which will make it possible for family members who do not live on Gotland to participate in discussions. To achieve this, the family set up work groups and booked days for competence raising, in-law, economy and organization, according to their needs.

The Vegetable Family

Needs at the beginning of the project:

According to the father the succession was well prepared “at least on paper” at the start of this project, what they needed was to prepare mentally and psychologically. There was a need for everybody to find their new roles in the company, the older ones needed to shorten their work hours and the daughters needed training to get into their new roles. To be able concentrate, and talk about the succession in such a way that all family members were involved and listened to, they needed to sit down together with someone from outside the family.
Decisions made at the fourth and final meeting

The family made a time plan for the takeover of half the company. They also decided that the rest of the company will be shifted in five years. They made plans for releasing the daughters from their daily work to enable them to successively take over the running of the company and be introduced to the father’s business contacts. The company has about 50 employees and they decided to hire more personnel to relieve the daughters and ease the pressure on the mother who does most of the bookkeeping. The family planned to make the succession public in connection to a jubilee. The older generation has made development plans for their house and garden better adapted to the new way of living where there will be time for more social life.

Follow up conversation with the father November -08:

“The succession is going well but it has been hard to find people who can take over the daughters’ work in the office. We had two people on a trial basis, but they turned out to be unsuitable. We are also looking for someone to replacement in the daily contacts with the farm and the packing hall and in the sales process. One of the daughters takes more responsibility and officially represents the company more and more, and the other daughter is working very well with the personnel. A lot of things are happening in the company and tomorrow we are leaving for Dublin to study machinery for packing the vegetables.”

The Bjärges Family

Needs at the beginning of the project:

There was a need to come to an agreement on who was going take over the farm and come and live in the dwelling house. “We need help to ‘untie knots’ and to come to an end with succession.” The parents have tried to find a solution for ten years.
Decisions made at the fourth and final meeting:

At the fourth meeting several different solutions were discussed by the family, but they were unable to make any decisions. There was one couple the rest of the family wanted as successors but they were not prepared to make any decisions at this time. The family wanted to continue our meetings, the mother said “don’t desert us now”.

