Forum Conversations: An organisational theatre method for improving managers’ interpersonal communication

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ABSTRACT

Forum Conversations is an organisational theatre method for helping individuals to deal with their difficult conversations in the workplace. It uses professional actors to simulate participants’ ‘difficult others’ and to play out confrontational conversations from participants’ own experience. This study adds to the empirical base of research into organisational theatre. It further conceptualises organisational theatre methods as reflective or refractive.

This qualitative, interpretive study examines the perspectives of both participants and actors through a dramatistic lens and also assesses if and how the Forum Conversations method has affected changes in behaviour and approach in the ways individual participants communicate with others in the workplace. In this assessment a novel, methodological approach based on attributions made by participants was used to make comparisons between individuals’ pre- and post- Forum Conversations views about their difficult conversations. Outcomes included improvements in confidence and awareness but also of agency in participants’ dealings with others.

The interaction between actors and participants is discussed in terms of a partial dialogism that dwells in the moment of exchange between interactants. From the actors’ side the study highlights the subtly layered reflexivity of the actors in process and also of their tendency to accentuate performance skills. In this context, the interaction is seen to compare with the way professional actors might use rehearsal to prepare for theatre performance.

Overall, it is concluded that Forum Conversations is a powerful learning method that enables participants to embody their learning experience and leads to sustained individual change that occasionally includes personal transformation both at work and at home.
DECLARATION

I declare that no portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGM – Annual General Meeting
AI – Analytic Induction
ASQ – Attributional Style Questionnaire
OASQ – Occupational Attributional Style Questionnaire
BAM – British Academy of Management
CIPD – Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
COO – Chief Operating Officer
DBA – Doctor of Business Administration
FC – Forum Conversation
LACS – Leeds Attributional Coding System
MBA – Master of Business Administration
NHS – National Health Service (UK)
OPP – Oxford Psychologists Press
OT – Organisational Theatre
RCT – Relational Communication Theory
RDT – Relational Dialectics Theory
TIO – Theatre in Organisations
THE AUTHOR

I was a professional actor in conventional theatre and television in the UK for over twenty years. During the latter part of this time I became casually involved in organisational theatre and eventually decided to leave conventional theatre to engage fully with organisational theatre. An academic interest in organisational behaviour led me to undertake a Masters in Organisational Behaviour at City University for which I researched the nature of leadership communication in videoconferencing. This present doctoral study is the only other formal research I have undertaken.

My organisational theatre practice included role-play for management development, corporate forum theatre and ‘invisible’ theatre where I might, for example, be clandestinely inserted as a member of an organisational group and told to ‘mess them up a bit’. I wrote poetry for organisational change events and scripted plays for corporate forum theatre. I invited attendees at conferences to write narrative plots for which colleagues and I then improvised the script and action. On one occasion this practice found me with nothing on but a towel in front of over a hundred senior civil servants in a Mayfair hotel. I am familiar with many organisational theatre practices.

One particular practice, the rehearsal of participants’ own problematic communication with others in the workplace, eventually became the mainstay of my work. This practice is the role-play of participants’ own problematic encounters with others in the workplace; a practice referred to in this thesis as Forum Conversations.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION OF THESIS

1.1 Introduction

The thesis is about the impact on participants of an organisational theatre method for practicing how to deal with difficult conversations that arise with colleagues, customers and suppliers in the workplace. The precise method under discussion is referred to in this research as Forum Conversations. This is an empirical study and as such seeks to contribute to knowledge of the effects of organisational theatre in a field where there is little empirical research into its processes and outcomes.

1.2 Organisational theatre

1.2.1 The research topic context

Organisational theatre (OT) is the umbrella term for a wide range of theatre-based activities in organisations not only in the UK and USA but also across the world (e.g. Meisiek and Barry, 2007 (Denmark); Nair, 2011 (India); Lesevre, 2012 (France). Activities include entertainment at corporate conferences and shareholder meetings (Westwood, 2004; Clark and Mangham, 2004a; Biehl-Missal, 2011 and 2012), management development role-play and Forum Theatre (Nissley et al, 2004; Galland et al, 2008; Rae, 2011) and theatre plays of various lengths written especially to address particular issues of organisational change or development (Meisiek and Barry, 2007; Bunt, 2011).

Organisational theatre is generally recognised as having arrived as a field of academic interest with the publication of a special interest issue of the Organisational Studies journal in 2004 (Darsø and Meisek, 2007). The editors of this special edition (Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004) suggest that theatre has been studied extensively in an organisational setting as metaphor (e.g. Goffman, 1959) or model (e.g. Mangham, 1990) or even ontology (e.g. Burke, 1969a) but rarely as praxis.

Despite such a hinterland of interest, it seems strange that there are few empirical studies of organisational theatre and its impact on organisational life. Further, most of these are descriptive, single studies. Recognising this lack of empirical research, as well as limited focus in organisational theatre in relation to broader debates in management studies, Clark (2008) outlined the wide scope of the research potential of organisational theatre. Nevertheless, whilst descriptive reports continue
to appear in the literature, there still seems little evidence of empirical research, although Rae (2011, 2013) raised the bar with an in depth empirical study of corporate forum theatre, one of the most common organisational theatre methods.

Thus the impact of organisational theatre on organisational life appears to have been little studied, despite numerous claims for the benefits of learning from theatre methods. For instance, it is claimed that benefits include the projection of different visions of organisational reality and thus of new possibilities for personal and corporate performance (Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004). It is claimed that organisational theatre provides an embodied, holistic experience that enhances learning (Elm and Taylor, 2010; Lesevre, 2012) and provides a space for creative dialogue (Darsø et al, 2007). Yet, there remains in the organisational theatre literature a limited and ambiguous picture both of what different organisational theatre practices actually effect in organisational life, and also of how they might achieve their effects. Given that organisational theatre now provides an alternative source of income for many professionally trained actors and that organisations seem content with organisational gains that apparently accrue from organisational theatre (e.g. Pollitt, 2010; Bunt, 2011), why might the scarcity of empirical study pose a problem?

1.3 The problem

The problematic has potentially phenomenological, critical, methodological and ethical aspects. There may be insufficient understanding about what theatre processes are capable of achieving. Conversely, there may be attempts to achieve more than the processes are capable of, as was suspected to be the case in an observation of a piece of corporate forum theatre (Clark and Mangham, 2004b). The reasons for which theatre methods are utilised in organisations may reflect a lack of understanding of specific organisational needs – the selection of organisational theatre by commissioners may be based on novelty value or simply fashion. Lack of understanding makes it less likely that theatre method can be explored and new forms developed in an organisational context, or its practitioners developed and trained effectively. It may be that theatre processes that are designed for testing and critiquing social relations may be misappropriated and used in the opposite sense, which is to secure audience compliance with dominant organisational scripts (Nissley et al, 2004). One consequence of this may be that theatre in this sense becomes ‘Lite’ and underpowered (Clark and Mangham, 2004b) and, perversely, a means of organisational control rather than of the evocation of new realities. Finally, without examination of the effects of
organisational theatre it is difficult to understand the epistemological basis of how knowledge is transferred between theatre and organisational life, and between professional and organisational actors.

1.4 Meeting participants in ‘their own world’

Role-plays are commonplace in management development (Petzold, 1972; Clegg, 2000) and are generally regarded as a successful means of inculcating learning. However, in my own practice as a professional role player I have often heard from learners that the situations and the roles they have been given to play do not reflect their real life experience sufficiently well to make the exercise valid.

On one occasion, early in my own practice, a senior civil servant refused to take part in a scripted role play because she claimed that she would never have allowed herself to get into the predicament of the character she was asked to play in the role-play scenario and thus it wasn't 'real'. Consequently she regarded the exercise as a waste of time. I suggested that she place the exercise in her own 'world' as she would expect to find it. This entailed a few minutes briefing about details of the civil servant’s own situation. This meant that I, as the actor, moved into the civil servant’s perceived reality rather than expect her to move into the 'reality' of the fictitious role-play. This was a successful transposition of context and the civil servant felt able to practice the learning within the familiarity of her own real world situation.

Other practitioners have similar experiences of learners being frustrated with scripted role-plays. Perhaps because of this, the practice of one-to-one simulations where participants set their own scene has become a standard offering of many practitioners. This process has a number of different proprietary names in practice including ‘Live Issues’, ‘Courageous conversations’ and ‘Transformational conversations’. For the purposes of this research project the practice is referred to as ‘Forum Conversations’ (FCs). The method is described in the textbox in Fig. 1.1

In my experience FCs seem to have a powerful impact and over time I have heard informal reports of personal transformations back in the workplace. However, I have never seen a formal evaluation of any effects and I do not know of any other practitioner who has. Indeed, it is rare that any organisational theatre event I have been involved in has been evaluated beyond 'happy sheets' at the time of the event. Rae (2011) seems to have found a similar issue in her study of corporate forum theatre. I sense FCs to be a powerful learning intervention but have no formal knowledge or understanding of its effects and impact.
Box 1.1 A summary of the Forum Conversations Process

**Forum Conversations**

Participants are encouraged to produce a current difficult communication with work colleagues or customers. These might also be past encounters or anticipated encounters.

There are usually no more than six people in a group. Each group will have one professional actor who may also be the facilitator. Participants take a turn at describing a difficult situation that is, or has been, adversely impacting their work. The actor will ask about the background situation, the character of the ‘difficult other’ and examples of their behaviour. Questions will be asked about the setting of the encounter, participants’ explanations of the difficulties and what outcome the participant is seeking. This takes no more than 10 minutes.

The actor will then enact the ‘difficult other’ as if in the real situation described by the participant. The rest of the group observes this conversation. At the end of between 5 and 20 minutes of playing time, the meeting is halted. All parties, players and observers, then comment on the experience.

The participant may then be given the opportunity to ‘replay’ the conversation, or selected parts of it. In this replaying period the participant may at any time appeal for further help and advice from the group. The experience is summarised. A second participant then comes forward for his/her ‘Forum Conversation’, and so on until all members of the group have participated.

**1.5 Aims and objectives of the research**

My research interest was initially to understand more about the nature of organisational theatre in general, simply because I was unaware of writing on this subject and wished to investigate some of the problems outlined above. In response to suggestions by Clark (2008) for more research in the field, and in particular to what he describes as ‘the fuzzy nexus’ where participants engage with theatre, I decided to focus the research on Forum Conversations. This is because they constitute a precise moment of engagement in the nexus between organisational and professional actors. In this I declare my partial interest as practitioner and recognise the need to retain a heightened reflexivity in my critique.
The particular aims of the research are to find answers to the following research questions:

- What is the nature of Forum Conversations?
- What is the impact of Forum Conversations?
- Why do Forum Conversations have impact?

I am aware that FCs may be regarded as a variant of management role-play, which has pre-dated the term organisational theatre by at least forty years as evidenced by the publication of ‘Role play in Business and Industry’ in 1961 by Corsini et al. The fundamental assumption in the use of role-play is that by practicing or demonstrating skills in ‘realistic’ scenarios individuals will be better prepared for similar ‘real’ events within their working lives (Clegg, 2000). At one level Forum Conversations assumes and offers no more than this. However, my sense is that professional actors bring something else to the ‘fuzzy nexus’ of the interaction between actor and participant, which is more theatre than role-play. Further objectives therefore include:

- Situating Forum Conversations as an organisational theatre method. This entails viewing Forum Conversations through the dramaturgical lens of the field of study of organisational theatre.

- The evaluation of Forum Conversations against claims that organisational theatre creates a forum for dialogue about change. This is referenced to individual change arising from Forum Conversations.

1.6. Research design

It was decided that because there is so little empirical evidence in the literature to inform a deductive inquiry, that an exploratory, inductive approach be taken that seeks what Bergman (2008) calls enhancement of understanding and practice (i.e. of FCs). Hence a qualitative, interpretivist approach was taken to gain a value-rich, constructionist understanding rather than what might be deemed to be a more scientific, reductionist and value-free account (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). This inquiry is into both participants’ and professional actors’ perceptions of the FC experience. As Maxwell (2005, p.22) states this “includes, cognition, affect, intentions and anything else that can be encompassed in what qualitative researchers often refer to as the participants’ perspective”.

There are three separate studies with three separate research populations. Two of the studies are thematic analyses of actors’ and participants’ separate accounts of their experience of FCs. The first of these was of a number of managers who had undertaken FCs at least one year earlier. The second was of actors who are experienced practitioners in FCs.

The third study used attribution theory (Heider, 1958, Weiner, 1985) as the basis of comparisons between the views of participants either side of the Forum Conversations event. Most empirical studies of organisational theatre obtain data from simple, cross-sectional surveys after the event. Therefore, possibly for the first time in empirical studies of organisational theatre, it was decided to attempt a pre-test post-test research design in order to determine any changes that might be adduced to participants’ experience of FCs.

The researched population was thirty-nine managers from a wide range of organisations and sectors including Government, Law, Health, Manufacturing and IT and ten professional actors.

The research is underpinned by theories of interpersonal communication including relational dialectics theory (Baxter and Braithwaite, 2010) and attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Weiner, 1985). Other relevant theoretical constructs include symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1954), dialogue (e.g. Isaacs, 2000; Deetz, 2006) and dialogism (Bakhtin, 1984).

1.7 Significance of the research

The research is of FCs, which are intended to help people rehearse their difficult conversations with others in the workplace. Poor and difficult communication seems to be an increasing problem in organisational life.

A recent survey of disputes in the workplace across the western world (OPP, 2008) produced the average figure of productive time lost to dealing with dispute as 2.1 hours per week per employee. Other surveys have attempted to put a financial cost to the wider impact of conflict and disputes in the workplace in the UK. Yet other survey evidence shows the opposite view, that good communication practice enhances productivity. The surveys are summarised in Table 1.1.

In sum, a picture emerges of a widespread waste of time and money, of frustration and of discontent that arises from dispute and poor communication in the workplace, along with a potential negative impact on the bottom line.
The use of theatre-based methods and professional actors in organisational learning and training seems to have been largely associated with the assumption that actors and theatre-based methods offer insights and skills for improved interpersonal communication behaviour. Therefore in the context of a poor and costly interpersonal communication environment in organisations it is important to determine the impact of organisational theatre practices, including Forum Conversations.

Table 1.1 *Surveys undertaken to show costs of dispute and poor communication in workplace. * - shows inverse of this

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Survey Source</th>
<th>Survey statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Microsoft – 200 countries</td>
<td>32 percent of respondents rated the most common productivity pitfalls as unclear objectives, lack of team communication and ineffective meetings. 5.6 hours per person per week are lost in unproductive meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution - UK</td>
<td>Conflict is costing business £33 billion every year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Watson Wyatt – USA*</td>
<td>Communication effectiveness is a leading indicator of financial performance. Firms that communicate effectively are 4.5 times more likely to report high levels of employee engagement versus firms that communicate less effectively. Companies that are highly effective communicators are 20 percent more likely to report lower turnover rates than their peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>OPP Ltd in association with Chartered Institute for Personnel Development (CIPD)</td>
<td>370 million days lost per year in UK – equivalent to £37 billion per year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>CIPD</td>
<td>Number of days of management and HR time spent on managing both disciplinary and grievance cases has gone up since 1997, from 13 to 18 days (disciplinary) and from 9 to 14.4 days (grievance).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.8 Organisation of the thesis

The thesis is organised into ten chapters.

Chapter 1 – introduces the research topic, the research problem and the objectives of the research. It also provides an overview of the design and wider implications of findings. Finally, it describes the organisation of the thesis.

Chapter 2 - looks at organisational theatre’s aims, practices and impact and how this is currently regarded in organisational studies. This is with a view to situating Forum Conversations in the field of organisational theatre.

Chapter 3 - seeks understanding of the world in which organisational theatre practitioners/actors and organisational actors meet. This means looking at how the organisational world, and indeed the human world, is viewed through the lens of drama and dramaturgy. The purpose of this chapter is to understand the epistemological basis of how knowledge is understood and transferred by both participants and actors and by analysts and researchers in this field.

Chapter 4 – examines what dialogue means as a key outcome claimed for organisational theatre. This is in order to distinguish the basis of how participants of organisational theatre communicate with others during and after the event.

Chapter 5 – is the Methodology chapter. It justifies and explicates the choice of the interpretivist research framework of Denzin and Lincoln (2005). It also introduces the ontological stance of this research. The chapter clarifies the choice of data collection by semi-structured interview and the analytical methods of template analysis and attributional analysis. It ends with a consideration of quality and ethical issues of this research.

Chapter 6 – Study 1: the thematic analysis of the perspectives of fifteen managers on FCs. The findings demonstrate a powerful, sustained impact on the thinking and behaviour of the participants.

Chapter 7 – Study 2: the attributional analysis of the pre-FC and post-FC interviews of twenty-four managers. The analysis also includes an analytic induction (AI) of the data. The comparison of the attributions shows clear gains in confidence and agency for many of the participants. The AI shows four overall patterns in participants’ response to the Forum Conversations experience.

Chapter 8 – Study 3: the thematic analysis of the interviews with ten actors who have experience of FCs. The analysis indicates that there are dialogistic dynamics in
the way FCs are performed. Also there is an indication that FCs are similar to rehearsals in conventional theatre.

Chapter 9 – Discussion of the findings in relation to the literature. Burke’s Pentadic ratios (1969a) are also used as a way of integrating the findings from the three studies.

Chapter 10 – Conclusion of the thesis summarises answers to the three main research questions. Answers include new understanding about the nature of the interaction between participant and actor, the transformational impact of the process and the mirroring of the participants in the process as a basis for why FCs have impact. Limitations are discussed and suggestions made for future research projects. Included is a reflexive statement about what I have discovered as a practitioner of Forum Conversations.
CHAPTER 2: THEATRE IN ORGANISATIONS

2.1 Introduction: situating Forum Conversations within the field of theatre in organisations

As a method that uses professional actors in interaction with an organisational audience Forum Conversations might be regarded as a discrete example of the practice of theatre in organisations.

Theatre has been used in an organisational context in a range of different ways (e.g. Rosen, 1985 – dramaturgy of corporate identity; Czarniawska- Joerges and Wolff, 1991 – managers as actors; Oswick et al, 2000 – scripting of plays to express organisational dynamics; Meisiek, 2002 – situation drama; Bryant and Darwin, 2003 – an immersive study of change; Nair, 2011 - immersive role play; Gibb, 2004 - effects of forum theatre; Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004 – organisational theatre; Larsen, 2005 – improvisation and change; Meisiek and Barry, 2007– Forum Theatre and organisational development; Galland et al, 2008 – developing research scientists’ communication skills; Daly et al, 2009 - improvisation in a service industry).

Various analytical frames and typologies have been used within organisational studies in attempts to organise these practices into a phenomenological field of enquiry within which to identify and comprehend their nature and forms (Schreyögg, 2000; Meisiek, 2002; Nissley et al, 2004; Clark, 2008; Rae, 2011). A brief review of these frames and typologies provides an outline of the application of theatre in organisations (TIO). The Forum Conversations method is then situated within this field of practice.

The review also highlights the diverse, problematic and contested role that theatre plays in organisational life and the impact it makes. In consequence it becomes possible to examine Forum Conversations through the multi-faceted lens of this problematic and thus draw conclusions about the kind of practice that constitutes Forum Conversations.

2.2 Theatre in organisations (TIO) as ‘technology’

2.2.1. Corporate theatre

Clark and Mangham (2004a) characterise theatre in organisations as a number of forms of ‘technology’ - the intentional application of tools directed to specific
outcomes and goals. Drawing on the thinking of Cole (1975) Clark and Mangham see this application of theatre as a means of manifesting imaginative life as physical presence – "Everything that figures in theatre can be understood in terms of the role it plays in the process of manifestation" (Cole, 1975, p.x). Thus theatre may be thought of as a powerful tool for the projection of wished for realities. In this sense, ‘corporate theatre’ as one of the four technological forms Clark and Mangham identify, is seen as theatre whose application is to project and reinforce corporate identity and to spotlight corporate performance and image (Pineault, 1989; Clark and Mangham, 2004a; Biehl-Missal, 2011). For Clark and Mangham a principal feature of corporate theatre is that audiences are deemed to be mere recipients of the corporate messages being projected and are intended to ‘feel’ these messages via the aesthetics of production.

2.2.2. Organisational theatre

In contrast Clark and Mangham suggest that ‘organisational theatre’ as another of their technological forms of theatre appears to ask the audience to ‘think’ (Clark and Mangham, 2004a, p. 55). Darsø and Meisiek (2007) credit Georg Schreyögg with originating the term organisational theatre to describe the use of theatre methods in organisations (Schreyögg, 2001; Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004). However, as Nissley et al (2004) point out, Schreyögg’s definition of organisational theatre as classical theatre that has been commissioned by a specific client organisation to address a specific problem for a specific organisational audience hardly describes the multiplicity of theatre-based practices used in organisations. Nevertheless, the term organisational theatre is generally regarded as the generic term for theatre practice in organisations.

Key to Schreyögg and Höpfl’s thinking seems to be that audiences see a different version (what might be) of their own reality (what is) presented to them on stage and in consequence learn that ‘what is’ is contingent and therefore accessible to change (Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004, p. 698). According to Schreyögg and Höpfl, citing Luhman’s theory of second order observation (1997), a possible explanation for the effects of organisational theatre upon its audiences is a splitting of perception that enables new thinking to emerge. The effect of this is supposed to ‘unblock gridlocked situations or to render the undiscussable ‘discussable’ (Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004, p.697) and as Clark (2008) suggests, can be thought of as akin to Lewin’s freeze, unfreeze, freeze model of change (1951). However, little or no empirical evidence seems to have been produced to demonstrate Schreyögg and Höpfl’s use of second order observation theory as an explanation of the effects of organisational theatre.
2.2.3. Radical theatre

Clark and Mangham describe a third form of theatre technology as ‘radical theatre’. Radical theatre was advocated by Coopey (1998) as a theatre form whose explicit intention is to create a privileged and protected space in which organisational actors might freely explore and play with ideas that can be taken into emancipatory, political action. In such a space according to Coopey (1998, p. 374) participants are enabled to take on a ‘ludic role’ enabling them “to participate in playing around with norms, customs, regulations, laws which govern their life in society.”

Coopey draws extensively on Boal’s Forum Theatre for his thinking about radical theatre in organisations (Boal, 1979). Forum Theatre seeks to engage its audiences in direct action against perceived oppressions to which audience members feel subject. Since Coopey’s call for a radical theatre (1998), an alternative theatre form that has been referred to as a Boal-lite version of Forum Theatre (Clark and Mangham, 2004b) has emerged as an educative theatre method in organisations (Rae, 2011). A number of observers (Meisiek, 2002; Clark and Mangham, 2004b; Nissley et al, 2004; Rae, 2013) draw sharp distinctions between the liberating ethic of Boal’s original Forum Theatre and the emergent lite-form (hereinafter referred to as corporate forum theatre), which is seen by contrast as a means for organisations to instil required normative behaviours (e.g. Pollitt, 2010; Bunt, 2011) often under the guise of an offer of open dialogue to its audience (Rae, 2011). Boal’s original intention for Forum Theatre to be used as an instrument for action against oppression is seen by some as having been subverted by dominant organisational voices as a means of manipulative control (Nissley et al, 2004).

2.2.4. Situation drama

A fourth form of Clark and Mangham’s theatre as technology is ‘situation drama’ that has been described by Meisiek (2002) as an instrument of change management. This appears to contain both Schreyögg and Höpfl’s definition of organisational theatre and the corporate forum theatre form identified as being predominantly used in organisations (Rae, 2011).

In ‘situation drama’ a play is performed to a specific audience and will have been written and performed by professional writers and actors to address a specific organisational issue in order to prepare the audience for change. The play might also have been written and produced in partnership with organisational actors and during its performance members of the audience might be encouraged to ‘intervene
spontaneously’ in the performance ‘whenever they feel they would like to change the plot in favour of their own ideas’ (Meisiek, 2002, p. 48). This would appear to encourage free participation by the audience and thus to move towards the ideas advocated by Coopey for a radical theatre. However, Meisiek is of the view that “Management buys the situation drama as a means of exerting influence” (Meisiek, 2002, p. 48) and elsewhere Rae (2013) points out that in corporate forum theatre audiences are often steered via various means towards the organisation’s predetermined scripts rather than to an uninhibited exploration of thinking.

2.2.5 Summary – TIO as technology

‘Technological’ forms of theatre in organisations include the corporate form whose intention is to seduce rather than challenge its audiences into adopting the desired realities of a dominant group (Clark and Mangham, 2004a, p. 56). Radical theatre, which is conceivably polarised to this view, would appear to advocate open, democratic and critical enquiry into every aspect of organisational life. However, there seems little evidence that this form of theatre is used in organisations. The other two technological forms, organisational theatre and situational drama lie between these two poles, seeking to change thinking either through the presentation of enacted visions that present alternatives to the status quo or through making the stage space of the theatre available to the audience as an interactive forum for the exploration of ideas. Nevertheless, there is a view that the agendas or scripts for these two forms are determined and controlled by the commissioning organisations and that there remains little scope for audiences to challenge the dominant view (Clark and Mangham, 2004b; Rae, 2013). Thus in light of Cole’s notion that theatre invests imaginary truth with a physical presence (Cole, 1975) it would seem that the use of theatre as technology in organisations is primarily to manifest the wished for realities of the commissioning organisations.

2.3 Theatre as resource

Clark (2008) also considers theatre as a resource in organisational change, as distinct from theatre as technology (Clark and Mangham, 2004a and Clark, 2008).

Various elements of theatre, from Shakespeare texts to samba drumming (Clark, 2008) are seen as a resource for engendering a richly textured and playful learning environment in which ‘the conventional is dissolved’ (Clark, 2008) challenging assumptions about ‘what is’ and enabling new thinking to emerge (Rae, 2011). A further aspect of theatre as resource is the aesthetic nature of theatre as an Art (Taylor and Hansen, 2005; Taylor and Ladkin, 2009; Meisiek and Barry, 2010).
Theatre can be said to offer a ‘medium that can capture and communicate the felt experience, the affect, and something of the tacit knowledge of the day-to-day, moment-to-moment reality of organisations’ (Taylor and Hansen 2005, p.1224). Thus learning from theatre is regarded as deriving from the total sensory, that is to say aesthetic experience and not just from the intellectualisation of word and thought (Taylor and Hansen 2005).