The continued meetings with the Bjärges Family

As the family was in the middle of a difficult process I decided to stay with them and continue meeting them after the project had ended. Some of the family members were a little concerned that I gave them so much time without any payment. But my reward was enormous since they made it possible for me to follow the transformation of their thinking and their relations. The decisions we came up with were good enough for all family members to feel satisfied two years later.
### Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Question 1: What has been the most important thing you have got from the meetings?</th>
<th>Question 2: What should we think about if we are to work in similar projects in the future?</th>
<th>Question 3: Additional views</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hearing the others opinions about the business and stating how and in which way I want to be a part of it.</td>
<td>You should have good information and ideas, and give clear and unambiguous tasks.</td>
<td>Try to focus more on development, less on nostalgia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The discussion got started.</td>
<td>More examples, more pedagogy instead of discussions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>That a discussion got started; it got easier to make your own voice heard.</td>
<td>More educational focus, e.g. lecturers…</td>
<td>Thank you for your help. You have helped us with a very important decision/process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A better understanding of the family’s aim with the business.</td>
<td>Good structure, but the meetings were a bit too long.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>That we, together, have started to talk about the future.</td>
<td>That you have the same patience that you have had with us. No changes.</td>
<td>It has been great fun with you. THANK YOU!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Getting all family members interested.</td>
<td>Shorter time between meetings.</td>
<td>Thank you for this time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>That we are virtually in agreement about strategies and action plans for the near future. Everyone is on the same page.</td>
<td>Perhaps give the participants homework.</td>
<td>A big thank you!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Appraisal of the company and your own position.</td>
<td>May be one more meeting.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The talks within the family. Listening and learning and perhaps understanding.</td>
<td>Stronger tape on the wall ;)</td>
<td>Love!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Important to get started with what we want and think about the business’ future and development.</td>
<td>You are really good at bringing up important perspectives.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>An understanding of how others feel and think about the business.</td>
<td>It shouldn’t be too long between meetings – more frequent meetings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Getting the discussion started and exchanging thoughts.</td>
<td>Keep going the way you do now, adapt to size of business, comparisons.</td>
<td>You seem to know what you are talking about; not “stiff” when it comes to atmosphere etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Got a dialogue started and commitment, deeper insight and understanding of the other family members’ views, thoughts and visions.</td>
<td>I feel that we could have many more meetings where we continued with education. E.g. organization, legal matters etc. etc.</td>
<td>Thank you!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>To have got to know more about the family and the business and what has happened during these years.</td>
<td>One more meeting.</td>
<td>It has been very interesting and fun and educational.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>An overview of which family members who are interested in participating in some form in the business activities in the future and I have also realized that I am interested in taking part something I didn’t know before.</td>
<td>No comment only participated in the last meeting and thought it was good.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Visions.</td>
<td>I have no objections.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Finding solutions where everyone is in agreement. Making everyone a winner.</td>
<td>Good to have the meetings on neutral ground.</td>
<td>Thanks for all the nice breakfasts!</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Getting to take part of the thoughts of everyone involves and the purpose of the ownership shift. Going through things, like housing, since I am not active in the business.</td>
<td>Interesting meetings, feels important and good to feel that I am also a part of the business although I am not active.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To find out what the sellers want. To talk it over together about the future. That the four of us have been able to sit in peace and quiet and talk and talk it over. Knowing what my partner wants.</td>
<td>Give plenty of time so people have time to think about what they want.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The business will continue as normal.</td>
<td>Good to meet the other part in the family, in my case my partners ex. Nice coffee breaks, no sweet stuff real bread instead!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Getting to hear the others thoughts.</td>
<td>Let it take its time, ripen.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Everyone got their voice heard.</td>
<td>The structure was good.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>That everyone involved got their say in an orderly manner.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Everyone’s opinions, that all opinions are considered. That we came to a decision.</td>
<td>Good meetings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The important thing is that we have sat down the whole family and really considered the issues around the ownership succession. The 5 year plan was good, to realize our parents won’t live to be 200 and we must deal with this whether we like it or not. That the ownership succession becomes good from a psychological</td>
<td>To learn the names of the participants beforehand. There was some confusion. It has been good and satisfactory. Good to get an outsider’s perspective. Getting new approaches, it’s easy to get too used to things.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>The most important has been to sit down together and talk. We talk a lot, but rarely so undisturbed and focused on this issue. Good to get perspectives from external people. Good that we know that we are striving in the same direction.</td>
<td>I think it’s been good, nothing to complain about. Sometimes the time has felt short, but I am also aware that it’s been due to us.</td>
<td>You have been easygoing and good to talk to. Now I hope everything goes well!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>You have highlighted the importance with competence and the soft parts. We have in a way, ourselves been on the right track I believe, but maybe your help will speed up the development.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>That some new sides to the kids came up.</td>
<td>Don’t know.</td>
<td>I thought that perhaps it would be more about the legal aspect of shift in ownership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>That it’s been adjusted so that everyone can make their voice heard.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>To start talking about how we should do this.</td>
<td>More practical information e.g. how it’s done legally.</td>
<td>Good that you saw to that everyone got their say.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>To have started the talks.</td>
<td>To give everyone equal time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>To feel that all our three children want to keep the business running.</td>
<td>To listen to everyone involves.</td>
<td>Useful with external information.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My story of KCC and Peter Lang

To situate where I am coming from professionally and to start to give an account of the systemic approach I want to tell about KCC, the organization and the persons that developed this professional doctorate.

Peter Lang is a therapist and a management consultant that has been working as supervisor and trainer since the eighties. He was born in Africa and studied to become a priest after he had moved to London in his youth. While working in his congregation he started to also train to become a therapist. When the big “revolution” in family therapy began in the eighties, Peter and his college Martin Little, both took part in it and eventually opened the Kensington Consultation Center (KCC) in London. The center offered individual and family therapy, consultation to organizations and lots of systemic training on all levels, from daylong workshops to professional doctorate studies that was validated by the University of Bedfordshire.

KCC has immensely influenced the developments of systemic and social constructionist ideas in Europe through innumerable courses in England and in many other countries, not the least in Scandinavia. They have also taken many of the most interesting practitioners and philosophers to London for seminars and workshops as well as held yearly summer schools; all which has created a vital systemic community. In a private communication with Mary and Ken Gergen 2007 we were talking about what contributions Peter Lang had made to the systemic community, they thought Peter is a great “weaver” of ideas; he takes everything in and creates his own “fabric” to use in his elegant practice and teaching. Unfortunately the KCC center was closed down during 2010 and the community is at the moment striving to survive, but the doctoral program has its continuation at the University of Bedfordshire as before.