Theatre as a resource for creating a playful, sensory learning environment has a role across all the technological forms of theatre outlined above, from corporate to radical. Dissolving or challenging the conventional through theatre arguably provides an environment in which change can be seen and felt aesthetically - theatre as resource for seduction (corporate - Clark and Mangham, 2004a) or emancipation (radical - Coopey, 1998). This implies different levels of active engagement by audiences and this principle underlies a number of attempts to place the wide array of theatre-based activities in organisations into conceptual frameworks or typologies.

2.4 TIO Typologies

2.4.1. Schreyögg – solution oriented typology

Five main typologies for theatre in organisations seem to have emerged, each of which demonstrates a different, underlying conceptual rationale. The first is that of Schreyögg (1999) (Fig.2.1), which is organised across two dimensions - organisational specificity and professionalism.

The first dimension concerns the scope of the organisational issue that is being targeted, either department specific or industry-wide (Meisiek, 2002), while the second dimension concerns the use of either professional theatre practitioners or amateurs (the latter usually being employees). These two dimensions are then contrasted in two different theatre contexts; in pre-prepared stage performances and in improvised work. Thus the framework enables the description of eight different types of theatre according to who are the agents of the activities and what their contexts. It also indicates a degree of employee involvement as well as the nature of that involvement, spontaneous or planned, in relation to the problematic being addressed.
Fig. 2.1 Schreyögg’s 1999 typology

**Stage-managed situation drama**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turn-key productions</th>
<th>Organisational theatre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage-managed amateur theatre</td>
<td>Employee theatre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Organisational specificity: High

**Improvised drama**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard improvisations</th>
<th>Improvised organisational theatre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improvised amateur theatre</td>
<td>Play-along theatre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Organisational specificity: High

2.4.2. Meisiek – audience participation

Meisiek (2002) introduced a simplified variant of the Schreyögg scheme (Fig 2.2) in order to emphasise the effects on the audience of situation drama rather than the problematic to which the drama is directed. Thus the typology emphasises the degree of active audience participation. This model is less specific than Schreyögg’s for Meisiek considers that different types of drama in TIO share various attributes and that these cannot be isolated as specific to each method in the way Schreyögg’s model attempts. However, in consequence Meisiek’s model loses descriptive power. Although the typology is modelled on the description of techniques, Meisiek sees it as a basis for an enquiry into effects of those techniques.
(Meisiek, 2002, p. 50). Later he considers that different types of participation may give rise to emotional catharsis (Meisiek, 2004), but that this may effect different outcomes such as release from negative experience, enhanced creativity or action taken to solve the presented problems.

Fig. 2.2 Meisiek’s 2002 typology

Nevertheless, whilst practitioners claim that these kinds of cathartic effects are often achieved in practice (e.g. Darsø et al, 2007; Larsen, 2005) there would appear to be little empirical research to support such contention, as noted by Clark (2008) and Rae (2011).

2.4.3. Nissley et al – power relation typology

Both Schreyögg and Meisiek’s typologies are management-led and goal-directed towards solutions of organisational problems, which coincide with Clark and Mangham’s characterisation of theatre in organisations as technology. A critical view of the management-determined application of theatre in organisations underlies a third typology, that of Nissley et al (2004) (Fig. 2.3). Here the range of OT activities is displayed on a continuum that at one end finds a passive
organisational audience who are performed to, though arguably ‘at’, by OT professionals and at the other an ‘immersive’ experience wherein organisational actors are actively engaged in participation framed as drama, sometimes without OT professionals and usually with some kind of facilitation (Oswick et al, 2000; Olivier, 2001; Bryant and Darwin, 2003). The language of the typology, which is presented as the politics of performance, reflects control and passivity both in terms of the script that is used within the theatre intervention and also of the parts or roles played by the various participants. This resolves, in an admittedly simplistic fashion (Nissley et al, 2004) into a straightforward, oppositional tension between management and worker control of the theatre-based experience, (Fig. 2. 4).

Fig. 2.3 Nissley et al’s 2004 typology

Passive audience    Directed performer    Self-directed performer

Professional performer    Organisational actor

“Control of the role” in theatre-based training and interventions

Other-scripted    Co-scripted    Self-improvised

Professional performer    Organisational actor

“Control of the script” in theatre-based training and interventions
Nissley et al recognise that this simplification has relevance as long as the professional actors are under the general control of management. At the same time, by contrasting control of script with control of role, a dramaturgical relationship may emerge between professional and organisational actors. For example, organisational actors might have control of the script whilst professional actors control their roles in the performance of that script as in the given example of the Theatre at Work Company (Nissley et al, 2004, p.825). Nissley et al provide a critical analysis of the structure and dynamics of TIO but in doing this they recognise that a simple polarisation between management and worker control may not account for other more subtle control mechanisms such as unconscious adherence to routine dominant scripts (Perinbanayagam, 1982), discipline effects (Foucault, 1980) and concertive control (Barker, 1999).

Nissley et al offer Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed (1979) as a method for achieving greater worker control. However, Nissley et al recognise that even Forum Theatre, as theatre of political action might be appropriated by the dominant group such that the forum theatre principle might be subverted to serve the group’s own interests. This envisages theatre in the hands of dominant forces as more likely to be used as a means of control than a means of emancipation (Nissley et al, 2004; Clark and Mangham, 2004b; Boje, 2005; Meisiek and Barry, 2007).
2.4.4 Clark – ownership of activity typology

Clark (2008) introduces a fourth typology (Fig. 2.5) which also emphasises the degree of audience participation, active to passive, but sets this against the extent to which the theatre piece is adaptable both in preparation and in performance.

Fig. 2.5 Clark’s 2008 typology emphasising ownership of the TIO activity

As with the Nissley et al framework the typology also emphasises the question of control. However, in this case it is less a matter of critical tension between management and workers than one of dramaturgical tensions between scriptwriter, performer and audience. Clark builds on Mangham’s notion that the scriptwriter’s control of the script is bounded in that the performer effects an interpretation of the script whilst the interaction between actor and audience brings the script to life (Mangham and Overington, 1987). This triadic collusion between script, actor and audience means that no single element totally dominates the equation but rather constitutes an interdependent ontology.

A feature of Clark’s typology is the sense of fluctuation across various dramaturgical elements. As any one element predominates it becomes potentially causal of effects and outcomes. Corporate theatre controls script and performance in order to create required effects in the audience (e.g. Biehl-Missal, 2011). A radical theatre is controlled by the engagement between audience and performer with potential impact on the organisation (e.g. Coopey, 1998).
2.4.5. Rae – ‘showing or experiencing’ typology

A final TIO typology identified in the literature is that of Rae (2011) (Fig. 2.6).

Fig. 2.6 Rae’s 2011 typology of Theatre in Organisations showing nature of theatre experience

Rae expands on previous typologies by integrating two separate notions of theatre. These are firstly, of theatre whose intention is either to ‘show’ a theatre piece to the audience or to engage the audience in active ‘experience’ (Bolton, 1993) and secondly, of theatre as either ‘process’ or ‘product’ (Taylor and Ladkin, 2009). Rae integrates these two allied concepts into the familiar active/passive continuum of other typologies opining that ‘theatre as product’ intended to be shown in performance to a more passive audience is more likely to be scripted and prepared. Conversely theatre that is about the process of experiential interaction is more likely to have improvised scripts and involve a more active audience.

Rae also recognises that TIO is not only about changing perceptions as with organisational theatre, or corporate theatre’s intention to promote visions of a desired corporate reality, but also about raising processual skill levels at both individual and collective levels. This typology accentuates something that is less explicit in earlier typologies, which is the dual nature of theatre as both craft with
requisite skills (Darsø, 2004) and art that can evoke the ‘essence’ of a concept in ways that propositional or linear orientations cannot easily achieve (Taylor and Ladkin, 2009; Meisiek and Barry, 2010).

In her typology Rae differentiates theatre as the transfer of skills, from theatre as illustration of essence. Nevertheless, she acknowledges a degree of overlap between them. Rae, along with several other writers, consider that certain theatre scripts often represent an analogical repository for enquiry into ‘essence’ and ‘tacit knowledge’ in the organisational context (e.g. Whitney and Packer 2000; Shafritz 1999; Augustine and Adelman 1999; Corrigan, 1999; and Stevenson, 1996). Thus this typology emphasises knowledge transfer, both implicit and explicit in the typology’s individual focus quadrants.

2.4.6 Summary– typologies of TIO

All the typologies include the extent of the passive or active participation of the audience. Each of the typologies conceptualises the aims of that learning differently. Schreyögg’s typology emphasises the learning of solutions to organisational problems. Conversely, Meisiek seems more interested in the effect of TIO on individual learning. Nissley et al are interested in how TIO teaches participants to accept and perform the organisation’s script. Clark is interested in the learning that comes from the interplay between script, actor and audience and how that changes depending on who has ownership of different elements of the process. Finally, Rae is concerned with learning that derives from the nature of the engagement with the theatre process itself, from ‘showing’ and ‘experiencing’. However, these typologies mostly only situate different TIO activities in relation to prospective learning rather than to actual learning and effects. Whilst Meisiek is interested in effects of TIO activities he also recognises that his typology remains descriptive (Meisiek, 2002, p. 50). Thus these typologies are mostly concerned with the aims of TIO and how these aims are inflected by the extent of audience participation. Again, Meisiek points out that the choice of TIO methods reflects the underlying change management initiative (Meisiek, 2002, p. 50). In this view TIO as technology and/or resource is largely intended to support organisational aims.

The various typologies highlight the extent to which organisational actors are active in the enactment, direction and control of events and scripts. This is a question of whether theatre is used democratically to enable new thinking or action, or used didactically to instil organisational messages and required behaviour.
2.5. Situating Forum Conversations

2.5.1 TIO as refraction

Whether theatre in organisations is used democratically or didactically it is clear from the various typologies and framing reviewed here that TIO is intended as a means of promoting change towards declared organisational aims. This is the case however general or specific these aims might be and however much various theatre processes and methods might be characterised as technology and/or resource. In what follows it is argued that in general TIO acts as a refractive medium in promoting organisational change and development.

Light is refracted when it changes direction in passing through different media (e.g. from air into water). Similarly, it is considered that the medium of theatre is different to that of organisations, despite arguments that work is theatre (e.g. Pine and Gilmour, 1999; Vaill, 1989). Thus by virtue of organisational actors’ active or passive involvement in TIO, it is assumed by both commissioners and practitioners of TIO that something will be changed in participants’ action, feeling, and thinking (or any combination of these) such that organisational actors are more likely to deliver, or align with, organisational aims. In other words TIO can be regarded as a refractive process in that interaction with theatre is thought to induce a directional change.

2.5.2 Theatre as reflection

It is more usual to think of theatre as imitative or reflective, that is to say, as ‘a mirror up to nature’ (Hamlet’s advice to the players in Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Act III, Scene 1). However, this is a problematic phrase in that it is not clear what it is about human nature that Hamlet advises the players to mirror – behaviour, ideas, psychology or some deeper source of being. Nevertheless, mirroring works on the basis of self-recognition at some level, albeit that it may lead us to become more self-aware and thence to make adjustments in our attitude and behaviour. Thus change may derive from theatre as refraction or as reflection.

2.5.3 The dominant voice in refraction

Refractive theatre can offer new visions of reality such as in Schreyögg and Höpfl’s view of organisational theatre (2004) and in corporate theatre (Clark and Mangham, 2004; Biehl-Missal, 2011), or in new ways of doing things as in the corporate version of forum theatre and in theatre skills training (Rae, 2013). This means that a dominant voice can determine what those new visions or ways should
be and how they are to be presented as theatre. Yet reflective theatre cannot be imposed upon an audience, for the audience will accept only that which it recognises as reflecting itself; when the performance is indeed perceived to be a mirror up to nature.

A sense of ownership might be thought to attach to reflective theatre in that it is directly concerned with the audience. Whilst reflective theatre may induce self-recognition and cognitive and emotional responses in a passive audience, a sense of ownership may be amplified when organisational actors participate actively and fully, having ownership of script and performance wherein their own ideas and choices are mirrored. Indeed, Boal developed Forum Theatre to mirror the conflict and oppression to which an audience may be subject in order for the audience to feel compelled to change what they see presented on stage. In contrast, corporate forum theatre is arguably refractive. Research and my own personal experience shows Boal’s forum theatre method to be 'lite' (Clark and Mangham, 2004b, Rae, 2013) and used in organisations mostly to convey messages about how the organisation wishes things to be done.

This does not mean that refractive can be simply aligned with didactic theatre and reflective with democratic theatre. But it does give an axis for the conceptual framing of TIO whereby theatre method, processes and skills are used either to promote new ways of doing things (refraction), or to promote new self-understanding and awareness (reflection), out of which, new behaviour and approaches may arise.

### 2.5.4. Forum Conversations as reflective theatre

In situating Forum Conversations in the field of TIO, it may be seen that they are predominantly a reflective theatre practice. Participants choose the problem they wish to address and provide an outline of the script that is to be improvised as well as then improvise the scripts that are produced. The professional actors do their utmost to mirror the actuality that the participants describe. The participants thus encounter a reflection of the experience they describe and in so doing may gain some awareness of themselves in action.

In mapping FCs on to the various typologies described above it might be argued that FCs should be situated in those parts of the typologies that indicate most active participation and ownership of the process by organisational actors. The extent of active participation and ownership by participants suggests that Forum Conversations might be categorised in the typologies as radical theatre. However,
whilst participants comment freely both on what they have experienced and what they have seen in each other’s performances, the extent to which normative scripts subliminally determine opinion (Clark and Mangham, 2004b) must be borne in mind.

It is also the case that the professional actors in Forum Conversations give advice about performance skills to participants. Thus there is a refractive element in FCs through which agendas and scripts, other than those of the participants, may enter the process. In consequence FCs cannot be described as a radical organisational theatre method. Unlike corporate forum theatre where an originally reflective method – Forum Theatre – has been largely adapted in TIO as a refractive means of promoting change, FCs is mostly a reflective theatre method that contains within it a refractive element. As such it might be expected to engender both the kind of self-awareness and subsequent change that potentially come from the revelations of theatre as mirror, but also learning that comes from more intentional knowledge transfer.

In the typologies outlined above, the rationale is mainly based on the descriptive nature of TIO in relation to the degree of interaction and control provided to the audience. Little attention is given to the effects of the many different activities, though Meisiek (2002) seeks to move away from a purely descriptive continuum towards a consideration of effects. This review therefore turns to an examination of the literature on the effects or impact of theatre as resource and technology in the context of TIO. This is with a view to throwing light on effects that might potentially be associated with Forum Conversations as a predominantly reflective theatre process.

2.6. Impact and Effects of TIO

2.6.1 Theatre as technology: Discovering solutions

Theatre as technology in organisations is theatre that is directed to some goal or set of goals and is framed as four different forms of technology as outlined above (Clark, 2008). Indeed, the organisational studies literature on TIO reflects the instrumentalisation of theatre forms and organisational outcomes (Schreyögg, 1999; Oswick et al, 2000; Schreyögg, 2002, Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004; Meisiek, 2002; Clark and Mangham 2004a and 2004b; Gibb, 2004; Meisiek, 2004; Nissley et al, 2004; Meisiek and Barry, 2007; Elm and Taylor, 2010; Rae, 2011).
Meisiek (2004, p.798) draws together summaries from a number of TIO practitioners and notes that TIO methods, as a body of “diverse techniques are generally employed to create an awareness of problems, to create togetherness, to stimulate discussion, and to foster a readiness for change that can then be drawn upon in various subsequent initiatives in organisational change.”

Organisational theatre as one of Clark’s technological forms is always about a problematic ‘something’ in the organisation with a brief to ‘discover’ solutions via the process of theatre (Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004).

2.6.1.1 Theatre as technology: organisational control of effects.

Organisational Theatre is seen as a means of raising awareness of problematic issues and potentially producing discussion that may lead to solutions. However, this contrasts with a view that organisations may be co-opting TIO as a means of corporate control (Höpfl, 1995; Meisiek, 2002; Clark and Mangham, 2004b; Meisiek and Barry 2007; Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004; Rae, 2013).

Nissley et al (2004) note three particular TIO formats as common, which are: stand-alone plays, plays followed by workshops and role-plays with rehearsals. In this work they note a particular concern, which is that the organisational actor is not free to ‘act’ but instead -

“is often prepared through a series of rehearsals to perfect his or her role and is heavily influenced by the dominant script.” (Nissley et al, 2004, p.825)

This reflects a concern that TIO is used to create an organisational monoculture wherein “organisational actors are taught to speak the same lines and provide consistency in public performances.” (Nissley et al, 2004, p.825). Such a view seems exemplified by reports of the use of Forum Theatre to create ‘sparkle’ in customer relations (Bunt, 2011), and to project a smiling face in public services (Pollitt, 2010).

Rae’s investigation of organisational Forum theatre (2011) evidences what might almost be regarded as connivance between TIO practitioners and commissioners of their work to direct participants towards required organisational messages, despite presenting the theatre interventions to participants as open forums. While many of the practitioners interviewed by Rae had little difficulty with this contradiction, some practitioners experience ethical discomfort when reflecting on their role as artists within organisational development.
For example Ibbotson (2012) reflects on the equivocation he feels as a professional actor working primarily in an organisational context. Ibbotson’s commentary echoes content of a meeting in 2006 in Denmark of some of the leading thinkers and practitioners of TIO where practitioners wondered whether working with organisations compromised their artistic integrity even to the extent of prostituting their art (Darsø et al, 2007). This disquietude was relieved by appeals to the emancipatory values of theatre that can deliver creative space and “the essence of what it means to be human” (Thellesen and Taylor, 2007, p.30).

Thus a tension may be discerned here between the emancipatory aspirations of artists, which may be described as pluralist or dialogic, seeking to hear many voices (e.g. Bohm, 1996) and the instrumentalist control of Business, described as unitary (Burgoyne and Jackson, 1997) or monologic (Buber, 1958; Bakhtin, 1984). Further, Nissley et al (2004) consider TIO to be a means of monologically controlling audiences. In contrast many writers and practitioners see TIO as a means of initiating dialogue (e.g. Meisiek, 2002), for modelling new perspectives (Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004), for creating shock effects in order to provoke change (Darsø et al, 2007), and for inviting audiences to participate in Art and TIO as a method of change management (Taylor and Ladkin, 2009).

2.6.2. Theatre as resource: Effects and impact

2.6.2.1 Theatre text as analogy

While TIO is often used simply as entertainment (Westwood 2004), or celebration (Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004), the use of theatre as resource for learning and change in organisations includes the use of theatre texts as analogical resource for the illumination of management practice. This is distinct from the use of dramaturgy as a metaphorical lens into organisations, which will be addressed in the next chapter of this review.

There is especial interest in Shakespeare’s plays as a source of analogy particularly in regard to leadership issues (e.g. Whitney and Packer 2000; Shafritz 1999; Augustine and Adelman 1999; Corrigan, 1999; and Stevenson, 1996). Elsewhere both ancient classics (Marini, 1992) and more recent dramatic texts (Garaventa, 1998) are advocated as a means of examining business ethics stressing that drama is more useful than literature in this regard because of the sharper focus on character interactions (Garaventa, 1998, p. 537).

Nevertheless, few if any of these studies provide empirical evidence for impact on individual and collective learning outcomes. This is partly because of the difficulty of
detecting the impact of learning where the use of cultural activities and tools in co-construction of meaning with learners (Foster et al, 2002; Palinscar, 1998) is less about knowledge transmission with the learner as an empty vessel to be filled (Freire, 1988) than about a complex social interaction with cultural tools; what Foster et al term ‘all in the hall’, (2002). It is also recognised that learners continue to integrate reflective learning into their conceptual development over time (Fontzenack and Kelley, 2000).

One empirical study used a simple survey format to evaluate management students’ reaction to the use of Shakespeare plays that highlight elements of leadership (Stevenson, 1996). It seems most respondents enjoyed the experience and found leadership concepts to be well illustrated by the plays. While this indicates favourable reaction to the learning format it does not necessarily establish that learning occurred.

The TIO company Mythodrama led by Laurence Olivier’s son Richard has clearly made an impact on management learning in the participatory use of theatre as analogy (McKee, 1999; Rae, 2011). Characters and plot from a number of Shakespeare’s plays are used in conjunction with Jungian archetypes to generalise leadership learning into practice (Olivier, 2001). Elsewhere Mangham reviews the character of Shakespeare’s Henry V drawing from this analogy comparison with leaders who might feel the need to demonstrate invulnerability (Mangham, 2001, p. 303). Nevertheless, again there appears to be no empirical study of the impact of this work on learning.

2.6.2.2 Theatre process as analogy

Another stream of theatre as resource in organisations is the direct comparison of theatre processes with organisational processes. It is assumed that the creative and performative nature of theatre with its short process cycles and tight deadlines provide for useful processual knowledge transfer into an increasingly complex and uncertain organisational context. For example Posner (2008) draws a number of conclusions about good leadership from observing a theatre director directing a play. Dusya and Crossan (2004) observe that improvisation in the theatre is not just about creative spontaneity but also about domain relevant skill and close teamwork and that the improvisational techniques to be learned from theatre may be useful to help organisations through turbulent times.

Ibbotson and Darsø (2008) comment on the bounded nature of the creative process in theatre and how organisational leadership might learn from this to balance
requisite creativity with tight performance boundaries. Elsewhere the notion of theatrical ‘wing space’ as a liminal space (Steyaert et al, 2007, p.65) and the rehearsal process in theatre as a model for the development of service products (Broekhuijsen and Ibbotson, 2007, p.56) are also used as points of comparison and the acting skills of actors are used extensively to develop managers’ communication skills in presentation and in interpersonal communication (Rae, 2011).

2.6.2.3. Theatre as aesthetics

Whilst there is extensive advocacy for the impact on learning both from theatre texts and theatre practice, there yet remains little direct empirical evidence for that impact. However, a line of empirical enquiry is developing in the study of organisational aesthetics. Taylor (2003, 2008) makes theatre in both academic and organisational contexts in order to use artistic methods to advance an epistemology that derives from aesthetic, sensory knowing, which in turn informs rational thought (Taylor, 2005). This aesthetic approach emphasises the study of experience rather than the study of objects and is thus deemed to be more appropriate than a conventional, ‘scientific’ approach for capturing how organisational audiences ‘feel’ about aspects of academic and organisational life (Strati, 1999; Taylor, 2008). Organisational aesthetics are also said to evoke the expression of unconscious or tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1966) and of what some have referred to as the ‘essence’ of experience (Taylor and Ladkin, 2009; Meisiek and Barry, 2010).

Taking this aesthetic approach combined with performance studies Biehl-Missal (2011) analysed audience reaction to a range of aesthetic elements of staged corporate ‘performances’ at shareholder AGMs. She found that audiences resisted many of the dramaturgical effects of the performances and in so doing became contributors to the ‘theatre’ of the events. This coincides with the view that, “It is now the audience – no longer just an unaffected witness but a participating partner – that determines the communicative success” (Lehmann, 2006, p. 136). It also resonates with Mangham’s theory of theatre as consisting of triadic collusion between script, actor and audience (Mangham and Overington, 1987). In a later paper Biehl-Missal (2012) presents a yet more complex, aesthetic experience where a piece of theatre was made from a corporate AGM (thus as Biehl-Missal puts it, ‘parasitising’ upon the AGM, which in itself may be regarded as a piece of corporate theatre) and used as an artistic means for demonstrating the aesthetics of that corporate event (note Taylor, 2005). Again, she evaluated the impact on the audience and found a negative, even repellent response to the organization’s manipulation of the AGM, with an overall outcome being an embodiment of
knowledge created in the spectators arising from their aesthetic experience (Biehl-Missal, 2012, p. 225).

2.6.2.4. Forum Conversations as ‘Theatre as resource’

As ‘theatre as resource’ Forum Conversations do not offer prepared analogical scripts, but do use the skills and feedback of professional actors in interaction with participants using their own scripts. There is a question as to the extent that these professional actors in their capacity as ‘theatre as resource’ offer their theatre skills as models of behaviour. There is also a question about the aesthetic nature of the Forum Conversation experience and this includes setting, dynamics of interaction, audience etc. and in consequence questions about the embodiment of knowledge arising from the total Forum Conversation experience.

2.6.3. Theatre in Organisations: Effect on the audience

Whatever the case, whether TIO is utilised monologically or dialogically, whether the application of theatre has technological or aesthetic aims, Schreyögg and Höpfl (2004) note that the effects of theatre must be considered from the audience’s point of view:

“In order to understand the effects of theatre, therefore, we have to include the audience’s perception. Whatever the approach, change has first of all to be brought about in the minds of the audience. We have, therefore, to start any explanation of any effect of organizational theatre from the audience’s perspective.”

Theatre director Peter Brook stresses the fundamental importance of the co-relationship of theatre and its audience:

“The audience gives theatre its fundamental meaning” (Brook, 1988, p.234)

This resonates with Mangham’s view of theatre comprising script, actor and audience (Mangham, 1987) and also with the aesthetic involvement of the audience with artistic work such that Biehl-Missal can say:

“a transformational potential is located within the particular aesthetic conditions of ‘theatre’, in the bodily co-presence of performers and audiences” (Biehl-Missal, 2012, p. 226)

However, given this emphasis on the audience a search of the literature shows few empirical studies of the effects of TIO on audiences (e.g. Stevenson, 1996; Monks, 2001; Ferris, 2002; Biehl-Missal, 2012). Of these, Ferris merely hints at
improvements in teamwork and customer response and the Monks paper provides a summary of feedback from students who had undertaken Forum Theatre type exercises citing positive comments by participants though no in depth analysis. Stevenson provided basic descriptive statistics but little analysis of an exercise using Shakespeare plays to teach students about leadership. A number of more recent papers provide a degree of analysis of impact of OT activities on the audience but without privileging the audience view and tending rather to critique the TIO processes that were used (Gibb, 2004; Meisiek and Barry, 2005; Meisek and Barry, 2007; Elm and Taylor, 2010).

Until 2011 these few studies would appear to be the only significant attempts in the academic literature on TIO to ‘hear from’ the audience. Rae (2011, 2013) recognised this gap and examined the impact of Forum Theatre on its corporate audience finding that those audience members/participants she interviewed had enjoyed and actively participated in the corporate forum theatre events they experienced and found them memorable. There was however, less evidence of either the transfer of learning from these events or of an initiation of a wider dialogue in the participants’ organisations. As well as noting the scarcity of the audience voice in the literature Rae portrays the provocative nature of theatre and its capacity accurately to model its audience, though she acknowledges that it is arguable as to whether theatre can prompt or initiate direct societal change. Indeed, Rae found the impact of corporate forum theatre on organisational audiences to be tenuous and ambiguous, despite claims by OT practitioners and theorists that OT initiates creative dialogue and enables change (e.g. Larsen, 2005; Elm and Taylor 2010).

2.6.4 Theatre in Organisations: Enjoyment as effect

Theatre is often used in organisations to celebrate success (Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004, Clark and Mangham, 2004) and also as entertainment (e.g. Westwood, 2004). While there seems to have been little empirical work on the effects of TIO, audience enjoyment of TIO has been noted in many reports (e.g. Stevenson, 1996; Monks, 2001; Ferris, 2002; Rae, 2011). However, enjoyment is distinct from learning as Gibb (2004) points out, referring to the corporate forum theatre he witnessed as ‘infotainment’ that engaged the audience and enabled a degree of catharsis and recognition of themselves in the theatrical mirror that was held up to them. But according to Gibb, this was a mixed learning event that lacked guidance and direction and failed to address deeper issues for the audience in question. This appears to have been reflected in Rae’s study of organisational Forum Theatre (2011). Nevertheless, the sense of enjoyment in itself may be thought of as an
aesthetic experience and may add to the memorability of the event, which indeed Rae found, quoting Mangham (2001, p. 296), that dramatic representations have the "potential to provide a powerful space for challenge, reflection and instruction."

Theatre also has the power to seduce audiences (Novitz, 2002). Novitz describes a cult of instant gratification that is current in the western world wherein artists, politicians and propagandists may seduce their audiences by playing on their hopes, desires and psychological vulnerabilities. In Clark and Mangham’s study of corporate theatre (2004a), the handpicked audience’s enjoyment was deliberately fostered via a triumphant celebration of the company’s success, and imaginative truth was engineered into physical presence (Cole, 1975) via the live appearance of iconographic performers from TV. In this case the carefully stage-managed aesthetics of the event were intended to strike “the right emotional chords” (Novitz, 1997; Clark and Mangham, 2004a) for the audience to be seduced, without coercion, into feelings of pride and belonging. Enjoyment here is derived from manipulated effect and affect.

Elsewhere in the context of organisational theatre the piece of Forum theatre witnessed by Clark and Mangham in ‘Varnishing the truth’ included a take-off of a game show (2004b). There was much laughter in the Forum piece witnessed by Meisiek and Barry (2007). Rae (2011) emphasises the amount of humour and fun in Forum Theatre indicating that practitioners of corporate forum theatre often seek to use humour in their work.

No study seems to have been carried out on how facilitators and actors in TIO organise and facilitate audience laughter, though it is likely to arise through a combination of content (script) and cuing (performance) as in Greatbatch and Clark’s of study of ‘management gurus’ (2002). Given that humour often seems to derive from a resolution of incongruities (Hurley et al, 2011) it might be that audience laughter comes from how the performers manage the splitting of perception of two different realities (Screyögg and Höpfl, 2004) or from the holding of a realistic mirror up to the audience who recognise themselves and the absurdity of their predicaments (e.g. Westwood, 2004).

Rae (2011) indicates how humour is used in corporate forum theatre as a means of engaging and energising audiences as well as building trust in the process. It is not clear whether this might lead to a sense that it is safe for audiences to speak out freely, a condition advocated by Coopey and Burgoyne (2000) and Fulop and Rifkin (1997) for the kind of organisational learning space that is potentially offered by corporate forum theatre. In contrast one facilitator in Rae’s study used humour to
close down inquiry and move a participant away from a particular line of questioning that deviated from the dominant script.

What seems missing in TIO activities is the use of humour ‘to express opposition, resistance and dissent’ Greatbatch and Clark (2003, p.1518). There is however, a clear example of this in Biehl-Missal’s enquiry into the aesthetics of performance in shareholder meetings where stage-managed corporate messages were openly ridiculed by shareholders in the audience (Biehl-Missal, 2011). In a sense this openness of expression reflects the ethics of radical theatre, but it must be borne in mind that these were not employees but owners. It appears that humour in corporate forum theatre (Rae, 2011; Clark and Mangham, 2004b; and Gibb, 2004) is used to create an enjoyable, cohesive learning environment wherein organisational messages may be conveyed, but not an environment wherein dissent may be openly expressed.

2.6.5 Ownership of the management of TIO effects

This leads back to the distinction between theatre as emancipatory and theatre as appropriated by dominant voices. Advocates of Forum Theatre point out its profoundly transformational and emancipatory nature in political and social contexts (e.g. Coopey, 1998; Babbage, 2004; Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006). However, Nissley et al (2004) take the view that TIO is a means of strengthening organisational monoculture, enhanced by what they have seen as the directive nature of rehearsals designed to control the workforce. Indeed, critical dramaturgists Boje et al (2004, p.769) seem to have no doubts that the “corporate facade fosters spectator passivity” and as such represses action.

Repression for Martin, a commentator on Boalian theatre, is all the forces, however indeterminate, that are “trying to control and bottle ‘the stuff and staff of life’; that creativity and generative capacity that we all have” (Martin 2006, p.28). It is in this perhaps that we see what lies behind the Clark and Mangham’s (2004b) critique of ‘Boal Lite’, or Nissley et al’s (2004) concern about TIO as ‘Theatre of the Oppressor’. Nevertheless, according to Rae (2011), the question of ‘oppression by theatre’ is not one that troubles either the practitioners or commissioners that she interviewed. Indeed, there is also evidence that the practitioner facilitation of corporate forum theatre is inadequate to the task on a number of counts including lack of understanding of the dynamics of organisational change, lack of understanding of the audience’s learning and development needs, of an inability to manage a polyphony of voices, and indeed of handling the process of forum theatre itself (Clark and Mangham, 2004b; Gibb, 2004; Rae, 2011). Instead it seems to be
merely a question of providing a methodology that serves organisational needs, by which is implied a discourse that is dominated by the controlling forces of the organisation.

2.7 Conclusion

In sum, there seems to be a distinction between refractive TIO activities that are used to control, if only through the delivery of a dominant group’s messages, and more reflective theatre that is used to release, in the sense of initiating an open enquiry into ‘what might be’ (Clark and Mangham, 2004b). This might be framed as respectively monologic or dialogic in intention (Nissley et al, 2004; Cooper and Burgoyne, 2000). But this framing is not clear-cut in terms of the impact on the audience because there would often appear to be a degree of messiness in the set up and handling of these events such that an event that invites dialogue might be so controlled as to be monologic in effect (e.g. Gibb, 2004; Rae, 2013; Clark and Mangham, 2004b). On the other hand a monologically controlled event might fail to account for open resistance when, for example carefully prepared aesthetic effects are met with derision and challenge from the audience (e.g. Biehl-Missal, 2011).

Whatever the outcome of the TIO activity, there would appear to be few empirical studies that investigate outcomes in any depth, as noted by Clark (2008) and Rae (2011). Thus there remains no clear view of whether TIO achieves its aims, whether particular methods are more effective than others, whether learning transfers beyond the events, what might be the aesthetic effects of these methods, how these are managed, how they deliver organisational goals and so on. It is in this context that Forum Conversations as a TIO method is studied in this report, noting and evaluating its effects, dynamics and agency in the pursuit of its aims. It is also necessary to investigate how and if Forum Conversations bring imaginative life into physical reality, but in doing so to be alert to the extent the process is promoting organisational realities as opposed to the genuine, multi-vocal realities of the participants. In the following chapter the discussion turns to the way drama and dramaturgy has been studied as an analytical frame for multi-vocal, social reality.
CHAPTER 3: THE DRAMATISTIC GENRE

3.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the consciousness and language that enable organisational actors and professional actors to interact in the context of theatre in organisations. It also reviews the use of dramaturgy in the analysis of those interactions and of organisational life more generally. In the discussion it will be seen that Shakespeare’s often quoted phrase “All the world’s a stage” (expressed by the world-weary and cynical Jacques in “As You Like It”, anticipating a more cynical, performative age) can be regarded as both metaphor and ontology. The evolution of thinking about theatre and organisations is shown to have moved from the former to the latter with the view that ‘life is theatre’. Forum Conversations may be thought of as a product of that evolution in that it activates actual rather than metaphorical encounters.

The genre of writing and analysis that views the human world through a dramatistic lens has been said to consist of three different forms – dramaturgy, social drama and dramatism (Sinha, 2010). These are distinguished here and shown to offer different though not exclusive insights in the analysis of social behaviour. Whilst a dramaturgical analysis offers a useful descriptive account of behaviour, and social drama provides a processual analysis of atypical eruptions from the normal course of social interactions, dramatism is said to offer a complete causal analysis of human behaviour (Overington, 1977). Moving from dramaturgy as metaphor to dramatism as motive is a move from viewing action through a single, terministic screen to multiple screens (Fox, 2002) and hence to an enhanced understanding of ‘All the world’ as a stage.

The chapter begins by considering what is offered by TIO and how organisational actors engage with that offering, especially in light of what is seen as an increasingly ‘performative’ world (Clark, 2008). The review turns to writing that has regarded life as being like theatre and thence to writing about life as theatre. This distinction is used to reflect on how the use of theatre has developed in an organisational context. It is also used to highlight differences and similarities between organisational and professional actors, emphasising that ultimately the two meet in the sense that theatre expresses life as action. There then follows a review of the literature on how ‘life as action’ has been viewed metaphorically in writing on dramaturgy and ontologically in writing on dramatism.
3.2 TIO and new thinking

TIO is seen as a means of initiating new thinking (e.g. Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004; Darsø, 2004; Elm and Taylor, 2010). Schreyögg and Höpfl (2004) speculate that organisational theatre presents an opportunity for audiences to see a different reality to that with which they are familiar. In various ways interactive TIO technologies (Clark and Mangham, 2004a) invite audiences to participate in those different realities. Radical theatre technology, and to an extent corporate forum theatre, are seen as means for audiences to co-create those new realities (Coopey, 1998; Meisiek, 2002). TIO offers a hermeneutic, interpretive approach to learning, but how this is regarded depends on participants’ view both of how organisational problems are constituted and how they can be solved (Addleson, 1996).

The offering of the Arts in general and Theatre in particular in a business context is seen by a number of writers as being based on an exploration of concepts such as the evocation of ‘essence’ (Ladkin and Taylor, 2009; Meisiek and Barry, 2010), ‘presencing’ (Darsø, 2004), and ‘complexly interpretable analogical artifacts’ (Meisiek and Barry, 2010, p.1506) as a means of initiating new and innovative thinking (Darsø, 2004). In the context of TIO as an art form in business it is a question first, as to how organisational actors view their engagement with TIO activities and secondly, if and how they are able to translate their experience of theatre and its forms and terms, including essence and presencing, into the complex, discursive power relations of business (Clark and Mangham, 2004b). As Clark and Mangham point out, this is a necessary translation if theatre is to be meaningful as a change agency.

3.3 Organisational actors and performativity

Some writers have regarded society as increasingly ‘performatve’ in that performance values are pervasive across all social interactions (Perinbanayagam, 1982; Denzin, 2002; Clark, 2008). Indeed, it is Clark’s view that because performance is now structural in society it can be said that ‘life is theatre’ (Clark, 2008).

In this vein Höpfl (2001) notes the familiar usage of theatrical language such as ‘playing a role’ and ‘taking a part’ in a business context. Indeed, rehearsals including role-plays are commonly used to prepare ‘the corporate actor’ for public performances such as in sales, or in service industries (Höpfl and Linstead, 1993). Further, there seems to be an increasing consciousness of the worksite as a performance space with, for example, bus drivers being taught to regard their
vehicle as their stage (Pollitt, 2010), air cabin crew learning improvisational skills from theatre (Daly et al, 2009), and performance skills being enshrined into the corporate values of the work practice of a Housing Association (Bunt, 2011).

Höpfl (2001) opines that the professional actor’s craft is ‘the consummate counterfeit of experience’ and for Roach (1985, p. 137) it is the ‘professionalisation of two-facedness’. Thus although corporate or organisational actors may be increasingly aware of performativity in their daily reality the assumption of ‘the dramatic mask’ (Höpfl, 2001) may require a considerable competence to achieve ‘consummate counterfeit’, something for which it may be assumed many organisational actors will be ill-prepared. This has been observed for example in role-plays in management training and education where credibility is stretched through lack of competence in the playing thus diluting the learning experience (Craig and Amernic, 1994). It can also lead to the role-play degenerating into caricature and stereotype (Van Ment, 1989).

A further distinction to be made in the donning of the dramatic mask is that the professional actor retains a degree of discretion in their interpretation of their role on the theatrical stage (Mangham, 1990). In contrast, organisational actors entering the theatre space in TIO may be only too conscious of the organisational constraints upon role, script and performance that follow them on to the ‘stage’ (Höpfl, 2002). Indeed, as Rae (2011) discovered, even when the organisational actor makes use of the forum theatre space to challenge the dominant script of the organisation, facilitators may deflect or rebut their attempts. Thus, despite reports that an emphasis on the theatrical nature of work performance leads to positive outcomes for workers and organisation alike (Pollitt, 2010; Bunt, 2011), it is hard to see that discretion in performance allows any interpretation other than an alignment with the dominant script of the organisation (Meisiek and Barry, 2010).

3.4 Life is like theatre/Life is theatre

A number of writers have observed that organisational studies of theatre initially showed interest in the metaphorical sense in which organisations were like theatre (Brissett and Edgeley 1990; Goffman 1959, 1961, 1963; Mangham, 1986; Mangham and Overington 1983, 1987; Messinger et al, 1968; Turner, 1982). More recently organisational studies have included investigations into TIO in practice (e.g. Meisiek and Barry, 2007; Rae, 2011). It is suggested (e.g. Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004, Nissley et al, 2004) that the association of theatre with organisations as metaphor was strongly influenced by Goffman’s work on the dramaturgy of social life (1959), which in turn is said to derive from Burke’s dramatism.
(Perinbanayagam, 1982). In contrast to the metaphorical use of theatre Burke’s dramatism is based on the claim that life is theatre (Burke, 1969a; Clark, 2008).

It was noted in chapter 2 of this thesis that a number of writers have used theatrical texts to parallel organisational life, especially Shakespearian texts in the context of leadership studies. In this sense organisations are regarded as like theatre. Other writers have described and analysed organisations as theatre (e.g. Czarniawska-Joerges and Wolff, 1991; Mangham, 1986). This entails the use of dramaturgical language to denote various roles, dynamics and processes within organisations. In this sense management has been equated with theatrical performance. For example Czarniawska-Joerges and Wolff (1991, p.538) equate leaders with actors:

“successful leadership ....is a dramatic performance which fulfils the expectations of both audience and co-actors, ... and, above all, a skilful use of stage set and a talented improvisation, tuned to prevailing moods”

Vaill seeks to move beyond the idea of management as merely constituted by a list of functions (Vaill, 1989, p. 114) and presents the idea of the manager as a performer where performance as an art is a ‘whole’ process including quality of form and process as well as the pleasure obtained from the appreciation of quality of the process. Other writers make the association between acting performance and charismatic leadership where the jointly constructed relationship between leaders and followers is viewed as a drama (e.g. Gardiner and Alvolio, 1998; Harvey, 2001).

Mangham exemplifies this joint construction in writing about management as a performing art (Mangham, 1990). He compares the 17th century English actor Edmund Kean with Lee Iacocca of Chrysler, showing how the great performers find their interpretations through the embodiment of their given ‘texts’, be that Shakespeare plays or the economic conditions of the car market. At the same time these high profile performers remain acutely aware of the response of their audiences and in consequence refine their interpretations to those responses. Thus for Mangham the total performance entails a reflexive, triadic collusion between script, performance and audience (Mangham, 1990, p.108).

The comparison between the charismatic leader and the great actor in terms of a triadic collusion emphasises theatricality, that is to say, the staging of reality. Mangham and Overington distinguish between the ritualised, inattentive mundanity of everyday social life and the reflective consciousness that enables “the
transformation of ritual action into theatrical awareness” (Mangham and Overington, 1987, p.50). This is an awareness of how theatre transforms reality through metaphor, enabling taken for granted realities to be interrogated by audiences (ibid, p.51).

Mangham and Overington think of professional actors as living in a theatrical world of appearances and metaphor whilst organisational actors live mostly in a ritualised mundanity, perhaps resembling commedia dell’arte with its standard character types, improvisation around set scenes and skilled ensemble playing (ibid, p.173). Yet in an increasingly performative world one questions whether organisational actors continue to recognise a separation between “mundane reality and theatrical appearance, between actors and their parts and between audiences and performers” (ibid, p.50)

3.4.1 Differences and similarities between organisational and professional actors

Despite this putative separation between reality and appearance professional actors interact directly with organisational actors in many TIO activities and there is a question about the basis on which they meet in the theatrical space.

Schreyögg and Höpfl (2004) note that professional actors are able to conceal their true character behind a mask, which then enables them to convey the full range of human emotion and sensibility. In contrast they note that the organisational actor has limited discretion to improvise, constrained by organisational context, role and script. The capacity of the professional actor to explore shifting realities is associated with the original Greek word for actor, which is ‘hypokrites’ (Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004). The capacity for dissimulation seems inherent in this word.

Nevertheless, there is a view that ‘hypokrites’ had a somewhat different meaning to that which might be inferred from the usage of the word ‘hypocrite’ in modern English. Hypokrites is said to have its root in the Greek verb ‘apocrinomai’, which it is suggested means ‘to reply’ (Karayannakos, 2007), and this better reflects the original role of the actor as the only character able to reply to the chorus in ancient Greek plays celebrating Dionysus. Thus in this sense it can be said that the actor is the ‘one who replies’ and this in turn indicates an interaction with others and thus of social action. Indeed, Goffman views the capacity for dissimulation or impression management in interaction with others as a key feature of social interaction (1959). And both Goffman and Mangham and Overington (1987, p.42) comment on the capacity for all individuals to reproduce events with a fair degree of verisimilitude.
Mangham and Overington claim that organisational actors are not mere performers but actors who play characters, “moving from character to character and audience to audience with a ‘theatrical consciousness’” (1983, p.221). This might also describe the modus of professional actors, but Schreyögg and Höpfl (2004) contrast organisational and professional actors explaining that the difference is in the compliance, or rather lack of it, of social audiences. In the context of social rather than theatrical interaction it is assumed that organisational actors are more concerned with their own performances than colluding with other actors to create moments of theatre. Thus the stakes are assumed to be higher for social or organisational actors than for professional actors in that the implication is of competition rather than collusion between organisational actors.

Schreyögg and Höpfl (2004) note further that constraints and obligations may be imposed by organisations upon organisational actors to the extent that the organisational actor may be alienated from him/herself, merely enacting an organisational mask. This bears comparison with Diderot’s view of the professional actor as an empty vessel or cipher performing someone else’s script and purveying his personal sensibilities solely in the service of the author’s intention (Roach, 1985). We see here a parallel between professional and organisational actors in the evacuation of ‘self’ reduced to a mask. Yet Diderot’s view of the actor as empty and devoid of soul is contested in drama studies (e.g. Harrop, 1992) and perhaps not more so than by Boal who sees actors as ‘the very incarnation of smiling sanity’ who bravely explore their own souls in order to discover what it is to be human (Boal, 1995, p.37), and for whom all is permissible in the theatrical space of the stage (ibid, p.38).

3.4.2 Theatre as the staging of life in action

On the one hand therefore Schreyögg and Höpfl present a view of actors, both professional and organisational, as subservient and passively receptive to the dominant monologue, and on the other hand there is Boal’s view that professional and social actors are capable of meeting in what might be called the active dialogue of Forum Theatre, where dominant scripts are challenged in action (Boal, 1979).

Indeed, Mangham and Overington (1987, p.52) reflect on how theatre is the staging of life as action, and how life can be treated as the staging of that which is not staged, that is to say, life itself. Mangham and Overington show how the preparation of role, character, motivation and techniques of presencing underlie the subtle negotiation of power and the authentic nature of performance. Thus the staging of performances in socially constructed realities, such as in the boardroom.
of an organisation where attempts are made ‘to impose modes of being’ (ibid, p.104), are vulnerable to inconsistencies or disruptions in performance that expose the fabricated artificiality of the scene; just as in the theatre. In this, Mangham and Overington demonstrate how theatre makes us aware of the relation between intentions and acts, context and resources for action. Theatre is thus offered as an affective interpretation of the ‘who, how, what, when, where and why of social action’ (Mangham and Overington, 1987, p.52) and as such potentially offers a powerful exploratory space for organisational actors. Similarly Mangham and Overington are of the view that in the theatre:

“depending on interpretations, essential character might be expressed in terms of a relationship to another character, to the situations presented by the play, to some action taken, to some internal personality feature of the character and so on”

Mangham and Overington, 1990, p.94).

The ambiguity in this statement about where the essence of character may be found neatly alludes to the relationship between motivational terms in Burke’s dramatism, which posits life as being synonymous with theatre. This is not about the theatricality of life or a conflation of the vehicle of the metaphor (theatre) with the metaphor’s tenor (life), proximate as these are already deemed to be (Cornelissen, 2004). Rather, dramatism moves beyond the metaphor of life being like theatre to the definitive statement that life is theatre

### 3.5 The dramatistic genre and dramatism

Sinha (2010) describes the dramatistic genre as consisting of three foci of thinking and analysis. These are firstly, Goffman’s dramaturgy, which seeks to explain human action and secondly Turner’s social drama, which is a processual account of social change. Thirdly there is Burke’s dramatism, which is an ontological statement of motivation, a term that is to be thought of as causal rather than as ‘drive’ (Overington, 1977). There seems to be some ambiguity in the literature as to how dramaturgy is distinguished from dramatism. According to Sarbin (1986) dramaturgy has to do with the artefacts of theatre including language, devices and techniques, which are active, while dramatistic has more archetypal and emotional connotations.

Burke and others view dramatism in terms of action and explanation of action. According to Overington, “As a method, dramatism addresses the empirical questions of how persons explain their actions to themselves and others, what the cultural and social structural influences on these explanations might be, and what
effect connotational links among the explanatory (motivational) terms might have on these explanations, and hence, on action itself. ” (Overington, 1977, p.133).

Elsewhere Burke himself notes that:

“Man is defined literally as an animal characterised by his special aptitude for symbolic action, which is itself a literal term. And from there on drama is employed, not as a metaphor, but as a fixed form that helps us discover what the implications of the terms ‘act’ and ‘person’ really are“ (1968, p.445)

Overington condenses this further:

“Burke offers another stipulation of dramatism in a wider sense [as] any study of human relations in terms of ‘action’...” (Overington, 1977, p.132)

These definitions are epistemologically different from Sarbin’s view of the use of dramaturgical language as metaphor to describe action. They are also different from Goffman’s intimation that his use of dramaturgical language is to be regarded merely as a scaffold (i.e. metaphor) for the study of social encounters (Goffman, 1959, p.254).

3.5.1 Goffman’s dramaturgy

Goffman’s separation of frontstage (mask) performances and backstage motivations became extremely popular as a dramaturgical representation of human behaviour because it seemed to provide an accurate description of human social interaction (Denzin, 2002); explaining the way we seek to manage the impression we ‘give out’ of ourselves to others. However, as Goffman points out we tend to have less conscious control of the impressions we ‘give off’, that is, the impressions that others perceive or infer about us that give away the ‘behind the scenes’ of our personalities (Goffman, 1959).

For Goffman we are all acting in the normal course of life even though this might not be with the skill of professional actors (Goffman, 1959, p.78). In terms of the agency-structure debate (e.g. Stacey, 2001, p.42) Goffman sees us as acting out that which has been built into us by the society that surrounds us (Goffman, 1967, p. 44). Our performances are thus scripted for us no matter how uniquely we organise these scripts (Goffman, 1967, p.45). Denzin (2002) however, disputes this notion that we should be viewed as performers of societal scripts. Firstly, he says that the performance of the social actor should not be regarded as akin to that of the theatre actor and secondly, that peoples’ performances should be viewed as a
process of "liminality and construction" (Denzin, 2002, pp.111-112), in other words as "vehicles for representing their ongoing definitions of experience" (Denzin, 2002, p.109). Referring to Butler (1993) Denzin says that there are no ‘originals’ that we reproduce in our performances, but that we performatively constitute our imitations as the originals, and thus our performances are both original and imitation (Denzin, 2002, p.112).

Ralph Turner (1962, p.86) also takes issue with the seeming ease with which Goffman credits people in their management of impressions given to others. For Turner ‘role-taking’ and ‘role-making’ in formal organisations is less about “a tendency to create and modify conceptions of ‘self’ and ‘other’ roles as the orientating process in interactive behaviour”, than it is about making aspects of role explicit, not only “bringing them to light” but creating and modifying them. “Moreover in this role-making relation there pertains reciprocity between roles where “one cannot exist without a ‘reciprocal’ other” (Turner, 1962, p.87).

This is in contrast to Goffman’s analysis of the individual as ontologically separate, residing authentically backstage while merely interacting as a performer on the social stage. Foote (1957) suggests dramaturgic interaction as the most appropriate unit of study, “the episode of interaction scrutinizing limited segments of behaviour with a view to discerning relationships among their antecedent, intermediate and consequent elements...and how one episode of interaction conditions another” (Foote, 1957, p.63). In this view the backstage of the individual is inconsequential for “the consecutive series of episodes in the life of each actor organized like conversation into sentences, paragraphs and whole stories, of diverse length, complexity and intercontingency ...remains the prototypical unit of organization” (Foote 1957, p.66)

3.5.2 Turner: Social Drama

Foote’s view of the processual nature of interaction is not dissimilar to Victor Turner’s ‘social drama’, which he describes as ‘constituting isolatable and minutely describable units of social processes that arise when interests and attitudes of groups and individuals stood in obvious opposition’ (Turner, 1974, p.33). For Turner the drama first manifests itself as “a breach of a norm, the infraction of a rule of morality, rule of etiquette, law, custom, or etiquette in some public arena” (Turner, 1980, p.150). Turner’s social drama has four phases of public action summarised by Boje (2003) as:

1. **Breach** of norm-governed social relations that have liminal characteristics, a liminal (space) between more or less stable social processes.
2. Crisis, during which there is a tendency for the breach to widen and in public forums, representatives of order are dared to grapple with it.