My contact with Peter started 1996 when I participated in a course in systemic practice at the child psychiatric clinic in Visby, my former working place. The course was in a typical KCC setting with Peter and Elspeth McAdam who supervised the clinic at the time. Their task was to educate all staff and at the same time a broad audience from the municipality was invited to learn together with the staff of the clinic.
After this first inspiring one and a half year long experience I wanted to continue. As I then had started my organizational consultancy business I asked if Peter wanted to develop management courses together with us. Since then there has been a lot of learning’s, we have been organizing these courses at least one per year, which has meant having Peter almost every other month on Gotland and the opportunity of learning and developing together with him for a long time. My contact with Peter has of course been the most important reason for doing this systemic based professional doctorate and I wanted to have Peters voice ‘live’ in this dissertation. After talking to Peter we decided to include a Skype conversation around our memories. After the conversation was transcribed and Peter had taken part of it, we decided that it was ok to ‘fill out’ the text to give a wider insight in the teachings that has been going on and into the development of my way of thinking and working.

While it is because of Peter Lang that I am attending this doctorate program I would like to have him ‘live’ in this study. So Peter and I agreed on having a Skype conversation about our mutual memories and about what systemic management really is. After having recorded and transcribed our conversation, both Peter and I agreed on ‘filling the conversation out’ in a written way to better give an account of the teachings of Peter and the knowledge it has given me.

**Skype conversation July 2010**

Hello Peter it’s nice to talk to you again, as you know I will record this conversation and use it in the introduction of my dissertation to help describing where I come from’ as a psychologist and as a consultant. To start with I want to talk about when we first met at the child psychiatric clinic in Visby 1996, in the one and a half year long course you and Elspeth McAdam had on systemic practice.

Do you remember how I tried to convince you that you were totally wrong? I did not want to change my psychodynamic worldview that I had worked so hard to establish.

**KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING Lisen Kebbe 2011**

Professional Doctorate in Systemic Practice University of Bedfordshire
Goodness me was it that long ago! But Lisen it was good to be questioned, in that way you helped me to refine things and it’s good to question things because then you make them your own, when you do not just accept what people talk about, it makes it possible to open up for new thinking of your own.

Yes Peter but I really did not want to ‘open up’ because I thought I already knew the best way of working. So I was really struggling for a whole year.

Yes, but then you made a change, I wonder what were it that influenced you, how did you make it?

It’s hard to know Peter, we have talked about this before, the “flipping around”, the totally turning that the systemic and appreciative way of thinking creates compared to the more problem oriented way of working I practiced at that time. The basic shift of seeing a person’s identity as created in childhood as a fairly stable entity, almost as something physical that is harbored inside your chest. That is very different from the systemic idea that identity is created through our relations and the language we use, and that it is through the stories others tell about us. And you also started to talk about we-dentity Peter, to really stress how basic relations are to us. This shift turned the thinking of what to do when working upside down. In the psycho dynamic way of thinking it is the individual that is focused, the ‘inner life’ and history of the person.

Kihlbom (1981) says that the basic phenomenon guiding psychodynamic therapy is transference. The idea is that the patient is mistaking the present for her history and is playing out the feelings she were having toward an ‘early important object’, a parent for example, in the therapy room in relation to the therapist. The therapist then has to let the transference ‘bloom’ and ‘let the room be coulored’ by these intense emotions which makes it possible for the therapist to confront the patient by the gap between the transference (the feelings the patient is having towards the therapist in the moment) and reality. The therapist then helps the patient through intellectual and emotional
interpretations to get it right and in this way the conflicts from an earlier face of development in the patient’s life is being resolved and her ‘true personality can be released’.

This way of thinking that emotions could be incorrect and that there is somewhere else, on complicated structures that the focus should be is alien to systemic thinking. The notion that Harry Goolishian made; ‘Listen to what people are saying, not what they are meaning’ is key, the systemic therapist is not occupied with what is ‘behind’ the words. In psychodynamic theory the base is some generalized knowledge of the human mind that the patients talk is analyzed by.