3. Redressive action, ranging from personal advice and informal mediation or arbitration to formal juridical and legal machinery, and to resolve certain kinds of crisis or legitimate other modes of resolution, to the performance of public ritual.

4. Reintegration of the disturbed social group, or of the social recognition and legitimation of irreparable schism between the contesting parties.

Each of these phases institutes the premises for the next phase (Turner, 1985, p. 48), thus the process is on the one hand more dynamic than Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis but is also less mundane in that for Turner dramaturgical analysis is initiated when crises arise in the usual flow of social interaction; when there is ‘breach’. Crucial to the processual nature of the drama is progress into the liminal state, which is the site of transformation (Turner, 1982).

In this liminal space - in Turner’s view the ‘betwixt and between’ state peculiar to rites of passage that lie between ordered social structures (Turner, 1974 p.41) - may be found “heightened emotion, suspension of the rules of normal life and centralization of that which is usually regarded as marginal” (Bell, 2008, p.134). Breach or conflict in normative social relations initiates the move into the liminal. However, Weick (1995, p.8) maintains that ambiguity and discomfort are ever present in normative relations within organisations and so it might be asked at what point might discomfort become breach?

3.5.2.1 Emotion in ‘breach’

Barki and Hartwick (2007) offer some clue to this, defining three characteristics of interpersonal conflict at work. These are ‘disagreement’, ‘interference’, and ‘negative emotion’, all of which are deemed to have negative connotations. Yet conflict may also have positive connotations as noted by Dewey (1922, p.117) “Conflict is the gadfly of thought. It stirs us to observation and memory. It instigates to invention. It shocks us out of sheep-like passivity and sets us at noting and contriving ……conflict is the sine qua non of reflection and ingenuity.” Similar positive effects are also pointed out by Cosier and Dalton (1990).

(1) **Conflict is emotionally defined** – we recognise via our emotional response that conflict has been triggered. (2) **Conflict is emotionally valenced** – the course of conflict is impacted by the weight of emotion at any point. (3) **Conflict invokes a moral stance** – events evoke judgements of good and bad, right and wrong. (4) **Conflict is identity based** – emotions reveal a sense of self and identity needs. (5) **Conflict is relational** – key relational elements are power, status and interdependence and conflict often arises from a challenge to perceptions of social relations.

Zurcher (1982) uses a dramaturgical framework to analyse emotions as enacted responses to situational scripts exemplified by crowd and team responses to an intervarsity American football game, and thus of emotions as contingently constructed. Jone’s five principles above also indicate the contingent nature of emotions in conflict. Thus it may be assumed that the emergence of an acknowledged state of breach, and thence of crisis, in normative relations is also contingent, depending on local or individual interpretation and sensemaking of events.

### 3.5.3 Burke’s dramatism: the Pentad

Burke sees Life as little distinguishable from drama in the way we make sense of the world (Burke, 1969a). Burke is regarded by some (Mangham and Overington, 1983; Sinha, 2010) as the father of dramatism, that genre of thought that uses ideas and metaphors drawn from theatre to illustrate human behaviour and which includes the metaphorical work of Goffman (1959) and the social drama of Turner (1980).

For Burke we play our parts successfully, or not, in relation to the interplay between the causal conditions of Scene, Act, Agent, Agency and Purpose – the dramatistic ‘pentad’ (Burke, 1969a) - (these translate respectively to When and Where, What, Who, How and Why). Overington (1977) explains that it is only through an understanding of the interaction of Scene, Act, Agent, Agency and Purpose that a true picture of causality emerges. Nevertheless, Burke himself later acknowledged that a sixth motivational term needs to be included, which is Attitude; that is to say a term for *incipient* action, or that action which is emergent but not yet enacted. However, Perinbanayagam (1991) thinks that even this explanatory ‘hexad’ is insufficient and adds a seventh motivational term, ‘temporality’, to the list. His view is that even as we engage with others with an end in mind, the other responds to us in the present moment such that we tend continually to renegotiate the terms and context of that engagement and
conceivably the end itself. This is more akin to improvisation than to formal drama and seems resonant with the thinking of symbolic interaction (Mead, 1962), and the creative dialogue of Bakhtin (1986) where new thinking is said to emerge from the dialogic negotiation of meanings.

Nevertheless, despite the refinements of attitude and temporality Burke’s dramatism is typically expressed as consisting of a ‘pentad’ of interrelating principles that are inescapably dramaturgic – Act, the deed or event done, Agent, the doer of that deed, Agency, the means by which the act was done, Scene, the background to the Act and Purpose, why the deed was done. For Burke these principles constitute a resource for understanding any human activity in any sphere (Burke, 1969a). The language of dramatism in motivation arises not as a simple, metaphorical transfer of dramaturgical language into the analysis of non-theatrical contexts but out of the realisation that the interplay of the pentadic terms constitutes an appropriate explanation of social action. Furthermore, the terms are linked in that there is an insistent, dramatic requirement that one pentadic element gives rise to another as a matter of coherence (Overington, 1977). As Burke himself points out, “It is the principle of drama that the nature of acts and agents should be consistent with the nature of the scene. And whereas comic and grotesque works may deliberately set these elements at odds with one another, audiences make allowance for such a liberty, which reaffirms the same principle of consistency in its very violation” (Burke, 1969a, p.3).

Thus a particular setting or Scene creates expectation for certain Agents and Acts to be present therein. In the same way a particular Agent creates expectation for certain Agency and Acts to be associated with that Agent. The way the terms work together are expressed by Burke as ‘ratios’ and Perinbanayagam (1982, p.268) adds, “It is the existence of such a neat ratio in drama that forces Burke to call his method dramatism.” According to Overington (1977) Burke saw the terms of the pentad as conditioning the assumptions made about cause and effect sequences. Thus if someone kills another person and that act is called a ‘murder’, the term itself requires (causes) a search to be made for a ‘murderer’ (Overington, 1977, p. 134). In other words there are coherent ‘ratios’ in Scene-Act and Scene-Agent that have an impact on further Acts and further Scenes. Mangham and Overington (1987, p. 70) insist that analysts using a Burkean perspective need to recognise that it is both the pentad and the pentadic ratios by which one analyses an object of study otherwise the analysis is incomplete.
3.5.4 Empirical use of the Pentad

The dramatistic pentad has been used in a number of organisational studies that include reflections on the study of leadership (Sinha, 2010), the analysis of a celebratory company outing (Walker and Monin, 2001), the study of praxis in a family enterprise in the USA (Graham-Hill and Grimes, 2001) and the analysis of a case study of technical writers (Fox, 2002). Sinha suggests that Goffman’s dramaturgy, Turner’s social drama and Burke’s dramatism can be used as research tools in examining the leader-follower relationship stressing that Burke’s literal terms enable researchers to “concentrate on the intrinsically theatrical and dramaturgical nature of leadership as the focal point of analysis” (Sinha, 2010, p.199).

Examples of the use of dramatism in research include the pentadic analysis of a celebratory company picnic (Walker and Monin, 2001). The researchers applied the individual categories of the pentad in the analysis of a New Zealand based company outing that had entailed transporting over a hundred people several thousand miles to the workforce’s home community. Thus the company celebration had a deeper significance as a homecoming. This was presented as an act of social responsibility under the pretext of the company’s tenth birthday, whereas the Press criticised it as a PR gimmick. By looking separately at the potential motives (Purpose) of the company owner (Agent) in setting up and enacting the event (Act), as well as perceived outcomes (Purpose), in the context of both geography and culture (Scene) and the owners’ role and means by which he set the event up (Agency), the researchers claimed to have achieved a much more nuanced understanding of what had happened and why it happened. This study demonstrated that the pentad can be applied in simple, categorical terms but as the authors freely admit, while this fragmentary approach may reveal aspects of the situation that might otherwise have been missed, a synthesis of their analysis through a ratios treatment might have provided deeper understanding of the ambiguities implicit in the event.

Fox (2002) is the only empirical study encountered in the organisational studies literature that applies the pentad as ratios in the analysis. In bringing a critical approach to what is offered as ‘the real’ Fox chose the pentad for the analysis of a ‘workplace drama’. This was to avoid what Burke sees as the reductive nature of any single terministic screen (Burke, 1969a). Fox regards the pentad as providing a variety of screens whereby to grasp but not reduce, “the messy and complex nature of human interactions” (Fox, 2002, p. 367), arguing that the pentad is generative rather than reductive and capable of disclosing multiple truths beyond ‘the real’. She claims that the pentad ratios offer at least ten different terministic
Fox looked at the communication between two technical writers and two engineers whose expertise the writers sought in order to write a new technical manual. On the surface Fox saw a dominant power relation where the engineers behaved as if the writers were of little significance. However, by applying the pentad analysis to develop a more nuanced understanding Fox realised that the engineers were ‘communicating to learn’. One engineer in particular was negotiating separate Agent roles of expert, teacher and student. In communicating his knowledge, he began to understand his own expertise more fully, and acknowledged the writers’ role in that. Similarly, Fox noted that the relationship was not as one-sided as it first appeared, but that the writers had more Agency in the Scene than appeared on the surface. By viewing this interaction through the lenses of various pentad ratios Fox was able to discern fine differences in the nuances of meaning that lay between the contentious parties. Through disclosing these nuances Fox was able to improve communication between the two sides of what had been a frustrating process. Thus the analysis not only critically revealed the ambiguities underlying what the parties regarded as ‘real’, it also constituted a practical method for enabling improved communication between the parties. The parties themselves appreciated the depth of analysis that the ratios provided to elucidate their situation and help them resolve it.

We can see here that Burke’s dramatism might seem to offer a denser means of analysis than one based purely on the language of dramaturgy. Nevertheless, Perinbanagayam (1982) notes that Goffman was influenced by Burke in his development of a dramaturgical analysis of human behaviour, seeking to convert the descriptive terms that Burke used in the analysis of language into “artefacts”—that is to say, tangible objects that can be manipulated as dramaturgical gestures (Perinbanagayam, 1982, p. 264). Thus these gestures are outward signs representing the meaning of social interaction, and the arrangement of gestures both verbally and non-verbally constitute a materialisation of the self in social interaction (Perinbanagayam, 1982, p. 266). Perinbanagayam suggests that this materialisation, in the sense of Goffman’s dramaturgy, demonstrates Burke’s ratios both in observance and infraction. Thus if we do not play our parts well in relation to acts and scene, we violate the ratios (Burke, 1969a). Reflecting on what Burke might mean by violation of the scene-act ratio in the context of Goffman’s dramaturgy, Perinbanagayam poses social congruence in terms of X situations requiring Y involvement (Perinbanagayam, 1982, p.269). Thus for example, social
conversation requires light involvement whilst a funeral requires deep involvement. In the former case signs of grief, and in the latter case light-hearted chatter, constitute ‘violation’.

There are claims that Goffman’s dramaturgy is insufficiently dramaturgical and does not draw a complete picture of life (Kärreman, 2001). Others consider that a dramaturgical perspective as metaphor does not provide a complete description of performative social interaction (Perinbanayagam, 1982; Denzin, 2002; Biehl-Missal, 2011). Despite this, we see in Perinbanayagam’s explication of Goffman’s translation of Burke’s literary terms into action the possibility of a synthesis of dramatistic discourses. Sinha (2010) goes further, advocating that researchers of leadership might combine the perspectives of Turner’s social drama with Goffman’s dramaturgy and Burke’s dramatism to achieve a fuller reading of leader and follower relations. This suggests the possibility of a processual analysis of action using dramaturgical language applied across a range of pentadic ratios.

3.6 Summary

It would appear that theatre texts, discourse and practice are much used in organisational development as analogy, in analysis of social action, in skills transfer and in preparation of organisational audiences for organisational change. Theatre as metaphor and dramaturgical analysis of action would seem to be the most commonly applied theatrical frames in organisational analysis. However, theatre as metaphor is contested on the basis of being too close to life to be useful as metaphor (Cornelissen, 2004) and arguably even this proximity disappears when life itself is regarded as drama. Thus Edmund Kean’s impact on the playing of Shakespearean kings (Mangham, 1990) or Shakespeare’s treatment of Henry V (Mangham, 2001) might be regarded not as analogies but as models for leadership behaviour.

Recognition that life is synonymous with drama perhaps explains why dramaturgical language is commonplace in organisational life and this seems especially to be the case when discussing leadership. However, dramaturgical analysis is contested as a comprehensive explanation of social action on a number of counts including the view that firstly, it does not deal with the continuous nature of the negotiation of meaning and identity through symbolic interaction (Denzin, 2002) and secondly, the view that dramaturgy merely relabels organisational processes rather than consider the nature of ‘performance and its aesthetic experience’ (Biehl-Missal, 2011, p. 621).
A dramaturgical comparison of organisational and professional actors shows a number of similarities when taking a view of both types of actors’ behaviour being determined by scripts provided by others (Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004). Nevertheless, it is recognised that professional actors are free to interpret either the scripts given to them or when improvising their own imagined realities. This might be deemed to be equivalent to Coopey and Burgoyne’s aspiration for organisational actors to be able to engage in a creative dialectic within a visible learning arena where they might test “strategies for unlearning existing knowledge, and for reframing what is already known” (Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000, p.876).

Burke’s dramatistic framing of analysis seeks a causal explanation that accounts for ambiguity through the application of a number of terministic screens to the analysis, that is to say, through the pentad. This may be familiar to organisational actors because of the journalistic exercise of ‘what, where, who, why, when and how’ framed by the writer Rudyard Kipling as:

“I have six honest serving men,
They taught me all I knew,
I call them what and where and when
And how and why and who”

However, Burke expresses these simple terms dramaturgically as Act (What), Scene (Where and When), Agency (How), Purpose (Why) and Agent (Who), because drama insists on coherence between the terms and indeed shows how the terms function as ‘ratios’ because of the inevitable dramaturgic association of one term with another. The application of ratios in analysis shows how ambiguities may be framed and multiple interpretations made, thus revealing whole rather than partial worlds.

Finally, Turner’s social drama arises when there is crisis in perceived normative relations. This drama follows the pattern of Lewin’s ‘freeze, unfreeze, freeze’ heuristic for change (1951) and enables the examination of the extent and quality of the unfreezing as well as a comparison to be made of the ‘before’ and ‘after’ frozen states. Social drama is a way to highlight conflict between social actors and Turner (1974) notes how actors can become trapped by defined social roles into playing inevitably into conflict when there is a ‘deliberate non-fulfilment of some crucial norm regulating the intercourse of the parties’ (Turner, 1974, p. 38).
3.7 Conclusion: When ‘life is theatre’

The literature on dramaturgy reviewed here has a number of different perspectives, which include theatre as ontology (Burke), as metaphor (Goffman), as model (Mangham), as aesthetics (Taylor) and as a processual frame for conflict (Turner).

I argue that it is from a sense of theatre as a separate, elevated (often literally so) genre of human activity that dramaturgical language derivates its power of symbolic association. For instance, Cole (1975) sees theatre as a kind of threshold space wherein imagined truth and deeper expressions of human nature interface with what we recognise as our present reality or truth. From here it is a simple step to the elevated use of theatre and dramaturgy in the description and explanation of human relations, as evidenced in much of the literature reviewed here.

Burke’s dramatism comes from what he saw as the central principle of drama - a consistency between the nature of acts and agents and the nature of the scene (Burke, 1969a, p.3). Goffman explains everyday social action as presented performances of the self in interaction with others (Goffman, 1959). Mangham is yet more theatrical than Goffman in his use of dramaturgic language to model and explicate human behaviour (Mangham, 1986) whilst Taylor and Hansen (2005) emphasise the aesthetic nature of the dramatic experience as crucial to understanding the complexity of human relations in organisational life.

In contrast, Turner (1982) is less concerned with using a dramaturgical perspective to understand human behaviour in general than with scoping the processual nature of conflict as social drama, which can be differentiated from normative social relations. Key to the progress of the social drama is what Turner calls the liminality of the crisis stage where “the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were trembles in the balance” (Turner, 1982, p. 44). Novitz (2002) argues that it is the processual nature of human conflict, expressed by Turner as social drama, with its attendant sense of liminality, which is part of the very evolution of theatre. According to Novitz, theatre, which has been separated out as a particular artistic genre is predicated on playing back to us, or mirroring, the dramas of ordinary human conflict, which constitute breaches in normal relations. Both social drama and theatrical drama are sites for liminality wherein may be explored the personal and social transformation that breach has made potential.

The potency of theatre may be thought to lie both in the coherence with which it presents the possibility of transformation and in the extent to which it conveys a
sense of liminality. Similarly, dramaturgical analysis of human relations identifies and reveals incoherence and normative rigidity that might inhibit liminality. For instance, a Burkean analysis identifies contradiction and ambiguity. Goffman identifies both the loss and saving of face when performances are incoherent. Mangham reveals how mystification leads to the acceptance of incoherent explanations. With this in mind the view is taken here that different types of TIO are attempts at creating portals into liminal, transformational states - although it is questionable as to whether these attempts are successful.

Thus, for example, corporate theatre might be thought to seek to seduce its audiences into a transformational space, suggesting that the past is negated by the promise of a bright future. Schreyögg and Höpfl’s organisational theatre is about showing new visions of reality. This is in anticipation that audiences will become aware of a contingency in processes and form - a kind of liminal sensitivity - and consequently be more prepared for change. In corporate forum theatre the offer is made to explore a transformational space through changing the action on the stage. Finally, an appeal to an aesthetic principle (Taylor and Hansen, 2005) is to invite audiences to dive beneath the cognitive radar into an uncertain and ambivalent liminality.

TIO invites participants into a transformational space but there is little evidence that this is effective, and indeed more evidence that it is not (e.g. Gibb, 2004; Biehl-Missal, 2010, 2012; Rae, 2013). It is not easy to say why this may be. It was suggested earlier that refractive theatre tends to offer alternative realities based on organisational aims. In this sense the ‘imaginative truth’ of these aims are conceivably too distant from audiences to be transformational. Alternatively, reflective theatre that mirrors, however exactly, the routine mundanity of audience experience might not be capable of drawing the audience into liminal exploration; where anything is possible. This implies that theatre as a ‘mirror up to nature’ is not just about the mimetic reproduction of a superficial actuality. Indeed, Hamlet’s advice to the players continues, “hold..... the mirror up to nature, show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.” This means that mirroring includes revelation of the ‘present truth’ (Cole, 1975) of the moral agent in action in the context of the time in which he lives; the mirror of theatre reveals more than a mere mimesis of presented superficial behaviour.

The concept of theatre as mirror also makes a contribution to an understanding of the ontological statement that ‘life is theatre’. When imaginative truth meets with present truth in the context of theatre, the possibility of a profound mirroring of
human nature is presented. However, when daily life becomes the ‘stage’ on which imaginative truth is made seductively available to life in the present, both through the offer of alternative realities that bombard our senses every day and through an increasing compulsion to turn every aspect of our lives into performance, then daily life rather than theatre serves as the ground and mirror for our performances; life is theatre.

In TIO the attempt is to create changes and improve performances in the context of life as theatre. It is to move people into a theatrical, liminal space where performances are prepared to deal with the uncertainty of the more mundane liminality of organisational life. Air stewards learn theatrical improvisation skills to cope with the ever-changing situations that their occupation entails (Daly et al., 2009), and bus drivers learn that their vehicle is their stage (Pollitt, 2010).

TIO often also attempts to draw audiences into a liminal space in order to create a dialogue for change. This was Boal’s intention for Forum Theatre as a prompt for action and dialogue about action. Dialogue is thus seen as both a product of, and vehicle for, the engagement between organisational actors in the liminal space. Indeed, claims are made for organisational theatre as a means of making the “undiscussible discussible” and as a means of initiating creative dialogue around the issues that the theatre piece is set up to address. Yet the nature of TIO as both refractive and reflective means that there are multiple possibilities for dialogue about identity, meaning and practice in relation to organisational aims. It is unclear from the literature as to the basis on which dialogue in the context of TIO is undertaken. Given that dialogue would appear to be a crucial aspect of the participation of organisational actors in TIO, the next chapter turns to a review of what constitutes dialogue and how it might manifest in the context of organisations and TIO.

3.7.1 Conclusion: Forum Conversations

In Forum Conversations organisational actors work with professional actors to explore their own ‘difficult conversations’ that might or might not indicate some breach in normative relations in the workplace. In preparing the professional actor to take on the role, attitudes and behaviour of the ‘difficult other’, participants outline the plot, script and characters of the drama that is to be enacted. In so doing they seek to make sense of their difficult communication relationship in terms of action and context and thus present a rough, dramatistic analysis. This is then converted into an improvised enactment with the professional actor in front of an audience of the participant’s peers. Thus it is possible to look at each difficult
conversation through three different lenses within the dramatistic genre (Sinha, 2010).

Firstly, the *mise en scene* and language of dramaturgy enables an analysis of the organisational actors’ participation in Forum Conversations to be expressed in terms of a theatrical consciousness that portrays the worklife situations that participants bring into Forum Conversations as life in action.

Secondly, since ‘difficult conversations’ might be considered to imply some kind of breach in normative relations it is appropriate to use Turner’s social drama template to examine the way Forum Conversations might play a part in the ‘redressive’ stage of the social drama. The impact of this might be seen best by examining the ‘reintegration’ stage post-Forum Conversation when participants return to the workplace.

Finally, dramatism as expressive of a complete motivational causality is a means of examining participants’ accounts and interpretations of events and relations before and after Forum Conversations.

Thus application of Sinha’s three-pronged dramatistic approach to an analysis of Forum Conversations may be conducive to gaining an understanding about Forum Conversations as an organisational theatre method and about what it achieves. One of the key achievements claimed of organisational theatre is an initiation of dialogue amongst participants and it is thus to an understanding of dialogue in organisations that this review now turns.
CHAPTER 4: DIALOGUE AND THEATRE IN ORGANISATIONS

4.1 Introduction

Some writers and practitioners consider organisational theatre to be a means of engendering dialogue amongst the workforce in the context of organisational change. This investigation looks at Forum Conversations as a potential site for the initiation of dialogic communication.

Forum Conversations entail the rehearsal of participants’ actual difficult conversations. Stone et al (2000) define difficult conversations as anything people find hard to talk about. In Forum Conversations this definition is extended to include anyone that is hard to talk to and this person is termed ‘the difficult other’. Table 4.1 shows typical difficult conversation scenarios brought into Forum Conversations. Chapter 4 is a review of literature on difficult conversations and dialogue in order to situate Forum Conversations as an interactive theatre method that might enable a transition from difficult conversation to dialogue. This entails an understanding of what is meant by difficult conversations and how specific writing on difficult conversations might be situated in interpersonal communication theory. Thence the review turns to dialogue in theory and in practice, highlighting the place that dialogue has in organisations and in organisational theatre. From here the chapter looks at the distinction between monologism and dialogism and how the dialogism of Mikhail Bakhtin adds to an understanding of why dialogue is important in social relations and in consequence why it might be a desired outcome of organisational theatre interventions.

Table 4.1 Typical Difficult Conversations Scenarios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
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<tr>
<td>Giving bad news, including redundancy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Influencing a manager to increase resource</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dealing with demanding clients</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dealing with poor performance</td>
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<td>Dealing with bullies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Influencing others to change poor behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult negotiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing changes in reporting relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dealing with diversity</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
4.2 ‘Difficult Conversations’ and interpersonal communication theory


Some of these works on difficult conversations emphasise improvement in an individual’s ‘message sending’ or communication management skills or yet again, personal authenticity (e.g. Scott, 2004). Such approaches might be considered to be aligned with interpersonal communication theories that view the individual as ontologically distinct from social interaction (Baxter and Braithwaite, 2008) and are thus concerned with individual aims in communication such as goal attainment (e.g. Dillard, 1990) or uncertainty reduction (e.g. Berger and Calabrese, 1975).

Other works are more relational in content. Their basis is the assumption that difficulties in communication arise when each side is insistently pursuing its own interest, and that understanding the other side’s position will improve communication (e.g. Fisher and Ury, 1981; Stone et al, 2000; Grimsley, 2010). Interpersonal communication theories that are arguably aligned with this view include relational communication theory (RCT) (Berger and Kellner, 1964; Rogers, 2008), relational dialectics theory (RDT)(Baxter and Montgomery, 1996) and social exchange theories (e.g. Thibaut and Kelley, 1959).

Whilst social exchange theories regard communication exchanges almost as an economic transaction where self-interest is balanced with interdependence, it is theorised in relational communication theory that it is the exchange of messages that constitutes the basis of relations between people thus establishing the primacy of communication as a formative, constitutive process (Rogers, 2008).

In terms of difficult conversations there is a view that a constant ‘dance’ between individual behaviours and systematic patterns of communication can trap people into a negative interdependence (Rogers, 2008). Thus communicants, as members of the exchange, “will tend increasingly to become entrapped in patterns that work against them, and, overtime, that work against the members' abilities to
maintain the relationship” (Rogers, 2008 p.341). Nevertheless, Rogers claims that it only takes one individual member to change his or her behaviour in order to change the pattern of the relationship (Rogers, 2008, p.344) and this thinking is often the basis of self-help books on the subject.

The sense of individual determination within a patterned relationship is central to relational dialectics theory (RDT), which says that meaning emerges from the struggle between different discourses (Baxter and Braithwaite, 2008, p.351), and where “discourses are systems of meaning that are uttered whenever we make intelligible utterances aloud with others” (Baxter and Braithwaite, 2008, p.349). In RDT, meaning is regarded as emerging both in the moment of exchange (synchronic) and also deposited over time (diachronic). It is both this synchronicity and the diachronic deposit that are said to constitute social reality (Baxter and Braithwaite, 2008).

Baxter and Braithwaite (2010) state that the use of the term ‘dialectics’ in RDT is interchangeable with the term ‘dialogism’ as used by the Russian thinker Bakhtin. Dialogism as dialectics is seen to be destructive of orderly structures and systems that are seen as incompatible with “a social universe that has neither fixity nor solid boundaries” (Baxter and Braithwaite, 2010, citing Murphy, 1971, p.90).

A dialogism that is positioned as a struggle between discourses would appear to be a coherent theoretical framing for the kind of struggles that underlie difficult conversations. But other notions of what constitutes dialogue are conceptually different to such a struggle. Therefore when writers and practitioners claim ‘dialogue’ is an outcome of organisational theatre it is unclear what they mean. Before looking at different thinking on what is meant by dialogue, both in theory and practice, this review briefly examines claims made for organisational theatre and dialogue.

4.3 Dialogue

4.3.1 Dialogue as an outcome of theatre in organisations

Schreyögg is of the opinion that organisational theatre ‘renders the undiscussable discussable’ (Schreyögg, 1998 and 2001) and Meisiek (2004, p. 798) comments, “diverse (TIO) techniques are generally employed to create an awareness of problems, to create togetherness, to stimulate discussion, and to foster a readiness for change.” Meisiek also refers to a specific, practitioner organisational theatre company that claims theatre experiences enable dialogue amongst the audience.
Darsø et al add, “the processes of role play and forum theatre allow individuals and groups to engage in a creative dialogue leading to greater self-understanding, and possibly change and innovation” (Darsø et al, 2007, p.48).

Elsewhere, in a study of a large-scale Forum Theatre project Meisiek and Barry (2007) note that Boal viewed Forum Theatre as an analogically mediated dialectic that would give rise to dialogue for change. However, Meisiek and Barry found that whilst the Forum Theatre project in their study initiated ongoing conversations among the participant audiences, a wider dialogue with management about organisational values did not take place.

Meisiek and Barry reflected that dialogue might be understood from two perspectives. Firstly, they comment on Senge’s (1995) concept of dialogue in the learning organisation as a basis for shared understanding that effectively creates a univocal outcome. And secondly, they comment on the perspective of researchers like Hazen (1993), Boje (1995), Gergen and Thatchenkerry (1996) and Oswick (2000) where dialogue is regarded as a polyphony of voices that co-develops new thinking but does not lead to the abandonment of the individual voice.

Whilst dialogue would appear to be a desired communication outcome from organisational theatre the term remains imprecise as to what constitutes dialogue as a process of interpersonal communication in the context of organisational life (Reitz, 2011).

**4.3.2 Dialogue in organisations**

Senge (1990) emphasises the development of dialogue in an organisational context as the necessary platform for organisational learning. Senge (1990) and Isaacs (2000), drawing on the thinking of Bohm, have given the notion of dialogue a place in organisational communications by suggesting normative dynamics and structures that underlie group communication. However, Meisiek and Barry (2007) suggest that Senge’s thinking is based on a simple exchange of messages that eventually coincide in univocality, the inference being that this is likely to institute the dominant voice.

Further, Mattila et al (2006) suggest that Isaacs and Bohms’ view of dialogue (Bohm, 1996; Isaacs, 2000) is abnormal in that it dwells on ‘crisis management’ and they prefer the dialogue of Bakhtin (1986) as being more related to the everyday. Gustavsen (2001), drawing on the work of Habermas (1984), has developed prescriptions for democratic dialogue in organisations and Deetz (1995) contrasts the constitutive elements of domination through control of the
information process (monologic) against a more open and welcoming communication principle that leads to "dialogic, collaborative constructions of self, other, and the world in the process of making collective decisions" (Deetz, 1995, p.107). Throughout this writing on dialogue, central themes would appear to include a spirit of openness, the sharing of assumptions and a balance between advocacy (of one’s own view) and inquiry (of the other’s view). Bohm suggests it is not about ‘winning’ (debating) or ‘cutting things finer’ (discussion), but about ‘sharing meaning’ (dialogue), (Bohm, 1996; Isaacs 2000).

There are many examples of the successful effects of dialogue in organisations where it has ameliorated conflict, enabled the reappraisal of common values or mitigated problematic effects of organisational change (Isaacs, 2000). Bokeno (2007) advocates the inculcation of dialogue at work as a way of transcending instrumentalism in organisations. Elsewhere Philips and Huzzard (2007) analysed a democratic dialogue that was set up in a Swedish company based on Gustavsen’s principles of dialogue (2001). They were excited by what they expressed as ‘the magic of dialogue’ in terms of the observed outcomes, but also asked critically, "Does participation transfer? Is participation in the dialogue coerced? In a hidden way, does the output need Management to continue? Can ‘participation’ be a control tool?" This sounds a similar note of caution to those writers who have doubts about the nature of participation in organisational theatre.

Deetz and Simpson (2004) consider dialogue to be “critical in our increasingly interconnected and multicultural context” and are of the view that three dominant positions on dialogue evolved in the latter half of the 20th century, all of which Reitz (2011) claims emerged from Buber’s distinction between I-It and I-Thou relations (Buber, 1958). These three positions are liberal humanism that seeks to understand and access meaning as located within individuals (e.g. Rogers, 1980; Bohm, 1996), secondly, a critical hermeneutic orientation (e.g. Habermas, 1984) that locates the production of meaning in the interaction between people and thirdly, a postmodern view that emphasises the role of ‘otherness’ in the social construction of realities through dialogue (e.g. Bakhtin, 1981; Gergen and Thatchenkerry, 1996). Deetz (2006) suggests that epistemological differences between these three categories can give rise to misunderstandings about the fundamental nature of dialogue and what its purpose might be in any given context. Thus when practitioners talk of organisational theatre as initiating dialogue it is unclear what interpretative view of dialogue they mean.

One way of understanding dialogue is to contrast it with monologue, which may be described as anti-relational, where the monologist seeks to pursue their own
interests, regarding others as objects that aid or hinder that pursuit. Dialogue is seen as the reverse of this.

### 4.3.3 Monologism and dialogism

Buber (1958) characterised the difference between monologic and dialogic communication as respectively I-It and I-Thou relations. In the former case "Other persons are viewed as "things" to be exploited solely for the communicator's self-serving purpose" (Johannesen, 1996, p.69). According to Johannesen, monologic communicators do not recognise others’ needs and persist in imposing their own truth or programme, failing even to recognise that there might be alternative truths and programmes. This same distinction is made by Bakhtin saying that monologism denies the existence of another consciousness outside itself as having equal rights, being regarded merely as an object (1984, p.292). In the context of corporate theatre (Clark and Mangham, 2004a; Biehl-Missal, 2011) and of organisational theatre (Nissley et al, 2004) critics express a concern with the closed, monologic voice of dominant organisational scripts. In contrast some consider dialogic communication to be characterised by openness and respect (Bohm, 1996; Isaacs, 2000) and an attitude toward communication that expresses a genuine concern to hear and understand the other person (e.g. McClellan, 1990). This would appear to express what the organisational theatre practitioners cited above are looking to achieve with dialogue. However, the concept of dialogue has diverse implications ranging from the interrogatory as in Plato’s (Socratic) dialogue (Fine, 2011), the struggle between discourses as in relational dialectics theory (Braithwaite and Baxter, 2008), the therapeutic as in encounter groups, and yet again in negotiation (Fisher and Ury, 1981).

Dialogue also has a number of variants and contexts (Arnett and Arneson, 1999; Yankelovitch, 1999; de Liefde, 2003) ranging from communities gathering to discuss anything and everything (Brown & Isaacs, 2005) to State sponsored programmes and corporate change programmes (Isaacs, 2000) to mediating political conflict (Yankelovitch, 1999) all which may be supported by different processes (Owen 1996; Brown & Isaacs, 2005). However, there remains a problem with initiating dialogue particularly where there are conflicting communities. There may often be significant inertial and structural resistances that must first be overcome (see Isaacs, 2000). This may be thought of as an activation problem and this is presumably where organisational theatre is advocated in the context of organisational change and development (e.g. Meisiek and Barry, 2007).
4.3.4 ‘Doing’ dialogue

Stewart and Zediker (2000, p.230) note that there are many ways to ‘do’ dialogue and one cannot predict in advance exactly what it will take for the dialogic quality of contact to come into being. While there are many commentaries on how to dialogue (Deetz, 1995; Isaacs, 2000; Oswick, 2000; Gustavsen, 2001) there seems less clarity on three counts. Firstly, what particular characteristics and qualities might enable an individual to engage effectively with the dialogue process? For example, a number of commentators have reflected on the relationship between dialogue and emotional intelligence (Massey, 1998; Levine, 2006; Mohapel, 2006). Massey suggests that after engaging in dialogue the emotional intelligence levels of some participants were raised, thus implying reciprocal effects (Massey, 1998). Secondly, there seems less certainty about how to initiate dialogue although there is common understanding that at least one party must be prepared to declare some vulnerability or transparency at the outset (Ellinor and Gerard, 1998; Simmonds, 1999; Yankelovitch, 1999). Thirdly, it would appear that it could be difficult to sustain a spirit of dialogue between people, particularly in organisations where power differences that are seemingly postponed during dialogue return in force post-dialogue, giving rise to anxiety and mistrust amongst those who might have been led to ‘reveal all’ during the actual dialogue process (Spohn, 2007). As Grudin (1996, p.13) notes, “[Dialogic interaction are] positive in the sense that they always generate some sort of energy. They shed light on nature and human affairs. Usually this results in growth and progress. But of course dialogue is a form of power and power of any sort can be misused”. Indeed, Hammond et al (2003) point out that dialogue may be initiated by leaders in an attempt to create open discussion but this may still reflect the leader’s own agenda.

4.3.5 Dialogue and organisational theatre

This power relation is problematic in the context of organisational theatre where organisational actors may be encouraged to participate openly in an interactive dialogue (Rae, 2013) that may bear little relation to the day- to-day organisational climate where negotiation of a new order of reality is unlikely to be available (Clark and Mangham, 2004b). Moreover, it would appear that organisational theatre does not offer normative or democratic structures for a dialogue process, such as those of Isaacs (2000) or Gustavsen (2001). Instead organisational theatre relies on theatre-based interactions to provide a forum for communication exchange. Thus few processual rules would seem to be offered in organisational theatre for dialogic communication within the guidelines of which participants might safely engage with significant organisational problems (Gibb, 2004). Yet the expectation remains for
organisational theatre to initiate dialogue based either on exposure as an audience in the theatre to a different way of doing things (e.g. Shreyögg and Höpfl, 2004; Boje, 2007) or to a predominantly vicarious experience where a handful of audience members participate either as spect-actors (sic) or as discussants to offer active solutions to the theatrically staged problematic (Meisiek, 2002; Larsen, 2005; Darso, 2007; Meisiek and Barry, 2007; Rae, 2011, 2013).

4.3.6 Polyphony

As discussed earlier, in various ways and forms organisational theatre offers different constructions of reality, which are regarded as the basis for a collective dialogue with audience members. Deetz notes dialogue in the context of “collaborative constructions of self, other, and the world in the process of making collective decisions” (Deetz, 1995, p.107). This suggests a polyphonic world of many voices that interact to construct a given reality.

Belova et al (2008) suggest that Bakhtin introduced the notion of a polyphony of voices in social interactions. They summarise the work in organisational studies that has emphasised this plurality, drawing particular attention to suggestions made by Carter (2003, p. 295) that polyphony is “always present in organisations even if it is often silenced by dominant voices” and that “in most organisations, there is a persistent plurality of different linguistic constructions that shape reality”. Belova et al also note that in our lived experience our actions (as researchers) orient others’ responses. This is a reflexive note for any researcher but also indicates the literal and metaphorical sense of ‘voices’ through which different discourses “clash and interfere with each other” (Belova et al, 2008, p.495) and in which meanings are fragmented, partial and constantly changing (Hazen, 1993). This sense of flux and disturbance in organisational life is given metaphorical force by Boje’s (1995) use of the Hollywood play ‘Tamara’ as an exemplar for the polyphony of stories that lace across any large organisation.

The theatre play Tamara was set in a large house with ten actors performing simultaneous scenes in different parts of the house. The audience chose one of the actors to follow around the house so that they saw only the story of that actor rather than the whole play. By virtue of the choice the spectators made of which actor to follow each spectator created their own individual view of the unfolding story. Boje (1995) used the metaphor of Tamara in an analysis of the Disney organisation “to demonstrate a plurivocal story of competing organisational discourses”, highlighting the potential for multiple interpretations that emerge “from the constructions that organisations collectively "write" as their histories.”
With this in mind this review now looks more closely at the work of Bakhtin where plurivocality is the fundamental basis of dialogism.

4.4 Mikhail Bakhtin

4.4.1. Bakhtin living in a world of words

Bakhtin was a philosopher and cultural theorist living and working in Soviet Russia during the first half of the twentieth century. Gardiner and Bell (1998, pp.1-2) note that his work encompassed “an existential phenomenology that focuses on human perception, the body, and intersubjectivity; the aesthetics of cultural creations; the philosophy of language; literary theory; the revolutionary potential of humour; social ecology; the temporal and spatial constitution of human life; critical interrogations of Freudianism, Marxism, Russian formalism, and Saussurean linguistics; and the ethical and moral implications of all these.” What is not mentioned in this list, because it is woven across all these fields of enquiry is his theory of dialogue. As he wrote “I live in a world of others’ words. And my entire life is an orientation in this world, a reaction to other’s words” (Bakhtin 1986, p.143).

Bakhtin is said to ‘live’ as an embodiment rather than as a construction in this world of words (Barsky and Holquist, 1990). As Gardiner and Bell note (1998, p.5), Bakhtin’s ethics has at its centre “a primordial concern for the other and an unequivocal recognition of difference…the experience of alterity, the self/other relation, which constitutes the basis of his dialogical outlook…one that is rooted in everyday sociability”. It is this understanding that makes Bakhtin’s thinking increasingly influential across a number of disciplines (Gardiner and Bell, 1998; Barsky and Holquist, 1990). At a time when the uncertainties playing upon modern organisations are less and less amenable to instrumental solutions, Bakhtin’s dialogue has been posited as a new way of thinking and communicating within organisational change management (Jabri, 2004).

4.4.2. Bakhtinian Dialogism

Bakhtin sees the self as being constructed from others’ words and the self seeks expression through those words - others’ words. Thus there is no self that is being revealed through words that are not the words of the other, which are socio-historic in origin. In this sense we are both “addressed by the past and address the past” (Sandywell, 1998), pulling the inner dialectic with ‘otherness’ into the outer dialectic with ‘otherness’ when we express ourselves to the other (Shotter and Billig, 1998). This is what Bakhtin refers to as heteroglossia or ‘double-voicing’,
“the fundamental ‘other-languagedness of human experience’” (Sandywell, 1998, p.197). Thus every expressed utterance has a polyphonic quality, for it contains the multiplicity of the other’s voice. Nevertheless, despite the emphasis on the iterative use of others’ words, for Bakhtin “an utterance is never just a reflection of an expression of something that already exists…. that is given and fixed. It always creates something that never existed before, something absolutely new and unrepeatable” (Bakhtin 1986, pp.119-120). Thus Bakhtin’s thinking points to the unique creative event that is lived and expressed in the moment (Shotter and Billig,1998; Bender, 1998; Jabri, 2004), and “where ‘coming to be’ takes precedence over ‘being’” (Sandywell, 1998, p. 200). In other words the self is dialogic, ‘becoming’ in the moment of unique exchange of utterance with the other, rather than the realist view of an independent, hidden or abstracted self that is revealed (or not) to the other, as in Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis of the presented self (1959).

Bakhtin recognises that "our actual experiencing is like a two-faced Janus. It looks in two opposite directions: it looks at the domain of culture and at the never-repeatable uniqueness of actually lived and experienced life” (Bakhtin 1993, p.2 cited in Shotter and Billig, 1998). In other words he sees a distinction between the ‘monologic voice’ of a unifying way of being, expressed through culture, and a dialogic polyphony, which allows for unique expression. Bakhtin sees "a continual tension between centripetal forces that push towards unity, agreement and monologue while the centrifugal forces seek multiplicity, disagreement and heteroglossia” (Shotter and Billig, 1998, p.16).

Bell (1998) suggests that there is a continual claim by the monologic voice to decide how things are, (expressed by Boal (1979) as the oppressor), even though, according to Bakhtin, there can be no pure monologue“- there is neither a first word nor a last word” (Bakhtin 1986, p.170).

Bell sees three strongly prevalent monologic voices: that of the objective ’I tell the final truth, proven by science, etc.‘; the subjective, ’my perspective is good as yours or any other’s’; and subjective-objective, ’through my personal experience I know the last word on the subject’ (Bell, 1998, p.54). Each of these three voices seeks to cut off dialogue. Against this, Bakhtin claims that “the ethical self participates in events from a particular position that is his or hers alone and cannot be replaced with any other position, or anyone else’s moral imperative” (quoted in Bender, 1998, p.187). In other words there is no finalised monologic ‘is’ in human relations other than that which is forced upon us; or that to which we consent. This
may well reflect our constrained unconscious and conscious responses to the imperatives of dominant organisational scripts (Perinbanayagam, 1982).

4.4.3 The Everyday

Aside from the essential and powerful tug between monologic and dialogic voices - the tension between convergent and divergent forces of identity – it is a question as to how the Bakhtinian notion of ‘becoming’ within every unique utterance, no matter how mundane, squares with the routine repetitions of daily living and organisational life. These tend to be largely unthinking habits that hardly bear testimony to the scintillating immediacy of Bakhtin’s creative moment. For Berger and Luckman everyday life is dominated by pragmatic motive, following a “recipe knowledge, that is, knowledge limited to pragmatic competence in routine performances” occupying “prominent place in the social stock of knowledge” (Berger and Luckman 1966, p.56) and sees us settling for this social routine as an alibi against responsibility (Berger, 1963).

Routine implies living in the past and not engaging in dialogue with the other. But Bakhtin sees no disjunction between smaller and larger frames of reference seeing us tie “the boundless world with the small life, tying together culture and individuals in local, understandable (and responsible) acts” and “Everyday life is participative and the ethical moment of an act occurs uniquely within the act itself” (Bender, 1998, p.188). This constitutes a definitive statement that mirrors that of Burke when he says ‘Life is theatre’. In Bakhtin’s “participative and ethical moment” Mangham and Overington’s (1987) distinction between ritualised mundanity and the theatrical event may be thought to collapse into the theatrical consciousness of ‘I’ in action, the ‘I’ that ‘is’ in the moment before the objective ‘Me’ returns to take precedence (Mead, 1962). Ultimately “Bakhtin is as Bakhtin does” (Barsky and Holquist, 1990) – a pragmatic world of being that is expressed only in the moment.

4.4.4 Dialogue ‘In the moment’

Taken in the context of organisational change which includes TIO, Jabri (2004, p.567) sees “change as the shifting of identities” emphasising the “role of Bakhtin’s notion of polyphony in understanding organizations as being comprised of multiple discourses.” Jabri looks at dominant narratives as the cohesive explanation of identity for both individual and organisation but as thus tending to “mask changes in the co-construction of meaning”. Jabri advocates Bakhtinian dialogue in organisational change programmes because it makes room for both the addresser and the addressee to meet whereby, in what Bakhtin calls transgression, there is
a co-production of identity within the unique moment of exchange, where the other plays back to the self. Perhaps Merleau-Ponty (2002, p.413) describes this meeting more comprehensively:

"in the experience of dialogue, there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground; my thought and his are interwoven into a single fabric, my words and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of the discussion, and they are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator. We have here a dual being.....our perspectives merge into each other in consummate reciprocity”

There is in this meeting of selves perhaps something about the idea of liminality, “an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were trembles in the balance” (Turner, 1982). Moreover it expresses something about the Boalian notion of theatre as seeing the ‘I in situ’ (Boal, 1995). And in the context of Forum Theatre where ‘the protagonist is the spect-actor is the protagonist’ we sense something too of Bakhtin’s triad of self - the ‘I’, the ‘other’, and the ‘I for the other’ (Bender, 1998, p.189).

Overall, we see here some hint of confluence between Bakhtin (1984), Boal (1979) and Heron and Reason (1997) in which ‘becoming’ is fundamentally about the ethics of participation. Organisational theatre is viewed as a site for participative enquiry where understanding is achieved through a dialogue on what is potentially revealed through critical incidents about trust, belief, fear and courage in organisational life presented as drama (Darsø et al, 2007). The dialogue that is revealed through action is coincident with Bakhtin’s view of dialogue reflected in statements such as, “What we share is not as interesting as what we do not share. We cannot learn or progress from shared meaning, we only learn by encountering new ideas and acting them out in intersubjective acts” (Bender, 1998, p.193 quoting Bakhtin). Forum theatre and organisational theatre are self-evidently the sites of ‘acting out intersubjective acts’.

4.5 Dialogue in Organisational Theatre

4.5.1 Dialectic to dialogue

Bakhtin’s sense of dialogue as occurring in the lived moment in which is found the creative contest between convergent and divergent voices is perhaps similar to the active dialectic that Boal sees lying at the heart of Forum Theatre and with it an invitation to participate so as “to transgress, to break conventions... in order to
foment disequilibrium that prepares the way for change” (Clark and Mangham, 2004b). Further, Meisiek notes that Boal theorises that the dialectical reasoning in an analogical setting [a Forum Theatre play is an analogue of a real struggle] provides the impetus for change-related dialogue to occur, a conclusion that is drawn from Paulo Freire (Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman 1994; Meisiek and Barry, 2007).

However, Meisiek (2002) takes the view that in the context of change management only those forms of dialogue that are configured for problem solving are appropriate in the situational drama of TIO. He refers to the dialogue models of Isaacs (2000) and Gustavsen (2001) as those most appropriate for change management because for him the theatre process in the workplace is an instrumental process that is focused on solving organisational problems. In this regard, as has been noted by Clark and Mangham (2004b) and Rae (2011), there is a clear distinction between Boal’s Forum theatre and what these researchers observed with corporate forum theatre. For instance Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman draw attention to three broad themes that constitute the powerful impact of Forum Theatre:

- “Playful, unpredictable, improvisatory, shape shifting and yet empowering means to challenge fixed, centralized, hierarchical and often oppressive circumstances and/or readings”
- “Notions of critical empathy, engaged containment, and respectful difference”
- “Theatre of the Oppressed’s potential as a creative form of resistance through one of its own fundamental lessons: dialogue”

(Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, pp.7-8)

Against this Clark and Mangham (2004b, p.8) reflected that the corporate forum theatre plays they observed were:

“not about the subversion or redesign of the hierarchy, but rather, its maintenance and lubrication through improved communication practices”.

4.5.2 Improved communication skills as conducive to dialogue?

A question that arises from this is whether improved communication practices lead as a matter of course to the ‘maintenance and lubrication’ of the hierarchy and the established order or whether the very improvement of communication might initiate dialogic practice. In other words whether this ‘improvement’ leads to greater control by the monologic voice or to the infiltration of the plurivocal dialogic voice.
into organisational communication – “a widening of ambivalence that potentially subverts univocity” (Bernard-Donals, 1998, p.120).

Recommendations for the improvement of communication in the literature on difficult conversations includes listening to the other (e.g. Stone et al, 2000) and this in itself would seem to be contrary to the monologic voice (e.g. Johannesen, 1996). Further, Isaacs (2000) and other writers on dialogue in the liberal, humanistic vein (Ellinor and Gerard, 1998; Simmonds, 1999) recommend behavioural and attitudinal approaches to the individual coming into dialogue that emphasise communication skills, such as listening, inquiring, respecting and the suspension of one’s own instantaneous opinion (e.g. Isaacs, 2000). Add to this Bell’s recommendations (1998) to individuals in dialogue to:

- Take care
- Be considerate
- Be honest
- Be straightforward
- Be responsible

This indicates that improved communication practice is an important aspect of collaboration between different voices, though it must be noted that the dominant voice is also potentially made more persuasive by virtue of such skills.

### 4.5.3 Dialogue as the interplay of old and new sense of self

It has been noted that relational dialogue co-constructs self and other in the moment of exchange and this implies that selves are ‘not’ before the exchange. However, the notion of a continuous objective self, a ‘me’, is regarded as distinct from that of the ‘I’ in the moment of exchange (Mead, 1962; Blumer, 1981; Weick, 1995). Similarly Bakhtin refers to the ‘I’ that ‘becomes’ in the lived moment (Bender, 1998) but that we are not ‘a biblical Adam’ in that we do not originate words but live in a world of others’ words (Bakhtin, 1986, p.94). This implies that as individuals we bring a storehouse of deposited meaning into each new encounter.

Similarly, relational dialectics theory (RDT) refers to ‘synchronic’ – in the moment – relational constructions, as well as ‘diachronic’ – temporally sustained – deposits of relation (Baxter and Braithwaite, 2008). This implies that the relational construction of selves in synchronic encounters also draws upon deposits of identity and meaning and this seems similar to both Bakhtin’s and Mead’s positions. Furthermore, it is suggested that where elements of a complete causal description
provided by Burke’s pentad are ‘mystified’, people might be satisfied with incomplete, unexamined explanations that are sustained over time (Mangham and Overington, 1983; Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004; Steffy and Grimes, 1986). This is further supported by Weick (1995, p.28), who explains that once we have made sense of the past and given it order, further retrospection stops. However, when meeting the present Weick suggests people take the cue for their identity from the conduct of others, but they make an effort to influence this conduct to begin with (Weick, 1995, p.23). In other words a constructed self that pre-dates any meeting in the present seeks to influence the other’s conduct. Thus it may be asked to what extent are new encounters genuinely creative ‘in the moment’ co-constructions and how much are they influenced by replays of old constructions? This would appear to be the ambiguous terrain on which dialogue operates and it would seem that in all dialogic traditions and forms it is recognised that new, shared meanings are negotiated out of old fragmented ones. And in each tradition there is advocated a dialogic attitude and set of behaviours and skills that are conducive to dialogue.

4.6 Conclusion: Dialogue

In seeking understanding of what is meant by dialogue, dialogue is contrasted with the monologic voice that fails to recognise others as anything but objects that must be manipulated and coerced into alignment with that same monologic voice. Dialogue by comparison seeks mutuality and inclusiveness between different voices (Reitz, 2011) yet it seems that, as with the Arts, dialogue is also ‘complexly interpretable’ (Meisiek and Barry, 2010), and has different forms and different understandings. For example, Senge’s dialogue is contested as being convergent towards a single voice (Meisiek and Barry, 2007) and dialogue models such as that of Isaacs (2000) are seen as normative prescriptions. In other words, such models advocate a plurivocality based on acceptable behaviour.