The job of the systemic therapist is instead to co-create conversations and her expertise is:

“...limited to the process of therapy rather than to the content (diagnosis) and change (treatment) of pathological structure. Thus a therapist would not be driven by a search for the truth, but by a need to understand” (Harlene Anderson, 1997, p141)

In the systemic way you focus what is between people, relations, and you, as a therapist is inviting everybody to talk by listening and asking questions. You never make any interpretations; the idea is that our identity and actions are created by the language we speak. You are working here and now and are much more focused on the future then on the past.

Peter you often gave us the Dewy example of a person with a bow and arrow who is aiming at a target, this metaphor shows how the vision of the future target determines our actions at the moment. I want to reference from your and Elspeth’s book

“Everything that the person does is designed to reach the target. Reaching the target is a hoped for achievement, in the future. However, that future
achievement is literary forming everything that the person with the bow and arrow does in the present. The actions that the archer is taking, the way she takes aim, how tightly she draws the bow, how she judges the wind and the way it might affect the path of the arrow.....these are all parts of the future achievement. So, we would say that the future is not ‘out there’ but literally forming us in the present” (McAdam, Lang, 2009 p8).

So the main task in the systemic approach is to look for skills and abilities the person has, to talk about them which makes them grow and makes it possible for her or him to create the life they want to live. The goal in both dynamic and systemic ways of working is the same, but the ways to get there are very different.

During the first year of the course when I was talking and using ‘problem talk’ with clients, I noticed how the energy just left the room and it was like we all were ‘sinking’. I couldn’t understand what happened, but when working in the systemic, more appreciative way life and energy was created.

I had just started my own business at that time and had some ways of working that was prepared and, ahh...... It could happen in the middle of doing or saying something, I almost choked when I heard myself. I stopped believing in what I was doing but had not yet found a new approach, it was very uncomfortable. Then I started to make some changes when the systemic way of working had ‘spread in my system’. It accelerated when I got feedback from my clients. For a while I had these different ideas competing and fighting inside of me. I really tried to defend my old ways of viewing the world. I think the war lasted about a year; suddenly I realized I had developed a new way of working.

So Lisen what was it that made you open up to this new and different way of thinking?

Yes as you said Peter, my waste questioning of you, all the effort I put into proving how illogical your theories were really got me working. But what kept me coming back was your very respectful approach to us and the inspiring
ways of telling us all kinds of stories and interesting cases. I was very touched, but couldn’t make sense of it. The way you answered me, thoughtful, smiling and often with a touch of humor got me hooked. And as you say, it made it easier for me to develop my own learning’s. And then it was all these workshops you and Elspeth held, they were challenging and fun and I experienced that they worked. The easiness and the energy that was created in the room; I think all of this made an important impact on me. But it took a long time and that shows how much I valued my old way of working, at times I tried to keep them both as many do, but that never fitted for me.

Yes Lisen the energy that is created is one of the attractions. I was seen a little while ago by a woman who had had lots of psychodynamic therapy and now she wanted to come and see me and have systemic and narrative therapy and I accepted to do that. And she came and I was using all that scaffolding and remembering relationships and all that kind of thing from Michael White and I never made any criticism of the therapy that she had had and after 4-5 times she said “I did never really need to go through that long time therapy, now that I have got the chance to have the systemic I feel much better”. I just think it’s interesting that she said that.

Of course Peter, you work with different things, the focus is different. The same thing happened to me a couple of moth ago when the manager of a youth ward asked if I could see a young man. He said; “This boy is depressed, he has had the most terrible childhood, he comes from a refugee family, he has been trough drugs and criminality but I don’t think he needs at this moment to go through all that, he needs some of your systemic understanding and to become aware of all capacity he has and to get help to look into the future”. I accepted this request and we started to draw a mind map with pictures of everything he had in his mind and went on to really go into detail with all his skills and abilities and the resources he had in his family and his surroundings. Then we looked at the fears that gave him anxiety and made him depressed and reflected over if using any of his resources might make him feel
better. In my experience you have to be very stable to benefit from looking back at a disastrous childhoods.

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Peter after the course in the clinic was over we started to do the management courses, I do not know how many we have had, around 15, 8 days courses. It was also what made Sven and me work together so it has made a big difference for us. At that time Sven was studying IT and organization. He was reading lots of social constructionist theories on organization and we started to realize that we were talking about the same things from different perspectives, I from family therapy and Sven from organization. That made us decide to try to create the management leadership courses with you and soon Sven and I were working full time together. This is more than 10 years ago.