In contrast, others like Deetz (1995), Oswick (2000), and Hazen (1993) consider dialogue to be the co-development of meaning that retains the plurivocality of individual voices. Yet others note dialogue as a struggle between partial and fragmented discourses that changes as relations between people change (Belova et al, 2008). Relational dialectics theory (RDT) (Baxter and Braithwaite, 2008) frames this struggle theoretically. However, relational communication theory maintains that because communication depends on the relational space between people, that space can be influenced and changed by one individual (Rogers, 2008, p.344).

Bakhtin’s dialogue of the everyday has been emphasised here because Bakhtin regards dialogue as an ontological state of social being and thus occurs as a natural
consequence of the association between self and other – unless something deliberately constrains it. Such constraint has been referred to as the monologic voice. It is in this sense that Forum Theatre can be thought, not only to initiate dialogue, but to create a space where the monologic voice cannot prevail, thus freeing up what Bakhtin deems to be natural, that is, the dialogical state of ‘becoming’ in the lived moment.

However, a problem with corporate forum theatre in organisations, as has been observed by a number of theorists, is that practitioners often seem to side, if unwittingly, with dominant, ‘monologic’ voices. Thus corporate forum theatre is described as accentuating the transfer of the communication skill-set that is acknowledged as possessed by professional actors (Clark and Mangham, 2004b), but which therefore is seen as tending only to support individual skill development rather than dialogue. Nevertheless, it is deemed by some that dialogue in practice requires developed individual skills both in the advocacy of one’s own voice and in inquiry of the other’s voice. This would imply however, that the polyphony of voices in dialogue is only acceptable if it complies with normative behaviours and as noted by Burgoyne and Jackson (1997), herein lies the potential for the reinsertion of the unitarist, monologic voice. This includes doubts about the one-sidedness of a radical political voice that ‘banks’ learning into the receiver, to use Freire’s term (Freire, 1988), and perhaps even uses Forum Theatre to achieve this end (Mutnick, 2006). In this we recognise concern about the use of corporate forum theatre, as noted by Clark and Mangham in their observation of the OT play ‘Varnishing the Truth’), as tending to promote the dominant voice (Clark and Mangham, 2004b).

4.6.1 Conclusion: Dialogue and Forum Conversations

The intention of this research programme is to look at the impact of Forum Conversations on communication practice in the workplace. A view is taken that Forum Conversations, like Forum Theatre, constitute the mediation of a dialectic that might initiate dialogue (Boal, 1995). According to Deetz (1995) dialogue fosters the notion of open communication as constituting a sharing across hierarchies rather than as the mere transfer of information in order to take or maintain control. Dialogue can be seen as participative encounter between self and other such that there is recognition, on both sides, that they are constitutive of each other (Bakhtin, 1986). Moreover, Bakhtin’s notion of dialogue situates dialogue in the unique, enacted and participative moment (Bender, 1998, p.188). Practitioners and researchers at a special conference on organisational theatre in Denmark in 2006 also came to an overall conclusion that organisational theatre was thought to deliver “the concept of ‘the moment’, in which something new becomes
possible. It can be found in expressions such as 'magic', 'silence', 'the space of possibility'...and 'being in the moment'” (Darsø and Meisiek, 2007, p.13).

In Forum Conversations as with Forum Theatre participants navigate the ambiguities of ‘the space of possibility’ that is constituted by “belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image” (Linds, 2006 quoting Boal 1995, p.43). Boal calls this space ‘metaxis’ (Boal, 1995; Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006) and it is the participation in this rehearsal space that empowers action, the drawing of the image of reality into reality and thus into action against the real struggle of which the play has been the image.

4.7 Summary of literature Review

Chapter 2 reviewed the literature on Theatre in Organisations and in particular the attempts to describe and understand what interaction between professional and organisational actors tells us both about the nature of the different processes and what is sought from them in organisational development and change. Writing on TIO seems to highlight firstly, descriptions of various practices including advocacy of their positive benefits, though there is little empirical support for these claims. Secondly, there is a critical thread in the writing that is suspicious of the use of theatre methods by dominant organisational forces to seduce or control their workforces. And thirdly, there is writing that seeks to explicate the impact of theatre as an Art within an organisational context and here we see a developing interest in aesthetics and how this might contribute to a richer human experience within organisations. Yet there remains no clear view of whether TIO achieves its aims, whether particular methods are more effective than others, whether learning transfers beyond organisational theatre events, what might be the aesthetic effects of these methods, how these are managed and how they deliver organisational goals and so on.

In Chapter 3 the review sought to show the development of thinking about theatre in organisations from the use of theatre as an explanatory metaphor for organisational life to theatre as praxis that reveals the nature of experience and motivation. Three main strands of thinking that underlie this praxis are dramaturgy, social drama and dramatism. The literature shows the use of these different perspectives in the analysis of organisational life in attempts to understand organisational actors in action, which is the fundamental nature of drama (Gr. dran
Yet there appears to be little work on the nature of the active interaction between organisational and professional actors within organisational theatre.

Finally, in Chapter 4 the review looks at dialogue in light of claims made that organisational theatre gives rise to dialogue around change and practice in organisations. In this sense the review looked at dialogue in the context of its advocacy and use in both interpersonal and organisational communication, in the context of different ontologies about social relations and in the context of the synchronic, ‘in the moment’ action of everyday life and indeed, of theatre. A distinction is made between monologism and dialogism as reflecting a divide in human relations, the former being exclusive, individualistic and closed, the latter being inclusive, collaborative and open. The suggestion is that theatre promotes dialogue by providing a space for inclusion and exploration. However, a critical view has developed that organisational theatre might be used to provide the reverse of this, merely providing a novel means for promoting corporate agendas.

In sum, two key issues have emerged from the review of the literature. Firstly, the focus of study on theatre in the context of organisations has moved from a metaphorical comparison to the description and classification of theatre methods in practice. Nevertheless, there remains little empirical work on TIO and no clear demonstration of the benefits to organisational learning and development that are claimed for TIO. Secondly, a critical voice has emerged that advocates TIO as a potential forum for genuine dialogue but is concerned that TIO is more likely to be appropriated as a mouthpiece for a dominant organisational view.

It is in response to these two issues that Forum Conversations is chosen here as an object of study. The study includes the evaluation of the impact on participants and also looks at the nature of the interaction between participants and actors. This investigation looks for evidence of individual change arising from the experience, but in so doing is alert to the extent the process is promoting organisational realities as opposed to the genuine, multi-vocal realities of the participants. The investigation is focused on three main research questions:

- What is the nature of Forum Conversations?
- What is the impact of Forum Conversations?
- Why do Forum Conversations have impact?

The next chapter on methodology introduces the rationale for how data was gathered and analysed in order to provide evidence for answers to these questions.
CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

According to Willis (2007) two research characteristics – contextual understanding and emergent design - help to distinguish research as interpretive rather than post-positivist. This investigation is interpretive in that it seeks contextual understanding about Forum Conversations rather than any general laws that underlie it. Further, the investigation is an emergent rather than hypothesis based design.

Creswell (2003, p.4) suggests that for any research, “a framework is needed that combines the elements of philosophical ideas, strategies, and method”. In what follows, the interpretive research framework of Denzin and Lincoln (2005) is used to structure this methodology chapter in four sections:

1. Theoretical paradigms and perspectives
2. Methodology and Research Design
3. Methods of collection and analysis
4. Meeting criteria for the quality of the research

5.2 Choosing the research framework

Willis (2007) identifies several key qualitative research frameworks including analytic realism (Altheide and Johnson, 1994), interpretivism (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), connoisseurship (Eisner, 1997), phenomenology (e.g. Giorgi, 1995), symbolic interactionism (e.g. Blumer, 1986), semiotics (e.g. Delledalle, 2001) and postmodernism (e.g. Gergen, 2009). According to Willis, analytic realism rejects the dualism of realism/idealism and focuses on multiple contextual perspectives that in sum build a picture of an interpreted social world. Denzin and Lincoln’s interpretive perspective is similar but includes a critical element that emphasises liberation and participation. Eisner also mixes a critical stance with interpretivism but seeks to extend research practice, stressing the insights and critical expressiveness of the researcher both as connoisseur and co-constructor of meaning. In contrast a phenomenological approach seeks to establish universal human sociological and psychological structures based on the assumption that these may be detected within individual consciousness.
Symbolic interactionism entails the merger of self and social interaction as the chief means ‘by which human beings are able to form social or joint acts’ (Blumer, 1981, p. 153). This concept both localises and individuates research but has been considered to lack critical perspective (Willis, 2007, p. 180). Semiotics dwells on the study of signs and sign systems in order to analyse practices and texts as cultural, social and natural subjects and objects (Willis, 2007, citing the American Journal of Semiotics, 1998). Central to postmodernism are problematic issues of language, knowledge and power (Coffey et al, 1996). Postmodernists tend to regard phenomenologists’ structures as products of particular cultures and experiences at a particular time. Thus postmodernism supplies multiple perspectives but is less clear about embodied acts (Willis, 2007).

5.3 Interpretivism

After reflection on these different frameworks it was decided to use Denzin and Lincolns’ interpretivist approach (2005). This is largely because it emphasises my historical situatedness and multi-cultural identity as professional actor, trainer and researcher. This brings me into a close relationship with FCs and the three main research questions that seek understanding of the nature and impact of FCs. I therefore acknowledge that my interest is unlikely to be what Denzin and Lincoln term value-free and is comprised of political, personal and experiential elements. Moreover, the research interest, framed by the three main questions, concerns the experiential nature of the encounter in FCs and what meaning that has for participants after the event, not necessarily expressed in action. Both sides, the researcher and the researched, bring an inherent subjectivity to the experience, and hence an interpretivist stance is taken.

Denzin and Lincoln’s framework is in four parts:

Theoretical paradigms and perspectives – This explicates the ontological and epistemological approach taken in this study.

Research Strategies – It is the participant experience of Forum Conversations that is of interest. Consequently it was decided not to use any research method that might alter the participants’ experience of Forum Conversations as normally practiced. Because of the scarcity of literature on the empirical dynamics of Forum Conversations it was decided to conduct an inductive inquiry rather than hypothesis-led research.
Methods of collection and analysis - these include interviews, template analysis and attributional analysis.

Denzin and Lincoln include a fourth phase, which is the art and politics of interpretation and evaluation. This is a view of qualitative researchers as interpreter-writers and their attempts to make sense of what they have learned; in essence telling a story (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.26). ‘Politics’ in this phase derives from what Denzin and Lincoln see as the potential impact of research on social policy. This is not a concern in the research that is reported here. However, Denzin and Lincoln also point out the problematic of an interpretivist stance in evaluation of the quality of the research. This point is addressed along with ethical considerations in this final section.

5.4 Theoretical paradigms and perspectives

The theoretical paradigm underlying this research is essentially constructivism but I also highlight the participatory paradigm of Heron and Reason (1997). There is a complex hermeneutic relating constructivism and Heron and Reason’s participatory axiology (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) and an effort is made to show how they coincide in the methodology of this project. Theoretical perspectives include attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Weiner, 1985) and Burke’s dramatism (Burke, 1962; Overington, 1977). It is shown how these paradigms and perspectives influence the choice of methodology and research design. There is also a brief discussion of the methodological implications of my own involvement in Forum Conversations, both as participant and researcher.

5.4.1 Forum Conversations and knowledge transformation

FCs may be categorised as experiential learning. This is a “process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). There is an emphasis here on the actual rather than the abstract. What is not clear with Forum Conversations in practice is how that ‘grasping and transforming’ of experience might manifest as new knowledge, and further, how and if any new knowledge is used in practice as well as what meaning that knowledge might have. Such considerations have ontological and epistemological implications particularly in the interpretation of meaning.
5.4.2 The ontological stance in this research

My sense as a practitioner is that active participation is crucial to the impact of the Forum Conversations experience. I tend toward the participatory ontology of Heron and Reason (1997) where "Mind actively participates in the cosmos, and it is through this active participation that we meet what is Other" (Heron and Reason, 1997, p.280). My understanding of this is that whilst we make sense of our experience through subjective and intersubjective constructions we engage the given world with our flesh. Guba and Lincoln suggest that a participatory ontology still entails an ‘hermeneutic elaboration embedded ...in constructivism” (2005, p.192), but include the participatory paradigm as a separate axiology in their classification of alternative inquiry paradigms (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). Thus I see my position as fundamentally constructionist whilst I feel that the elaborate hermeneutics of “the participatory worldview, with its notion of reality as subjective-objective” (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p.9), allows me to seek not only the subjective interpretations of participants’ experience of Forum Conversations but also evidence of how that subjectivity might be expressed in participatory action.

5.4.3 Epistemological issues

In trying to grasp the totality of ‘knowing’ that is implicated in the subjective-objective experience Heron and Reason (1997) talk of an extended epistemology that integrates four different types of knowing: experiential, presentational, propositional and practical. Heron and Reason (1997, p. 280) describe experiential knowing as “direct encounter, face-to-face meeting: feeling and imaging the presence of some energy, entity, person, place, or thing.” This is the meeting with what is given and the perceptual articulation with it. Presentational knowing is how we transform our experiential knowing “into metaphors and symbols of aesthetic and spatiotemporal imagery” (ibid, p.281) and express our attunement with the given world. Propositional knowing expresses our articulation with the experiential world through concepts and language. Finally, practical knowing is seen to fulfil the three prior forms of knowing through action and “brings them to fruition in purposive deeds” (ibid, p.281). Thus purposive deeds entail a participatory response that has been shaped through experiential encounter with the world.

This study seeks an understanding within this extended epistemology of how participants’ experience of Forum Conversations helps them to grasp and transform their knowledge in their practical engagement with others in the workplace. The study is less concerned with what ‘the given’ might be, that is to say the nuts and
bolts of the Forum Conversation process, than with participants’ perceptual attunement with the experience and the impact this has on changes in their practical knowing. Thus the research looks at participants’ interpretations of their active experience with others in the workplace before and after their participation in Forum Conversations.

5.4.4 Summary statement of the ontology and epistemology of this research

Overall, this enquiry is gathered into a methodological framework that attempts to connect an essentially constructionist ontology and epistemology with research strategy and method.

The sense of a double hermeneutic in the participatory paradigm informs my own emergent ‘worldview’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 22). I look for actual changes in behaviour (practical and presentational knowing) that arise from the interpretations (propositional knowing) participants place upon their encounters with what is ‘given’ (experiential knowing). Interviews afforded a means of collecting and analysing attributions as evidence of such changes in ‘knowings’.

Moreover, I participated in the Forum Conversations method both as actor/facilitator and researcher and therefore had a dual role, which again has a bearing on epistemology. It is not unfamiliar in participatory research that the ‘researcher’ engages as a full participant in the participatory process. This has been the case, for example, in what has been described as performance ethnography (Alexander, 2005) and ethnodrama (Mienczakowski and Morgan, 2001). To an extent the difference between these two forms can be extracted from their nomenclature. Performance ethnography privileges performance as the experiential setting in which participants gain ethnographic understanding of “the variables that shape and affect cultural knowing” (Alexander 2005, p 430). Ethnodrama privileges ethnography that is represented and accentuated through the mirror of drama. In Forum Conversations it can be considered that participants are accessing a personal ethnographic understanding by performing their own cultural scripts. The professional actor both mediates and facilitates the performance as a co-researcher in the process of the participants’ personal inquiries.

Wadsworth (2001) contrasts the differences between the working practices of the ‘researcher’ as might be seen in mainstream research and those of ‘a facilitator’. The researcher’ is positioned as one who, “selects the methods and the questions, asks the questions, interprets and analyses the data, draws conclusions, makes
recommendation and writes up the report” (ibid, p.333). In contrast to this Wadsworth sees ‘the facilitator’ as “working with co-researchers to choose the methods and questions to be asked of (and possibly by) the co-researchers, and circulates the responses among them; together they interpret, analyse and draw conclusions” (ibid, p.333).

My own methodological practice is characterised by Wadsworth’s contrast between researcher and facilitator in participatory research. I follow the role described above as the ‘researcher’ of Forum Conversations. On the other hand I also took the role of ‘facilitator’ and participant/practitioner within the Forum Conversation process. This leaves me open to the charge of ‘ontological oscillation’. However, my concern was that were I to make the study of Forum Conversations a participatory action research project the very process of Forum Conversations would change from how it was contemplated at outset as a research object and thus would confound the very purpose of the research. Nevertheless, I remain aware of this ambiguity and comment reflexively on my participation in Forum Conversations as actor/facilitator.

5.4.5 Theoretical perspectives

In regard to the ‘lived-in moment’ of the experiential encounter there are three main theoretical themes that permeate this study. The first theme can be associated both with symbolic interactionism, identified with the work of Mead (1962) and Blumer (1986), and also with dialogistic interaction (e.g. Bakhtin, 1986; Isaacs, 2000). These theories explicate the attempts made by people in social interaction to coincide in a common interpretation of meaning. They refer to the adjustments people make in their verbal and non-verbal patterns of communication in order to communicate what they mean as well as to understand what the other means. Forum Conversations is predicated on such adjustments in communication and consequently the research method is based on ways of determining adjustments in behaviour in participants’ communication in the workplace.

One key aspect of the interpretation of meaning is the attempt to understand why someone has said or done what they have done and this may lead to a search for cause and an attribution to that cause. In this study, the second major theoretical theme, attributional theory (Heider, 1958 and Weiner, 1974 and 1985), is used to frame the attributions that participants in Forum Conversations make about the behaviour of their ‘difficult others’, and as will be seen, also provides a means by which comparisons can be made between the learners’ interpretations, before and after the Forum Conversation, of their own and difficult others’ behaviour.
Finally, the investigation of attributions is referenced to the theoretical framework of Kenneth Burke’s grand metaphor of causality, dramatism (Burke, 1969a), which posits that life in itself is drama and as such has both interconnected and conflicting sources of causality that may be adduced to the players themselves, to the strategies of action they employ in dealing with others (Burke, 1969b) and to the scene of the great stage of Life. This coincides with the participatory paradigm which has action as both first and final cause; as “primary (in that it presupposes) an experiential grounding in the situation within which the action occurs” and as finally “fulfilling the three other forms of knowing, bringing them to fruition in purposive deeds” (Heron and Reason, 1996, p.281).

5.5 Methodology and research design

This section considers research strategy, which entailed an inductive approach with consequent impact on strategies for collecting and analysing the data. This section also includes a commentary on my role as researcher/practitioner and finally the emergent research design is introduced.

5.5.1 Strategy

The object of research is FCs and its effects. It was decided not to use any research method that might alter the participants’ experience of FCs as normally practiced. Rather, it was decided to investigate participants’ pre and post FCs viewpoints as a means of accessing the impact of the Forum Conversation experience.

5.5.2 Inductive approach

There is little guidance from previous work that would enable informed hypothesis making prior to investigation of the impact of FCs on management learning and behaviour change. Thus it was decided to take an initial inductive approach to the study and thence, if possible, to produce theory based on specific observations, rather than the deductive inverse of this, which is to apply a general theory to the prediction and testing of specific events (De Vaus, 2002).

5.5.3 Strategies for organising data

Two different approaches have been taken to assess and organise participants’ expressed interpretations of their Forum Conversation experience.

Firstly, it was decided to look for themes that might run across the responses of all participants to questions about how they perceive the impact of the Forum
Conversation process. It was also decided to use this same approach with a number of professional actors, who are expert in FCs, in order to understand their participation.

The second approach was to make a comparison between the attributions participants make about the difficult communication predicaments in which they find themselves, both before and after their Forum Conversation. Attribution theory is a theory of sense-making about communication rather than a theory of the communication process itself. In other words this is an investigation of the way participants make sense of the causes of their communication difficulties.

5.5.4 Researcher/Facilitator role

Although I am the author of this research I chose to participate as the actor/facilitator in the process that was being studied. Reasons for this included my own experience as a practitioner of FCs, which gave me confidence that I could bring a consistency to the process since I intended to involve a number of separate participant groups in the study. I also felt confident that my professional skills were good but not exceptional compared to other practitioners. Thus I believe that I am representative of the professional actors who do this work. Other reasons were more pragmatic, including the prohibitive financial costs of using other practitioners, as well as difficulties arising from scheduling other practitioners into participant groups.

5.5.5 Research design

The study investigates FCs in practice with an emphasis on the meanings that all participants, both organisational learners and professional actors, ascribe to their experience. The research design initially contemplated in this study was qualitative/exploratory (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007) as represented in Figure 5.1. This envisaged a simple comparison of before and after intervention data, which entailed the interpretation of the participants’ interpretations, or what has been called ‘Verstehen’ (Weber, 2009; Sayer, 1992). By ‘qualitative’ is here meant ‘not-quantitative’ or not about numbers or categories of data.

Fig. 5.1 Initial Research Design
A number of research design models advocate continuous re-appraisal of the research process throughout its duration so that the design is responsive to the empirical case as the researcher engages with it (e.g. Robson, 2002 and Dubois and Gadde, 2002). Furthermore, reflexivity is encouraged in research not only to ensure its quality (e.g. Alvesson et al, 2008; Brannick and Coghlan, 2006) but also critically to challenge the assumptions the researcher is making in interpreting others’ interpretations (Cassell and Symon, 2004). Reflexivity also entails review of the researcher’s epistemological stance. For instance Dubois and Gadde suggest that, “the research issues and the analytical framework are successively reoriented when they are confronted with the empirical world” (2002, p. 554) and this might also include epistemological considerations.

As the research progressed there was a move away from the investigation of the dynamic process whereby meaning emerges primarily through negotiation with others. This arose because the frequencies of coded attributions in Study 2 were amenable to basic statistical analysis (Silvester, 2004). In consequence there was a move away from the jointly negotiated text of the interviews in order to explore inferences that might be drawn from the observed changes in frequencies. However, this also resulted in the observation of what seemed to be a simple pattern of changes in the coded data. The observed pattern provided an opportunity to return to an interpretative view of the rich text of the transcribed interviews via an analytic induction (AI) of those patterns.

Thus the design reflects both the emergent nature of the study (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011) as well as the emergent epistemological position.

In sum, there are three different empirical studies in this research. Study 1 looks at the long-term impact on organisational actors of their participation in Forum Conversations. It is a post hoc study that seeks to establish that changes have occurred and been sustained over time. This is complemented by Study 2, which seeks to investigate the extent of change by comparing the views of participants about their difficult communication before and after their participation in Forum Conversations. Study 3 explores the views of the professional actors that facilitate Forum Conversations in order to gain understanding about the process and the role and function of the actors within it. Thus the design enables a multi-perspective view to be developed of the Forum Conversations process and its effects. The final overall design is represented as part of the concluding statement for this chapter in Figure 5.2.
5.6 Methods of collection and analysis

5.6.1 Summary of methods of collection and analysis

The methods involve one type of data collection and two types of analysis. Data collection was in all cases by semi-structured interview (King, 2004; Fontana and Frey, 2005). Analysis in Studies 1 and 3 is by template analysis of transcribed interviews (King, 2004). Analysis in Study 2 is by comparison of the attributions found in the transcribed ‘before and after’ Forum Conversations interviews (Munton et al, 1999). In Study 2 the ‘before’ interview takes place immediately before the Forum Conversation. The ‘after’ interview takes place two to three months after the event.

5.6.2 Data collection

5.6.2.1 Interviews

The research interest in this project is the nature and impact of Forum Conversations. There was no wish merely to observe the process and subsequently provide either another descriptive account of organisational theatre in practice or conduct a survey that might merely add to the growing evidence in the literature that organisational theatre is a positive and enjoyable experience. Instead it was decided to conduct qualitative interviews as the main means of data collection.

Interviews are regarded as the most common means of data collection in qualitative research (King, 2004, p.11; Fontana and Frey, 2005, p. 698). King suggests that the goal of the qualitative research interview is to look at the research topic from the interviewee’s perspective as well as to find out how and why they have come to that perspective. The assumption is that the qualitative interview allows access to the life-world of the interviewee (Kvale, 1983, p.174) and thus to a rich, in-depth personal account of their experience (Fontana and Frey, 2005). It is also assumed that interviewees’ accounts are truthful even though there may be a complex interplay within the interview of inconsistency, contradiction and reframing of those accounts. As Burman (1994) notes, inconsistency and contradiction in research interviews may reflect the nature of the research experience and therefore should not be discounted. Thus it was decided that qualitative interviews would provide the best way of accessing participants’ interpretation of their experience of Forum Conversations.

However, it is recognised that the qualitative interview is not a neutral event (Fontana and Frey, 2005) and that the interviewer actively shapes the course of
the interview and shares in the negotiated meaning that derives from it (King, 2004; Flick, 2009, p.171; Runswick-Cole, 2011, p.94). King also points out that people are generally familiar with the interview process and often enjoy the experience. Further, he notes that interviewees sometimes comment how the interview has helped clarify their thinking. This gives the sense that the meaning of interviewees’ experience comes in part from a co-construction of that meaning in relationship with the interviewer at the time of the interview. The way the interview is set up and conducted therefore has a bearing on the interpretation of experience.

5.6.2.2 Nature of the interviews

All interviews in this study are considered to be semi-structured in that a schedule of questions was produced in order to structure the interviews around chosen issues. However, in semi-structured interviews a degree of freedom and flexibility is given to interviewees so that the questions might be used as starting points for wider discussion (King, 2004; Newton, 2010). This characterisation of the interviews as semi-structured situates them between structured and unstructured interviews but this is not a precise position. In structured interviews effort is made to standardise both the questions and the style of asking them as well as to control the options for response (e.g. Runswick-Cole, 2011). In unstructured interviews an open-ended interview process is used as a way of accessing and understanding the world from the respondents’ viewpoints (Fontana and Frey, 2005, p. 708). Semi-structured interviews therefore have a structure that directs the interviewee to particular topics of interest whilst allowing sufficient flexibility for an open exploration between interviewer and interviewee.

The characterisation of semi-structured as somewhere between structured and unstructured gives little clue about the process of interviewing that Scheurich (1997, p.62) describes as, “persistently slippery, unstable and ambiguous from person to person”. It was also found in this research that, as with Saukko (2000), interviewees could not be thought of as merely monologic where the interview process is seen as a means of access to their individual experience from a neutral stance. Rather interviewees were seen as Saukko did - borrowing from Bakhtin (1986) - as ‘dialogic characters’ (Saukko, 2000, p.303) that co-constructed the meaning of the interviews as they progressed. As such this might also be envisaged as a ‘mutually accomplished story’ achieved through collaboration between the interviewees and interviewer (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002).
Thus the story that emerged from the interviews was a co-product of the interpretation of the Forum Conversations experience by the interviewees and the interpretation by the interviewer of participants’ interpretations - hence as *Verstehen* (Weber, 2009).

5.6.2.3 Interview questions

The interview process was semi-structured for all interviews throughout the study. Question guides were drawn up for the interviews (Appendices 6.3 and 8.1). Interview questions for Study 1 were concerned with participants’ experience of Forum Conversations as they went through the process – expectations before the event, experience of the event, and any learning that might have transferred. Questions were designed to give participants a relatively free rein in their responses to the main research questions. The interview strategy was to use the headline questions in the interview guide to explore participants’ experience of the process from pre-event expectations to post-event effects and outcomes that they identified as linked to the FC. Probes were used within the interviews to explore how participants’ experience evidenced various aspects of interest and concern that have been identified in the literature.

Thus in Study 1 there was an interest in OT as a means of providing alternative methodology for dealing with organisational issues and the extent to which commissioners and participants sought this from FCs prior to the event. Probes were used to explore a number of themes that were detected in the literature review. These included the extent to which FCs as an OT process might have been used to further an organisational agenda – Nissley et al’s ‘dominant script’ (2004) – and about the participants’ experience of trust in and openness to the experience. Emphasis was also placed on the extent to which participants were actively engaged in the process, a strong theme in the literature. The literature is sparse on the impact of OT methods so there was a particular interest in what outcomes and effects participants could identify as arising from their FCs experience. OT is also characterised in the literature as a resource for safely addressing ‘the undiscussible’ and for creating dialogue. Thus probes were directed towards changes in the way participants communicated in the workplace that might evidence a more dialogic style of communication. Probes also addressed contrasting themes from the literature such as suggestions that theatre is used in organisations as technology to solve problems and alternatively that it is the aesthetic nature of theatre that delivers the potency of the experience.

The specific nature and wording of the probes emerged during the interviews as
part of the clarification process (King, 2004) and as part of the flow of the conversation. This meant that the wording of probe questions was occasionally somewhat casual and unfocused as attempts were made to link the ongoing conversation with themes from the literature. Examples of questions and probes showing the relationship between research questions and themes that emerged from the literature review may be seen in Table 5.1 (Study 1). For example, theme A in Table 5.1 concerns the use of organisational theatre as a way to generate new thinking about an organisational issue. Questions were asked about previous experience of organisational theatre and intentions for using it, in order to gain understanding about participants’ and commissioners’ sense of theatre as providing alternative ways of approaching and dealing with organisational issues. Table 5.1 is arranged to show how questions and probes were associated with the three main research questions.

**Table 5.1 Relationship between Research Objectives, Literature and Interview Guide in Study 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 1: What is the nature of the Forum Conversations process?</th>
<th>Examples of Interview Questions and Probes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Themes from Literature Review</strong></td>
<td><strong>A - OT as alternative methodology for addressing organisational issues</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Clark, 2008 - the conventional is dissolved</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>B - Interactive engagement</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Schreyögg, 1999; Meisiek, 2002, Nissley ey al, 2004; Clark, 2008; Rae, 2011 - Typologies showing axis of passive to fully active interaction</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>C - Openness</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004 – making the undiscussible discussible</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Coopey, 1994 – learning to trust and trusting to learn</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>D – Dominant script</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Nissley et al, 2004; Meisiek, 2002 – management exerting influence through OT</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Research Question 2: What is the impact of Forum Conversations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes from Literature Review</th>
<th>Examples of Interview Questions and Probes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **E - Impact**                | Q: Did you find it easy to engage/connect to the methods?  
  Gibb, 2004 on learning from Forum process  
  Biehl Missal, 2012 on audience impact |
| **F - Change**                | Q: What about this work seems to have been sustained amongst the team?  
  Rae, 2011 typology and sustained transfer  
  Darsø et al, 2007 Outcomes of Organisational theatre |
| **G - Emotion**               | Q: Do you think that emotion was similar to what you might have experienced in the real conversation?  
  Turner, 1986 emotion in social drama breach |

### Research Question 3: Why do Forum Conversations have an impact?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes from Literature Review</th>
<th>Interview Questions (examples)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **H - Nature of Impact**      | Q: Is it an odd experience with the actor pretending to be this person?  
  Darsø et al, 2007 theatre as means of change  
  Taylor and Ladkin, 2009 Arts as Essence  
  Meisiek and Barry, 2010 Work art |
| **I - Dialogue**              | Q: Do you think you are more prepared to deal with things as it comes at you rather than in a pre-planned way?  
  In the moment ‘I for the other’ - Bakhtin  
  Advocacy and inquiry –e.g. Isaacs, 2000  
  “dialogic, collaborative constructions of self, other, and the world in the process of making collective decisions” Deetz, 1995 |

Q: In meetings do you see the partners dealing with difficult situations better now than before this kind of coaching?
In Study 2 pre-FC questions arose as part of the actor’s normal process of investigation of the participants’ difficult communication situation in order to be able to ‘play’ the difficult other and the specific difficult situation with some degree of verisimilitude. Post-FC interview questions were derived from an enquiry into the actual experience of participants with their ‘difficult others’ in the two to three months following their Forum Conversation. This entailed questions about any changes they had made, and why they had made those changes, including the impact of their FC experience. Again, questions were linked to the three main research questions.

Study 3 was an enquiry into the professional actors’ experience and understanding of FCs. The interview guide is shown in Appendix 6.3. Questions were also linked to themes arising from the literature. These mostly matched those in Study 1 but included additional themes such as the use of humour in building rapport with participants and questions about personal dilemmas actors might experience as they move from conventional theatre into organisational theatre. Questions were particularly geared to understanding the process as operated by the actors and what they perceived themselves to be doing and achieving by using their theatre skills and techniques in an organisational context. Table 5.2 shows where questions and probes were associated with themes drawn from the literature.
Table 5.2 Relationship between Research Objectives, Literature and Interview Guide in Study 3

Research Question 1: What is the nature of the Forum Conversations process?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes from Literature Review</th>
<th>Examples of Interview Questions and Probes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A - OT as alternative methodology for addressing organisational issues</strong>&lt;br&gt;Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004&lt;br&gt;Clark, 2008 - the conventional is dissolved</td>
<td>Q: What is the process of Forum Conversations?&lt;br&gt;Q: What do you think these methods achieve?&lt;br&gt;• What helps you get an understanding of what they need to do differently?&lt;br&gt;• Do you ever find that participants come to the event without knowing what they are being asked to do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B – Interactive engagement</strong>&lt;br&gt;Schreyögg, 1999; Meisiek, 2002, Nissley et al, 2004; Clark, 2008; Rae, 2011 - Typologies showing axis of passive to fully active interaction</td>
<td>Q: What is the process of Forum Conversations?&lt;br&gt;• What do you do to establish with participants that this is something they can engage with?&lt;br&gt;• Do participants know beforehand that they will be interacting with actors?&lt;br&gt;• What does it take to get everyone fully involved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C - Openness</strong>&lt;br&gt;Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004 – making the undiscussible discussible&lt;br&gt;Coopey, 1994 – Learning to trust and trusting to learn</td>
<td>Q: Do you find it easy to engage/connect with the participants?&lt;br&gt;• What do you do to help people to open up and engage with the process?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D – Dominant script</strong>&lt;br&gt;Nissley et al, 2004; Meisiek, 2002 – management exerting influence through OT</td>
<td>Q: What, if any, are the main differences between conventional theatre work and corporate theatre?&lt;br&gt;Probes: examining the extent to which participants determine the script&lt;br&gt;• Who determines the agenda?&lt;br&gt;• You only bring to it what they have asked of you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E – Personal dilemmas</strong>&lt;br&gt;Ibbotson 2012 conflict between art and business&lt;br&gt;Darsø et al 2007 Theatre in business as prostitution</td>
<td>Q: Do you have reservations as an actor about the nature of what you are doing?&lt;br&gt;Probes: looking at the use of specific skills in the context of business&lt;br&gt;• Do you think the event achieves what is intended?&lt;br&gt;• What training have you had for this work?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Research Question 2: What is the impact of Forum Conversations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes from Literature Review</th>
<th>Interview Questions (examples)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>F – Impact</strong></td>
<td>Q: What do you think this method achieves?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibb, 2004 on learning from Forum process</td>
<td>Probes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biehl Missal 2012 on audience impact</td>
<td>• Do you think about learning outcomes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How do you know what people need?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **G – Change**                | Q: Do you know if the impact of this work is sustained for participants? |
| Rae, 2011 typology and sustained transfer | • Do you think this work achieves what it sets out to achieve? |
| Darsø et al 2007 Outcomes of Organisational theatre | • Do you know if they put new skills into practice? |

| **H – Emotion**               | Q: What difficulties do you encounter? |
| Turner, 1986 emotion in social drama breach | Probes: exploring emotion and resistance |
|                               | • Why was it difficult? |
|                               | • Do you find that people sometimes have quite emotional reactions? |
|                               | • Do you get a sense that participants are being true to themselves in these conversations? |

### Research Question 3: Why do Forum Conversations have an impact?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes from Literature Review</th>
<th>Interview Questions (examples)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I – Nature of Impact</strong></td>
<td>Q: What things seem to have had the most impact?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darsø et al, 2007 theatre as means of change</td>
<td>Probes: examining why actors think certain things have impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor and Ladkin 2009 Arts as Essence</td>
<td>• How important do you think the reality of the experience is?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meisiek and Barry, 2010 Work art</td>
<td>• Do you think that because people say you were just like the real person, do you think that makes your feedback more valid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **J – Dialogue**              | Q: Do you change character once you are up and running in the conversation? |
| *In the moment ‘I for the other’* - Bakhtin | Probes: Examining the nature of dialogic co-construction ‘in the moment’ |
| Advocacy and inquiry –e.g. Isaacs, 2000 | • What is happening that you create a character so quickly? |
| “dialogic, collaborative constructions of self, other, and the world in the process of making collective decisions” Deetz, 1995 | • To what extent do you adjust or grow the character during the conversation? |
K - Humour
Rae, 2011; Clark and Mangham, 2004b

Q: Do you ever use humour?
Probes: about warmth and humour
- Do you ever think about entertaining the watching group whilst you are in a conversation?
- Do you ever ‘play’ to the audience even within the engagement with the Individual participant?

L - Use of theatre technology
Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004

Q: What is the process of FCs?
Probes: use of theatre as an instrument of change
- What, if any, are the main differences between conventional theatre work and corporate theatre?
- What are the benefits of feedback in role or as yourself?
- What do you think particularly helps participants?

M - Theatrical Preparation
Taylor, 2003

Q: How much training have you had for this work?
Probes: background preparation
- What are the skills that are required?
- How do you make a character to play in only 5 minutes?
- What is going on for you in the process?

N – Safe Environment
Coopey, 1998

Q: How do you make it safe for participants?
Probes:
- What made you feel safe?
- How do you know the boundaries between work and personal contexts?
- What do you think is the nature of the safety they are experiencing?

5.6.2.4 Participants

Each of the studies had a different participant group and no individual was included in more than one of the studies.

Wilmot (2007) points out that a qualitative inductive study does not require probabilistic sampling of the researched population. Nevertheless, there were some imposed criteria for selection of participants.

Study 1: In Study 1, it was required that all participants had taken part in Forum Conversations at least a year earlier. Retrospective qualitative studies are not unusual in biographical research (Flick, 2009) but are subject to special cautions about researchers’ reflexivity (Thomson and Holland, 2003), the fallibility of memory and the influence of the present in an interpretation of the past (Belk, 2006). From an interpretivist standpoint this is of less concern than it might be in a positivist search for cause and effect since the interest is in what the event in the
past means to the interviewee and how that might translate into their idiosyncratic, idiographic orientation in the present (Belk, 2006, p. 389).

Notwithstanding this view the interviews took place a relatively long time after the event. Both Belk (2006) and Flick (2009) suggest that attention should be paid to the reliability of informants in reflecting on their past. All interviewees were immersed in either HR or Leadership and thus much involved with others in their work. It might therefore be assumed that they would be more tuned to the impact of Forum Conversations on their normal work practice. Against this, and also because of their roles, the interviewees are likely to be immersed in a world of interventions of which Forum Conversations was but one. Thus it might be asked how they are able to isolate the impact of any one intervention?

This might simply be because of the nature of FCs, which requires participants to produce a personal example of a difficult conversation. Thus a particularly relevant, and perhaps sensitive issue provides the matter of the intervention. In consequence the FC experience is likely to stand out from the normal course of events, particularly if it has been effective not only in the specific instance of the difficult other, but also more generally in participants’ dealings with others. Therefore the interviews included questions about what had been the difficult issue that interviewees had presented in the Forum Conversation and why that had been difficult, so as to prompt memory of the FC experience that had focused on the difficult issue. This led to questions about what had changed about the difficult situation after the FC event. This prompted a range of answers that included situational and behavioural changes that had led to positive outcomes and indeed a number of participants commented that they had been changed by the FCs experience. After his FC one participant stood up to a bully who was his difficult other and experienced an extremely positive change in the relationship. One might expect such an experience to stay in the memory for a long time.

Even so, a view is also taken here that the research is interpretive of, "the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale 1983, p. 174). Further, the view in this research is that template analysis is relatively immune to temporal effects and individual subjectivity in that the search for themes entails interpretation of interpretations (Verstehen) and thus presents a thematic picture that in this case says something about the meaning rather than causality of Forum Conversations.

It also seemed important to have a range of diversity (Wilmot, 2007) and the recruitment of participants from a range of business sectors provided this. Points of
contact for participants in Study 1 were either from my own practice or from events where I knew the practitioners involved. Participants included a number of commissioners of the work, two of whom observed the conversations but did not take part themselves. No participant in Study 1 was interviewed before the Forum Conversation.

**Study 2:** Participants in Study 2 were mostly volunteers from the Global MBA course at Manchester Business School and I knew none of them beforehand. Participants came from a number of nationalities and cultures and a range of sectors. Nationalities included, Russian, American, Nigerian, Zimbabwean, Indian, British and German. Sectors included Banking, IT, Motor racing, Academia, Health, Manufacturing and Retail. Again this provided diversity as in Study 1. Initial interviews took place with each individual participant immediately before their Forum Conversation. This interview took about 10 minutes. This corresponds to the briefing time that is part of the normal Forum Conversation process. It was decided not to record or note what took place during the Forum Conversations so as to interfere as little as possible with the process.

In Studies 1 and 2 all participants were managers, though there was a wide range in their hierarchical level. Thus the research was only of management personnel.

**Study 3:** was of ten organisational theatre actors, most of whom I knew professionally. Interviews lasted about an hour.

Tables of demographics for participants in each study are provided in the chapters dedicated to each specific study. There were fifteen participants in study 1, twenty-four in Study 2 and ten in Study 3. A total of fifty-two participants took part in the three studies but three of these were not contactable for a post-Forum Conversations interview in study 2. Thus there were forty-nine participants who took part and seventy-three transcribed interviews across all three studies. I was the only transcriber of the interviews.

I was the main actor/facilitator as well as the researcher in Study 2. I tried to compensate for this by employing a second, female actor who undertook a third of the Forum Conversations that were researched. Her only involvement in the research process other than to facilitate the conversations as she might in her ordinary practice, was to audio-record the pre-conversation briefings.
5.6.2.5 Conducting the interviews

In Study 1, fifteen interviews were held. The first four interviews were held face to face but thereafter all interviews were on the phone. In Study 2 twenty-seven participants gave face-to-face pre-Forum Conversation briefings. Two participants gave face-to-face post-Forum Conversation interviews while all the other interviews were on the phone. In Study 3 three actors gave face-to-face interviews whilst the other interviews were on the phone. This split of location was merely on the basis of convenience. In all cases there was no discernible reduction in the quality of interviews on the phone, as measured by the readiness to talk and the willingness of interviewees to explore the topic beyond the set questions. If anything the quality improved, although this might have been a gradual improvement in interviewing skill as the study evolved.

All participants’ consent was first gained through direct personal contact by email or by phone. Their consent to be audio recorded was gained within ethical guidelines as agreed to in the Manchester University Ethics Statement. Once they had agreed to take part they were sent a brief outline of the interview topic and specific areas of interest (Appendix 6.1) but were not shown the full list of questions to be asked so as to enable a more flexible, semi-structured style.

An iPhone switched to loudspeaker mode was used to audio record onto a Macbook Pro computer. All interviewees were offered the opportunity to receive a summary of the research findings. All interviews were transcribed and stored on computer before being transferred to a hard disc memory device.

The research interviews were predicated on three main areas of questioning in relation to the Forum Conversations method:

- What are the prior expectations of this method and what is sought from it?
- What is the participant experience of this method?
- What, if any, are the effects of this method on participants after the event, in the short to long terms?

All interviews were transcribed by myself and anonymised in preparation for the thematic analysis and development of the template.

5.6.2.6 Research interview experience

My actor colleague conducted seven of the pre-Forum Conversations briefings as part of an actor’s usual practice in Forum Conversations, while I conducted the
remaining sixty-six briefings and interviews. The interviews were enjoyable and engaging and a number of interviewees said that they had also enjoyed clarifying their thoughts on the topic, thus confirming King’s experience of interviewees (2004). I found that over time I learned not to ask multiple questions and not to start a question, then qualify it and then complete the question. This must occasionally have been confusing for interviewees. I also learned to summarise interviewees’ responses so that they could confirm or disconfirm my understanding or perhaps add supplementary information.

On only three occasions did I experience any kind of difficulty with interviewees, and two of these occasions were with fellow actors. With one fellow actor on the phone I found he would go silent for long periods and then give expansive replies. I found myself first checking to see if he was still on the phone, and then trying to cut off his flow, which was a slightly disconcerting experience. His was the longest interview. It was slightly difficult with a second actor because she gave the impression that she wanted to let me know that she knew far more than I did about the topic and somewhat dictated the interview agenda. The third occasion was with a commissioner of Forum Conversations who tended to give short and monosyllabic replies, which up to then had not been my experience. I found myself self-conscious and tending to expand his answers for him, but I was aware of this and checked myself on a number of occasions.

I found that although over time I improved my audio recording technique both in face-to-face and phone interviews, it was often very difficult to hear phone recorded interviews especially when the person was a non-native English speaker of which there were many. This made transcription very difficult and time consuming. It is obviously important to use high quality recording equipment for interviewing as well as to ensure that the surrounding environment is quiet (Runswick-Cole, 2011).

Overall, I found that my questioning became clearer and simpler over time with fewer qualifications and fewer interviewee requests for me to repeat my question. However, I found that in dealing with the actors as intuitive experts they would often not be aware of their expertise (Sadler-Smith, 2010) and I found myself at times prompting their responses. However, in most cases they affirmed and expanded points of discussion.
5.6.3 Analysis of the data

5.6.3.1 Template Analysis

It was decided to use template analysis to analyse the data in Studies 1 and 3. Forum Conversations arguably deal with the 'image of reality and the reality of that image' (Boal, 1995), which suggests an ontological ambiguity that may defeat any search for underlying cause. Similar ambiguity attaches to template analysis, falling somewhere between realism and constructionism (King, 2004). It is this ambiguity that makes the collection of data by semi-structured interview, and the analysis of that data by template analysis both consistent and appropriate to the topic in question. Further, template analysis does not demand prescribed ontology or procedures but can flex with the emerging inductive process. Also, because of my practitioner experience I found that I was able to attempt an initial template even before accessing the data. Additionally, because I transcribed all the interviews I was able to gain an early overview of themes that threaded through the text of the transcribed interviews. Finally, this is an inductive investigation where the underlying explanation for effects is sought empirically rather than hypothesised at outset, and template analysis lends itself to this type of investigation.

In template analysis the researcher identifies and then codes key themes within a text that seem important to his/her interpretation of the data (King, 2004). Wherever a specific theme is identified across all the texts within the study, the theme’s given code is applied to all the phrases or words deemed by the analyst to convey that theme.

5.6.3.2 Constructing the templates: Deductive phase

Analysis in template analysis begins even before data is collected in that an initial (a priori) template of themes may be constructed as a basis for organising the data (King, 2004; Waring and Wainwright, 2008). The data in this research consists of the text of the transcribed interviews. This data was coded for themes that are deemed to run through and across the texts. According to Saldaña (2008, p. 3) a code “is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data.” Thus themes and their codes are not necessarily self-evident in the text but are rather a matter of selection and interpretation. Gibbs et al (2005) suggest that a priori codes can be derived from a number of sources
including literature review, practical experience, early information gathering and even ‘gut feel’ such that estimates can be made about the kind of themes that might be likely to be found across a number of interviews. Later, codes that have not been predicted beforehand but which emerge from an examination of the text itself (in vivo codes) are used to build or adjust the initial coding template.

The templates for both Studies 1 and 3 went through a number of rounds of development, which Saldanha (2008) calls cycles. It is via various cycles that the analysis moves from what Gibbs et al (2005) call descriptive coding, which tends merely to summarise the data, through to analytical coding, which, quoting Coffey and Atkinson (1996, p. 29), entails "breaking the data apart in analytically relevant ways in order to lead toward further questions about the data".

The main themes that can be identified are known as first order, or highest order, themes. These can be broken further down into second order themes as comprising the more detailed nature of the first order themes. These second order themes may be broken down into yet more detailed lower order themes. Thus a thematic sequence with a hierarchy of themes is arranged showing how each higher order theme sub-divides into numerous, more specific, lower order thematic components.

There is no pre-prescribed theoretical structure for a template and individual templates are built entirely as analysts see fit to arrange the thematic structure. Thus templates are a flexible means of constructing and portraying analysts’ total interpretations of a text (Waring and Wainwright, 2008).

5.6.3.3 Constructing the template: Inductive phase

King (2004) clarifies a number of ways of adjusting templates and all of these were used during the drafting of the templates for this study. King’s categories of adjustment with examples from the final template are as follow:

**Insertion** – when a theme is identified in the text that was not previsaged in the first template, the new theme is inserted into the template as appropriate to its order and thematic sequence

Example: the most obvious feature of the comparison between the initial and final templates in Study 1 is the insertion of a greater number of lower order themes as a fuller picture of the impact of Forum Conversations emerged.
Deletion – a theme that seemed necessary in the first pre-analysis template may not be warranted after a study of the text. In this case it is deleted from the original template.

Example: it had been expected that participants in Study 1 would mention specific tools and skills they had learned in Forum Conversations. In fact, some people did mention this but so few as to obviate tools and skills learning as a theme. This was therefore deleted from the template.

Changing scope – this is where a theme may need either to be moved up the order or down it in order to position its thematic 'weight' more appropriately in the template.

Example: in Study 1 emotion had been anticipated as a theme but this was associated initially only with perception of the actor. It became clear that participants talked about emotion on their own account. Emotion was therefore given a higher order in the final template.

Changing higher order classification – this is where a theme may have been initially inserted in one vertical sequence of descent from one first order theme but may eventually be better positioned in another vertical sequence descending from another first order theme.

Example: in Study 1 safety was anticipated as a theme but it had not been anticipated to be so dominant. It was therefore promoted to being one of the three main first order themes.

These types of adjustment were key to developing the template. One other type of adjustment also seemed important in my own experience. This was:

Parsimony – this is where choices needed to be made about what to include and what not to include. It seemed important to be parsimonious against a proliferation of lower order themes.

Example: In Study 1, when participants mentioned emotion it was associated with catharsis, with learning and with personal stories. What seemed clear was that emotion was a key aspect of the impact of the experience and so all aspects of personal experience were contained within a single theme that reflected the importance of emotion in the learning experience.
5.6.4 Template Analysis

5.6.4.1 Study 1

The initial template for Study 1 is shown in Appendix 6.4. In Study 1 the interest in the participants’ progress through the Forum Conversations process informed both the questions asked in interview and also the first attempts at making a template. My previous experience as a practitioner of FCs also played a part in the construction of this initial template, particularly emphasising my sense of the impact of FCs on learning, and thus there was a concern to link the template to the three main research questions. Further, there was an interest not only in what the participants’ experience of FCs was in the sense of how they engaged and connected with the process, what they saw as the key aspects and what impact the process had on them personally, but also how they evaluated the actor and the way the actor worked. This evaluation was further separated into a view of the actor as facilitator of the process and view of the actor as the ‘difficult other’.

It was further decided to differentiate two other aspects of the FC experience: between the participant experience as player and audience and between different types of learning outcome differentiating between skills and awareness from active experience as player and observer. On over-viewing the initial template it was thought that the template might gather so much coded data as to make the eventual template too unwieldy and so the initial template was divided into two templates: one was intended to capture participants’ expectations and experience of the FC event whilst the second was intended to reflect the learning taken from the event and back into the workplace. Thus a second cycle of deductive templates was produced. However, after initial coding in the inductive phase it was decided to revert to one template so as to contain the complete story of the participant journey through the process.

5.6.4.2 Inductive phase

The transcripts were coded for themes that emerged from interpretation of the text. This was an ‘inductive’ in vivo phase where all the material evidence of the transcripts was interpreted thematically and coded accordingly.

5.6.4.3 Study 1 - Coding

At outset, codes derived from the initial template were applied to the participants’ responses. For example, ‘Rapport’ was established as an a priori code in the initial
template. This was because the actors seek to establish an easy and friendly working atmosphere from the outset in FCs. Examples of phrases in the transcribed interviews that indicate this sense of easy of rapport include “the actors are a friendly bunch” and “the actors were people we could relate to”. Another a priori code was ‘Safety’ This code represented the sense that participants felt comfortable and safe to role-play their difficult conversation in front of other people. Examples of phrases that were coded as ‘Safety’ include, “it’s the knowledge that you can expose yourself, that it’s OK” and, “we found out what it felt like to happen (the difficult conversation) but in a non-threatening environment”.

The initial template was adjusted and developed considerably as new themes and sub-themes emerged. For example, ‘Safety’ was promoted to its own hierarchical line, so that the theme could be opened up to include a range of subthemes as to what participants thought constituted ‘safety’. It also became clear that feedback was an important aspect of participant learning and so codes were developed to distinguish between phrases and comments in the interview transcriptions that indicated different elements of feedback. For example, the phrases, “the value of the actors was that they could give hard feedback” and “they could actually say that the participant was patronising” were coded as ‘hard hitting and honest feedback’. Another element of feedback was coded as ‘different perspective’ exampled by the comment, “the feedback was valuable but not always what you might expect”. This was because it was assumed that the unexpected nature of feedback from an observer implied their different point of view.