That is fantastic Lisen and you are still working together...... we really had some nice times together with the participants and they liked what they learned. This makes me think of somebody who told me that he had been working with a group and now had found out what the problem was in the organization. And that he had to find out what to do next to help them. I thought ‘if you just take the appreciative approach you are there in just two or three steps. You do not have to talk about it, find what is working’.

Yes it is much more likely that you can help them if you start to talk about how to achieve the future they are wanting, achievement talk instead of problem talk that helps grow ‘we-dentities’. This has also to do with the formative and creative powers of language.

So Peter, here is one of the important ideas of your take on the systemic way of working; to talk about problems or to talk about what works, there is always something to be proud of or else would the organization been closed down.

Yes to instead use the appreciate process where we start by looking for what is desired, to see problems as frustrated dreams, we have problems because we would like life to be different, it is no good to give problems to much attention.
Instead be quick to focus on what gives life and creativity in the organization and encourage them to do more of that. That creates a totally different emotionality that can be used for finding new ways forward. This is a very different approach compared to first making the effort to be clear of what the problems are in the organization.

Yes talking about emotionality Peter, here we have another important strand.

Yes the ideas of the social construction of emotions that we learned from Harre’ (1996) has been very liberating for our way of working. We see emotions as something we learn; “….as we are born and grow up in relationships with others we learn to behave with emotional abilities within a cultural context…….Most usefully, emotions are an invitation to someone to do something” (McAdam, Lang 2009, p44). So to be aware of the emotionality we create by the ways we are working and talking is very important.

I agree with you there Peter, we have many times experienced the freeing of creativity and energy when people in an organization are helped to look for what is working and allowing themselves to be proud of work done by themselves as well as by their work mates. The generous atmosphere that is created makes it possible to talk about the most difficult things later on.

Peter I remember when I first heard you talk about ‘problems as frustrated dreams’, it was hard to hear the words, what did you mean, problems and dream in the same sentence? This is an example of what got me exited and confused at the same time. As a psychologist I was trained for many years to be an expert on finding and analyzing problems, you can see what hard times you gave me.

Peter do you remember in the beginning when we arranged the management courses, you also supervised almost all of our work, I chased you, drove you to the airport and we talked and talked, that was great learning for me, I was terrible!!

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING Lisen Kebbe 2011

Professional Doctorate in Systemic Practice University of Bedfordshire
Yes it was a very interesting time, a lot of things happened, there came people even from the university and they thought it was interesting what we were doing. They got a lot out of it.

Yes they did, they really appreciated it. We also had these “kvarsittare” participants that attended the course over and over again. It was never boring, you could never know what would happen, there were so many different practices and philosophical notions to talk about. We developed new exercises all the time and of course the different participants created every course in a new way. It was always the first first, the first second.... the first eighth course and so on. There was always the surprising freshness. What more do you think Peter was important that the participants got out of these eight days? I called it training camps; we always had a lot of practicing.

One thing they got I think is how you can posture yourself differently I think that is useful, how you can move your position.

Yes I remember when you told the Danish story about a group of boys having a stag party, showing how a different story, a different context, creates different emotionality. The story went; a group of young men were throwing cream cake in the face of one of the men. An old lady passed by and shouted: Shame on you! She was angry and wanted to help the poor young man. But when they told her it was a stag party she picks up a cake herself and with a cry of delight thru it on the groom to be.

Lisen another thing that I think was important was this wonder idea.

Yes Peter you made very strong exercises out of these ideas that gave us bodily feelings of the power of communication and storytelling. When we asked participants to tell each other of a story of when they had experienced something that was exceptional, something that was like a wonder something they had experienced with awe. I remember how we played with the words, English and Swedish; wonderful, vördnad, vördnadsfull, ....no I don’t remember, but I’m sure you do Peter, I just remember doing it...
Yes, we experienced in this exercise how telling about these kind of experiences created a special way of using words, of special tone of voice, warm feelings spreading in our bodies and how it instantly builds good relations and possibilities and longings for future cooperation’s. This is another example of how growing ‘warm’ emotionality makes a big difference for our relations and the performative powers of languaging.

So Peter what more is the systemic?

I think this idea that I really like is that “everything is perfect” for the time being and then you can hypostasize around that. It makes a great difference in the contact and respect with people this way of thinking. When working with kids, kids who have acted in a way we usually consider really terrible, it gives a sense of respecting these kids, and it also creates a sense of respect for our self.

As you say in your book; “Maturanas ideas (1985) of everything are being coherent or part of a “perfection” at any point in time for that context – that there is always a coherent explanation for any social behavior. This is a useful idea to work with when trying to understand something that does not make sense” (McAdam, Lang, 2009, p43).

Yes Peter not to get stuck with the idea that there is one truth, if one person is right the other one has to be wrong. There are at least as many perspectives as there are persons involved. At the moment I am curious about a young successor in a family I am working with. He is so angry but he doesn’t use our conversations to tell about what’s on his mind. This is puzzling me, I am wondering what he is loyal to and I will try to find a good way of being able for him to feel respected and to talk to his family next time we meet. But it is very to think he is stupid, spoiled etc....But instead to be curious about how the ‘world is perfect’ for him at this moment in time helps me not to get stuck as a facilitator of conversations in this family.
Peter another thing people have been talking about as important is the context markers and the difference it makes to be aware of how the context we are in creates the meaning of what we are talking about. Bateson likens context with a frame and Hedges writes about context as story. But I guess it is the late Wittgenstein (1953) we all are leaning on when he writes something like this; to understand a word or a concept means being able to use it in its context and that we are only able to put something into practice when we really do understand it. This means that what we hear and understand from a conversation depends on what we expect to hear in that situation. So in line with this you often talked about the importance, as a manager, of being clear of what circumstance you are in, to be aware of the context of time, place and relationships.

Yes Lisen and that brings us into the domains. The context is connected to which domain we are in at any place and time and how we use that. The domain model was inspired by Maturana and Varela (1987) and I, Marin Little and Vernon Cronen (1990) wrote an article called “The systemic professional: domains of action and the question of neutrality” (ÅR). This has to do with what I talked of before about the ability to ‘move yourself’. From the beginning we needed to help people working in social services to sort out different tasks, the different contexts for their different interventions. When performing legal interventions in child protection, taking children into custody and when they perform more supporting, therapeutic tasks they are in different contexts. For them it was important to be able to sort out what kind of context and what kind of conversations to have.

Peter I have read Christine Olivers book, “Reflexive Inquiry” (2005), she writes about the domain model like this; “In the model we are invited to treat the world as if it is separated out into three meta contexts or domains: Of production, explanation and aesthetics. Within each domain the individual actor values a particular way of seeing and acting in that world...(..)...The model help us to challenge a pattern whereby we might act in one domains as if that is THE way of seeing and acting in the world, rather than one position
taken for particular purposes, in the knowledge that the position is temporary and partial and operating within a wider context” (p34-35). I think she, as an old KCC worker, is describing it consist and well. I remember many managers on the course that felt such a relieve when becoming aware of the different demands that is laying on their shoulders and found it helpful to be able to discriminate between having different conversations with their employees in different situations.

In my dissertation I am addressing the family business literatures way of talking about business and family as two competing systems, families as emotional and the business as logic. I am opposing that. They think what is messing everything up is this overlapping of the two fields. I want to challenge this idea of family being emotional and relational and business only being logic.

Lisen this makes me think of a quote from Cecchin that said; when families talk about money they are really talking about relationships and when they are talking about relationships then they are talking about money.

It is very interesting, have you done some interviewing in the voice of the house, I suddenly saw when you said that that you should interview them in the voice of the house as a living person, you can do it with the house and then with the farm. Lisen you can use this questioning way and you get it all together.

What I mean is that the families will understand through talking, it’s kind of what we have done during the years. Speaking with the voice of the other, Carl Tomm wrote about it, but it was Michael White that made it, there must be some papers about that from the eighties, speaking in the voice of another.

Of course Peter these ideas of the split between emotions and logic also lives in the family, I haven’t really thought about that because I have my emotional glasses on when I am with them.
That example you used Lisen with the woman that would never live in the house, it would be interesting to see what she would say if she would talk of the voice of the house.

Yes that’s a very good idea Peter, do you know, now she is living in the house, they just moved in there half a year ago.

Peter do you know that when Sven and I think we are doing a really good job then we say we are ‘petering’.

I think it’s interesting, this ‘petering’, I myself would use ‘Maturana would say’, ‘Bateson….’ so when one does that it always creates a space where you can discuss and think about the way Bateson thinks and what Bateson would have said and to talk back to him. So ‘petering’ I think is a way of saying to you self, of creating a space for a discussion and a debate for leadership and a culture.

Yes Peter that is right, I remember the first time we did it, we were recommended to do a job in social services in a municipality north of Stockholm. It was a little nervous the first time we met, they had a lot of ‘problems’. I remember when we went there on the train the first time, we said to each other: we have to do some ‘petering’, we can’t just come there and listen to their problems we have to tell a story in the beginning, something local, something about coming there, something very immediate, to create a good atmosphere and to set a context by telling something that is interesting and nice to think of and at the same time makes a good way of presenting ourselves.

Yes Lisen it’s a nice way of introducing yourself to tell a story so when you are ‘petering’ you are using story, and you ask people to join you so you can join them.

Yes in this way it opened up for them to tell their stories and when they presented themselves they told about different things and we had a nice atmosphere to start to work from. So is that systemic?

Yes Lisen it would all be systemic, because what you are doing is joining their grammar, and working with your approach, which is not to control your questions, but an approach that opens up an understanding for them. When we read the article “Hypothesizing, circularity and questioning” by Selvini, Boscolo, Checcin, Prata in 1980 it was the first time we started to talk about questions as the most important tourniquet of development, and by feeding different types of questions we open up for learning.
Peter as I have told you before, the work we were doing together with you meant everything for us. In the beginning Sven and I tried very hard to make a program and we tried to make you stay with it. But what happened when the participants came was always something different, everything came alive and the needs and contributions from the group always made a new experience. And I guess that was the greatest learning of them all. To always be open, to start and foster a dialogue in the group, because the participant we had were all very experienced people and the mutual learning was great.
Meeting with John Shotter and the dialogic way of thinking

When making the decision to apply for the Professional Doctorate I wanted to know more about professor John Shotter who was going to be the main responsible person for the teachings on the course at KCC. I had his book “Conversational Realities” at home; it had been in our bookshelf for at least ten years. Peter had told us to read it. And I tried and I tried... but I could not make any sense of it. So I was a little worried if he was going to be the main teacher, I had to find out if it was at all possible to understand him.

There was a two days course in Luton some months before the application for the Professional Doctorate had to be send in which I decided to attend. Sitting on the train to Luton I was looking at people in the wagon like the tourist I was. There were not so many passengers, I started curiously to attend to two women on the other side of the row and decided that they looked just as much as foreigners as I did. When I heard them speaking Danish I knew, they must be on their way to the same course. I had never been to Luton before and the only guide I had was a map on a wrinkled paper showing the way. When getting off the train we saw strange looking warehouses that seemed abandoned, stores that looked like ‘holes in the wall’ and further on loads of university buildings. I felt totally unsecure and asked the Danish women if we could make company. Together we found our way and we chatted all the way about KCC and Peter Lang, about our jobs and hopes for the course and of how curious we were on John Shotter. It started to feel better.

Finally we were all seated in a large circle, around twenty of us; the professor, John Shotter, looked and sounded exactly as I had expected. Friendly, with a little ‘bewildered professors like expression’ in his face and with the aura of having read all the book you could ever dream of reading, not one time but over and over again. He taught us for two days with what had been a term long course when he was teaching at the University of New Hampshire.

What I remember among other things is the story of “The cat sat on the mat...” and how different intonations; readings, gave the story different contexts and meanings. I also remember the Batson story about some art student; Bateson through a cooked crab on the desk and told the students; “convince me that this is the remains of a living thing”. After
that we made lists of what are the signs of something that is living compared to something that is dead. I guess that John after that made the connections to the embodied, relational and dialogical kind of communication that is his field, but I did not understand it at that point. But I was eager to enter into this world. Finally I had met someone who talked about the tiniest parts of communication, it opened up for studying conversations in great, great detail, to understand what makes it “tick” in different ways. I was hooked.

Something else that made me even more eager to go regularly to London was that after the course I was going back into London to meet with Anne Radford, a friend and a consultant within the Appreciative Inquiry field. When Anne heard that John was driving me she invited us for a drink at the Tate Gallery witch she lives nearby and was a member of. It all ended up with them inviting me to dinner in the restaurant on the top floor of the Tate. We were sitting there discussing all the interesting things, me listening a lot to the beautiful English thongs, looking at the roof of St Paul’s Cathedral on top of one of the most fantastic modern art museums in the world and my introduction to the Professional Doctoral course could not have been better.