One of the problematic features of the development of the template was the participant perception of the actor in role as both actor and facilitator. It became clear that I tended to privilege this role separation because it was more important to me as a practitioner than it was to the participants. This also meant that in the third cycle template I ‘pushed’ coding of aspects of this role separation to a more subjective language. For instance, I coded one aspect of facilitation as ‘Holding’, that is to say, as the facilitator’s management of interplay between themselves and the participants. In the third cycle template ‘Holding’ had lower order codes for ‘Empathy’, ‘Flexibility’, ‘Sense of humour’ and ‘Emotion’. I realised that this represented my privileging of what the participants experienced as characteristic of emotional intelligence rather than the participants’ tendency to note the professionalism of the actors’ handling of the facilitation. Thus in the next template cycle, I recoded the lower order themes for ‘Holding’ as ‘Separation between acting
and facilitating’, ‘Preparation’, ‘Clarity of process’ and ‘Engaging participation’, which reflected the objective rather than subjective nature of ‘Holding’, whilst allowing for more subjective aspects to be contained within the code, ‘Engaging participation’.

Three inductive versions of the template followed the two initial deductive templates. The first inductive template was made largely on a descriptive basis using participants’ own language to establish codes and to attempt codes for every nuance of meaning. The second inductive version was made on the basis of focusing and clarifying the code content of the first template, both by simplifying the terms of the codes and by reducing the number of lower order codes so as to make the template less unwieldy. For example, in the first inductive template the code “The actors’ self-awareness is a gift to participants” was a direct quote from a participant and used as a code to capture the recognition that the actors’ competence was in the service of participants. This code was removed from the second inductive template. Instead, this kind of comment on the actors’ competence and approach was included in the higher order code, “professionalism”. Another example of code derived from participants’ descriptive language was “who is everyone? – this includes the actors”. This code was intended to capture the theme of the desired transparency of everyone involved, which was included in the ‘Safety’ vertical track. In the second template this was merely subsumed within the code, “openness”. Thus the second inductive template, the penultimate, 4th cycle template, simplified language and reduced the number of lower order themes, yet remained largely descriptive.

The final template is shown in Table 5.3 below. Appendix 6.5 shows the 4th cycle, penultimate version. This penultimate version shows a number of horizontal connections between themes across different hierarchical tracks. The penultimate template mostly represented a summary of the descriptive coding of the themes that emerged from analysis. The approach for the final template was to simplify the vertical and horizontal cross-connections between themes. A decision was also made to collapse the two separate vertical lines of coding for the participant experience – their subjective experience of themselves in the process and their experience of the actor – into one headline code of ‘The Conversation’. A decision was also made to emphasise themes that were repeated across a number of vertical lines in the penultimate template. The final template is a condensation of the penultimate template so as to minimise duplication but to accentuate key themes. For example, in the penultimate template, ‘feedback’ occurs under the
vertical line of coding for ‘participant experience of the actor’ with lower order codes of ‘feedback as other’ and ‘feedback as self’. But ‘feedback’ also appears as ‘multiple perspectives’ under the ‘learning’ line of themes. These three codes were reduced to a single code, ‘range of perspectives’ in the final template. Similarly, a number of codes attached to the quality and constructive nature of feedback across different vertical lines. It was considered that ‘constructive’ connotes ‘quality’ and so a single code ‘constructive’ was used in the final template to capture this theme.

Table 5.3 Study 1. Final Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>1st level</th>
<th>2nd level</th>
<th>3rd level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Conversation</td>
<td>1. Engagement</td>
<td>1. Attraction(attractive) – being drawn to the process</td>
<td>2. Accessible – it is easy to get involved with the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Contracting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Realistic</td>
<td>1. Accuracy</td>
<td>2. Suspension of disbelief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Participants’ scripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Emotion</td>
<td>1. Replication of felt experience</td>
<td>2. Key to actual experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. The Actor</td>
<td>1. In the moment</td>
<td>2. Rapid engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Speed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>1. Realistic without risk</td>
<td>1. Away from work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Everyone participates</td>
<td>1. It is for the participants</td>
<td>2. Everyone is exposed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Group effects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Credibility</td>
<td>1. Acting</td>
<td>2. Other participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>1. By doing</td>
<td>1. Experience of self</td>
<td>2. Saying and hearing the words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Provides material evidence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. By witnessing</td>
<td>1. Range of issues</td>
<td>2. Reflect on own reactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Range of Perspectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. New behaviour</td>
<td>4. Wider organisational effects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.6.4.4 Study 3

This was a study of the views of ten professional actors about the process of FCs. Details about these individuals are given in Study 3, Chapter 8. Thematic analysis is by definition reductive and is regarded as a useful way of contrasting the views of different groups (King, 2004). In this case I compared individuals within the same group. Nevertheless, because the actors work mainly alone in Forum Conversations almost none of the actors was familiar with the individual practice of other workers. Thus the search for themes across the actors’ different approaches continued to make sense.

An extensive initial template was made on the basis of my own experience of FCs combined with the review of the literature and reflection on the interviews as I transcribed them. Although the review revealed little empirical evidence on which to base a development of themes it nevertheless gave direction to the interview questions and these in turn influenced the development of *a priori* codes for likely themes. Appendix 8.2 shows this initial template. This shows that there was an initial interest in the actors’ experience of the process, subdivided into their own personal experience and their view of the participants in the process. There was further *a priori* thematic interest in what the actor’s might consider the process of FCs to be, subdivided into preparation for the process and the actual process itself. A third major interest was in how the process might help the clients.

5.6.4.5 Study 3 - Coding

Coding was determined at outset by matching phrases and words to the themes that had been identified in the initial *a priori* template. For example, the statement “I *just wanted to work with ordinary people, giving them something*” was coded from the initial template as ‘giving assistance’. This was because the actors saw themselves as helping participants to improve their communication skills. “*Giving them something*” was interpreted as indicating this wish to help. In another example, the statement “*I have learned through experience*” was matched with the initial template code ‘On the job training’. This code was set to differentiate between formal, professional training received by the actors outside of working with clients and the learning that arose entirely from the experience of doing the work. However, as the coding progressed every small detail that resonated as a theme was immediately given a separate code. For example, “*Being a great conventional actor might actually be a hindrance* (in FCs)” was coded as the subtheme ‘good not great’ under the code ‘acting skills’. This was established as a distinct theme.
because many of the actors felt that although it is necessary for actors in FCs to be good actors, ‘great’ acting was considered to imply that the actor might become so immersed in their role that they might lose the capacity for detached observation, a perspective that was deemed to be necessary when giving feedback after the FC.

As this matching process went on it became clear that the template had to be adjusted in various ways as described by King (2004) and highlighted in section 5.6.3.3 above.

This gave rise to a number of significant developments such as in the re-designation of the initial theme of ‘Helping’ as “Client Focus’, which was further subdivided into ‘Facilitation’ and ‘Service.’ It also became clear that the codes merely became long, descriptive lists of features of the process, such as what constituted a sense of professionalism, authenticity, a safe environment, and so on.

In hindsight I think I was mistaken to have made such a full initial template. This is because during in vivo analysis instead of developing codes analytically from the transcripts, there was a tendency to look for simple variants of the codes already described in the initial template. Thus I found myself adding more and more nuanced codes from each transcribed text until the template became overloaded and unwieldy, as warned against by King (2004). For example, in this second cycle template there were 17 different codes given to the various skills that actors’ describe as crucial for being able to undertake FCs. In effect these different skills were merely examples rather than being distinctly different codes in themselves. I therefore decided to take a more reductive approach and reduced these to just three different codes in a third cycle template – ‘interpersonal skills’, ‘quick thinking’ and ‘good acting’, albeit that these were further nuanced with a number of lower order theme codes. For example, ‘good acting’ was further divided into ‘making it real’, which is the ability to make the character of the difficult other realistic. ‘Not enough’ as a lower order code under ‘good acting’ expresses the view of a number of the actors that merely being a good actor is not sufficient. Additionally, ‘good improviser’ was seen to be a necessary complement to being a good actor, and ‘spontaneity’ reflected the capacity to work speedily and intuitively.

A further example of the tendency to overload the coding is shown in the 3rd cycle template (Appendix 8.3) for code 1.1.1. This is the actors’ experience of the process of FCs expressed as ‘Flow effects’. It will be seen that there are eight further coding subdivisions. On reflection this was deemed to be unnecessary.
because most of these eight sub-codes are contained within the concept of flow effects.

I was initially tempted to pare down the unwieldy template I had produced by keeping only those codes that had high frequency of appearance. However, this would have constituted a quantitative rather than interpretive view of the data. Instead, as with Study 1 where the first inductive template became over-laden with lower order themes in an attempt to capture every thematic nuance, I worked on revising and broadening the themes such that what I had distinguished as separate, nuanced themes were condensed into more generic categories. Nevertheless, it was felt that the 3\(^{rd}\) cycle step was important for understanding the subtle nature of what the codes represented as for example in codes like ‘interpersonal skills’, ‘Flow effects’, ‘Authenticity’, ‘Resistance’ and so on. The 3\(^{rd}\) cycle is given in the Appendix 8.3 as a comprehensive reference for the final template.

The final reductive step was aided by taking a further analytical approach. This was to take Kenneth Burke’s recommendation to look for contradictions in the data (Overington, 1977) as a way of avoiding the limited perspective of a single, terministic screen (Fox, 2002). This approach led to a perception of a number of thematic ambiguities in the working practice of actors in Forum Conversations. For example, actors talked about ‘tuning in’, basing their assessment of the participants on their (the actors’) subjective, intuitive reactions. At the same time actors used a number of heuristics to enable them to engage rapidly with the participants such as using stereotype behaviours for the initial playing of the difficult others. This is expressed in the final template as a contrast between ‘tuning in’ and ‘heuristics’. Another contrast was seen between the actors’ oft repeated phrase that the process ‘just happens’ whilst they also produced an extensive list of skill requirements for FCs. Thus the final template reduces the previous coding cycles further into a limited number of paired, contrasted themes that express a range of contrasting ambiguities. The final template is shown in Table. 5.4. Findings derived from the templates for Studies 1 and 3 are given in Chapter 6 for Study 1 and Chapter 8 for Study 3.
### Table 5.4 Study 3 - Final Thematic Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>1st level themes</th>
<th>2nd level Themes</th>
<th>3rd level thematic contrasts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rehearsals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Diagnosis</td>
<td>1. ‘Tuning-in’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Heuristics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Making it real</td>
<td>1. Authenticity of acting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. 3rd eye detachment</td>
<td>1. duty of care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>1. Intuitive Expert</td>
<td>1. It just happens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Extensive skill requirement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Co-construction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre</td>
<td>1. Nature of acting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Conventional theatre = performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Corporate theatre = being</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. ‘Improvisation’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Script</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Client led</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Actor led</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Direction</td>
<td>1. ‘Writing music’ together</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Power imbalance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Rehearsal</td>
<td>1. Safe environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Challenge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aims</td>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>1. Sense of Service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Fixing (what isn’t working)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agenda</td>
<td>1. Corporate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Individual need</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Solutions</td>
<td>1. Behavioural solutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Subjective assessments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>1. As character</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. As Self</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>1. Fixing problem</td>
<td>2. Little clue about outcomes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.6.5 Attributional Analysis – Study 2

According to Kelley (1955) people tend to behave like scientists in making sense of their world. That is to say they, “formulate hypotheses about the world and the self, collect data that confirm or disconfirm their hypotheses and then alter personal theories to account for the new data” (Weiner, 1992 p.223). In a similar vein Heider (1958), the acknowledged founder of attribution theory, refers to people as ‘common-sense’ or ‘naïve’ psychologists who interpret other peoples’
actions and seek to make predictions about what they may do under certain circumstances. In other words we attribute to others and to ourselves certain causes and motivations for our actions. Attribution theorists (e.g. Abramson et al, 1978; Weiner, 1992; Försterling, 1985; Silvester, 2004; Anderson, 1983) consider that people are interested in the relationship between causes and outcomes in order to ‘render their environment more controllable’ (Silvester, 1999, p.3).

It might be expected that an attributional search to ‘render the environment more controllable’ could be the basis either of confirming initial attributions or generating new ones. Whatever the nature of an event that people seek to make sense of through attributing cause, it should be possible to elucidate attributions made before and after such a search and compare them for any differences. Such a comparison might indicate changes in thinking about the cause and effect of negative experience and thus of learning – “the alteration of personal theories to account for the new data” (Weiner, 1992).

By comparing attributions made before the Forum Conversation with those made after the Forum Conversation it was assumed that it might be possible to detect changes in interpretation of experience. Because people are regarded as having a consistent style in how they make attributions (Abramson et al, 1978; Metalsky et al, 1982; Peterson et al, 1982; Seligman et al, 1979) any observed changes in attributional style either side of an intervention might indicate that learning has taken place. Only one study has been found in the organisational literature that assessed individuals’ style of attribution making before and after a learning event (Proudfoot, 2001). It was found that there was a general move to a more optimistic style. However, Proudfoot’s study applied an adapted Occupational Attributional Style Questionnaire as a measure (OASQ). In the OASQ respondents are asked to select attributions for the provided fictional scenarios. In other words responses are hypothetical. It was decided not to use such questionnaires or surveys in this study so as to disturb the Forum Conversations process as little as possible and to access actual rather than hypothetical attributions.

5.6.5.1 Leeds Attributional Coding System

Another way of assessing peoples’ attributions without requiring them to think along defined dimensions, or to imagine causes that might have given rise to hypothetical situations as in Attributional Style Questionnaires, is the Leeds attributional coding system (LACS) (Stratton et al, 1988; Munton et al, 1999). Theory underlying the system derives from the attributional dimensions of
internality, stability, globality, controllability, and personal-universal. Table 5.5 gives descriptions of these dimensions. A sixth dimension was added recognizing the emotional and goal seeking difference between people in dispute (Thomas, 1976). This sixth dimension is Affect/Interest.

Table 5.5 Attributional dimensions and what they represent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal/External</td>
<td>attribution is to something that arises from some internal motivation of any agent. If not, it is external</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unstable/Stable</td>
<td>the extent to which a perceived cause is relatively constant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global/Specific</td>
<td>whether a particular cause may impact on a single or a range of different outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal/Personal</td>
<td>reflects the sense that something that an individual has done might reasonably reflect most peoples’ behaviour in the same circumstances (thus Universal).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controllable/Uncontrollable</td>
<td>whether an individual feels in control of a situation or another individual or not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect/Interest</td>
<td>The extent to which a person prioritises relationship or objective goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unlike Attributional Style Questionnaires that ask respondents to make attribution about hypothetical scenarios, the LACS does not require participants to provide anything other than spoken or written descriptions of their activities. When making suggestions for the further use of the LACS Munton et al themselves make the point that it might be interesting to ‘track’ the progress of individuals as they move through their careers by analysing the attributions they make in a series of interviews made over time (1999, p.191). This ‘tracking’ clearly entails comparison between patterns of attributions that would have been elucidated via the LACS. Furthermore, Silvester (2004, p. 240) suggests “that the ability to quantify patterns of attributions also renders them open to further investigation and comparison, including how they change over time”.

The Leeds attributional coding system (LACS) was therefore used for analysis of attributions in Study 2. This is because it is an analysis of peoples’ actual attributions rather than hypothesised ones. In a sense this parallels the basis of the Forum Conversation, which is about the re-enactment of peoples’ own difficult
conversations and the learning that might come from that, rather than about scripted, hypothetical scenarios.

Attributions were extracted from transcripts of interviews made before and after participants’ Forum Conversations. Attributions were then analysed in two different ways.

Firstly, attributions from transcripts of before and after FCs interviews were coded as per the Leeds Attributional Coding System (LACS) (Munton et al, 1999) on six different dimensions of attribution. Comparisons were then made between percentages of codes on each dimension from the pre and post FC attributions in order to see if there were any changes across these dimensions.

In a second type of analysis, an Analytic Induction (AI) (Johnson, 2004) was made of changes pre and post FC as to who or what participants perceive to be the main causal agent of events in their relationship with others. This was in order to see if participants think of themselves as having more control of events in consequence of their FC. The patterns of change observed in the comparison of perceived causal agent between pre and post FC are reviewed against observations from attribution theory.

5.6.5.2 Qualitative/Quantitative issues

The LACS method in Study 2 is used as a basis for pre-intervention post-intervention comparison. The LACS is presented as a qualitative method and yet it is suggested that the codes, once converted into percentages, can be used for statistical comparisons (Silvester, 2004). Thus there is potential for epistemological ambiguity in its use. Silvester makes the point that attributional analysis has been used historically within the quantitative paradigm and that the Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ) and Occupational Attributional Style Questionnaire (OASQ) are instances of this. However, she argues that attributions reflect both internal cognitions, which can be accessed through questionnaires and hence can be analysed quantitatively, but also that attributions are “part of a dynamic interaction whereby individuals actively share their understanding” (Silvester, 2004, p.229). This represents a constructivist view and hence best fits the qualitative paradigm. Munton et al (1999, p.190) concur with this and claim, "Quantitative research can benefit from a qualitative perspective just as qualitative research can benefit from a quantitative one". Whatever the case it is clear that one of the aspects of
5.7 Meeting criteria for the quality of the research

5.7.1 Criteria for research quality

Key criteria for assuring the quality of research include epistemological consistency and integrity, coherence and richness in the interpretation and explanation of the story that is being told and the importance of the research in context – does it make a contribution, both in terms of the issue(s) being explored and of earlier theory (Cassell and Symon, 2004; Cassell et al, 2005; Yardley, 2000)? Satisfaction of these requirements means the quality of the work will be assured without needing to defend a ‘qualitative’ position against quantitative demands for ensuring the trustworthiness of the research by accounting for validity, reliability, generalisability and objectivity of the findings (e.g. Sinkovics et al, 2008).

Indeed, since I have taken the view that in Forum Conversations, and in this research of Forum Conversations, I am co-constructing my world through participation with others in our encounter with what is assumed to be ‘given’, the quality of the research may hinge on how well I am able to tell the story to others of the change experiences that seem to emerge from Forum Conversations. Like all good stories this story needs structure, credibility, plot, explanation, characterisation, interpretation and ultimately a sense that it was worth listening to - and maybe acting upon.

Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) insist that participatory research should give rise to outcomes that are ‘actualities’ rather than ‘abstractions’ and in consequence that others might be able to hold up these ‘actualities’ for inspection as the story is being told. I have therefore attempted to translate actualities into observable ‘facts’ through the use of frequencies of attributions and through some basic statistical checks to show patterns of movement and relationship of the ‘facts’. Nevertheless, it is not intended that these operations should demonstrate generalisability and objectivity. Rather, they are intended to show patterns in the explanations people make for how they construct their realities, and indeed patterns of explanation that may emerge from participation in Forum Conversations.
5.7.2 Ethical considerations

According to Aguinis and Henle (2008) ethics has been instituted in academic research since the 1970’s when it was understood that research could be harmful to subjects. Silverman (2010) notes that ethical problems are inherent when researchers are in contact with human research participants.

The Economic and Social Research Council of Great Britain publishes an extensive framework for the guidance of ethics in research (2012). There are six main principles underlying this framework:

1. Research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure integrity, quality and transparency.
2. Research staff and participants must normally be informed fully about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks, if any, are involved.
3. The confidentiality of information supplied by research participants and the anonymity of respondents must be respected.
4. Research participants must take part voluntarily, free from any coercion.
5. Harm to research participants and researchers must be avoided in all instances.
6. The independence of research must be clear, and any conflicts of interest or partiality must be explicit.

These principles, along with a declaration made to the ethics committee of Manchester University, have guided this research. The following commentary explains choices and actions made in this research to comply with the ethical principles above.

5.7.2.1 Research Integrity, Quality and Transparency

Throughout the research I informed all participants about what they were being asked to do, and why I was doing it as well as making it clear that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could leave whenever they chose. This also applied to telephone interviews.
5.7.2.2 Information to participants

Before attempting to contact any individual participant I ensured that I asked permission from a number of corporate bodies to contact their members. These included a national consultancy organization, the NHS Institute and Manchester Business School. I also contacted a number of organisational theatre companies to ask for access to their members. In all cases I clarified the purpose of my research and what it entailed. Invitation to participate in the research and information about the research are shown in Appendix 6.1. I supplied all participants with summary reports of my findings.

5.7.2.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality implies that any identifying information that emerges from the research will not be made available to anyone not connected to the study whilst anonymity means that participants will remain anonymous throughout the study – possibly even to the researchers themselves.

Both of these aspects of secrecy and privacy are somewhat problematic in this research on a number of counts.

Each participant in Study 2 was interviewed twice and therefore personal telephone and email contact details were taken in order to contact participants (1) at three months after their Forum Conversation and (2) to send them summary reports of the findings. This latter point applies also to all participants in all three studies. This necessitated secure storage of their details. Further, participants’ contact names and organisations were anonymised. Some participants invited me to join them in the social network LinkedIn. I accepted the invitations whilst ensuring that no link could be made to their participation in the research. I also decided not to initiate social network contact with any participant.

In Study 2, which involved only Global MBA students, groups of participants undertook FCs. On at least two occasions there was a small number of non-participant observers. The method entails disclosure of problematic workplace communication and personal response to the problem. All people present, both participants and observers, verbally agreed to respect confidentiality though I could not guarantee this on their behalf.

I attempted to preserve anonymity of participants by coding or changing their names. Their organisations are unspecified and their roles generalised.
5.7.2.4 Voluntary participation

At each point of contact with participants their voluntary participation was stressed. During FCs with Global MBA students two out of 28 of the students decided not to take part having observed other colleagues undertaking the process. Two other students did not respond to a request to take part in a post-Forum Conversation. It is not known if this because they chose not to be interviewed or for some other reason such as inaccurate contact details.

5.7.2.5 Harm

As noted earlier FCs may entail disclosure of problematic relationships with colleagues. All participants were advised beforehand that they have free choice of the difficult conversation they wish to present in the session, again emphasising the voluntary nature of participation. They were also advised that they could stop the session whenever they chose. No participant did this.

5.7.2.6 Independence of the research

I was aware that as a practitioner I had a potential conflict of interest when contacting and working with participants. Therefore I have made no attempt to initiate contact with participants outside of the research interest, although when invited by participants I have accepted LinkedIn professional online network contact.

5.8 Summary

This chapter has presented an overview of the methodology of this research including the interpretive approach that has been used, underpinned by Heron and Reason’s constructionist, participatory axiology. It shows how Denzin and Lincoln’s research framework has been used to structure the research and its process. A general description of the means of data collection and analysis has been provided along with some understanding of attempts to assure the quality of the research. The next three chapters describe the three separate, detailed studies of Forum Conversations commencing with Study 1, which is a template analysis of responses of participants of Forum Conversations made at least one year after the event. Study 2 looks closely at the attributions made by participants before and after Forum Conversations and Study 3 investigates the actors’ perspective of their
practice in Forum Conversations. Figure 5.2 is a summary, diagrammatic representation of the research process.

Fig. 5.2 Overall research design

**STUDY 1** (Participant group 1)

- Semi-structured Interviews
- Template analysis
- Interpretation

**STUDY 3** (Actors)

- Semi-structured interviews
- Template analysis
- Interpretation
- Interpretation

**STUDY 2** (Participant group 2)

- Semi-structured interviews Pre FC
- FC Intervention
- Semi-structured interviews Post FC
- Comparison of attributions pre and post FC
- Interpretation

Pentadic ratio exercise
CHAPTER 6: STUDY 1 – A TEMPLATE ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANTS’ EXPERIENCE OF FORUM CONVERSATIONS

6.1 Introduction

Study 1 is an inductive inquiry based on interview responses of managers who had participated in Forum Conversations a year before the interviews (hereinafter referred to simply as ‘participants’). The study highlights realistic simulation of participants’ own scenarios as a key aspect of the process. Additionally it demonstrates the importance of feedback from a number of perspectives including that of the ‘difficult others’ as played by the professional actors. There is evidence of sustained learning from Forum Conversations in how to deal with difficult communication at work. This chapter begins with the discussion of a number of methodological issues peculiar to Study 1. These include details about participants and their reasons for undertaking Forum Conversations. This is then followed by a report on findings that are gathered under three main headings – The Conversation, Safety and Learning. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the differences that might be found between what has been highlighted in this study about Forum Conversations and conventional role-play.

6.2 Method

Details of the template analysis method for Study 1 were given in Chapter 5. What follows are details of participants and specific information about the nature of the interviews in Study 1.

6.2.2 Participants

All participants had been first contacted by email. They were invited to take part and provided with an information sheet (Appendix 6.1). Their positive response by email was assumed to constitute consent (Aguinis and Henle, 2008). However, their voluntary participation was re-emphasised at the beginning of the interview and their verbal agreement was again confirmed that they were willing for the interview to be audio-recorded.

There were 15 interviewees who were all at relatively senior management levels in a range of organisations. These included a senior official in a UK Government department, the head of training from an international project management
company and the training manager for a large corporate law firm. Also included were two senior project managers from an international project management company, one director of DBA studies from a business school and nine senior managers and coaches from the NHS. Of these fifteen, there were eight men and seven women - See Appendix 6.2 for roles and names (not their own).

It must be noted that amongst this group people had a number of different purposes for using Forum Conversations. The senior Government official wanted to improve the openness of communication between different department heads. The head of project management wanted to help his team deal more assertively with bullying clients. The training manager from a law firm saw Forum Conversations as a means of inculcating leadership communication skills while the head of a DBA studies group wanted to give her students a novel learning experience. The NHS coaches were undergoing a course on diversity in coaching and so produced scenarios that reflected their questions and concerns about diversity and their own practice.

The participants from the NHS had all undertaken one Forum Conversations workshop as part of a one-year programme of training as management coaches within their organisation. Their contact details were provided by the NHS Institute, which had organised the training. About thirty individuals were contacted from the supplied list of contacts. Many contact details were no longer valid or the people contacted said they had no recollection of having participated in the training programme of which Forum Conversations had been a part. Other contacts made no reply. The nine people who agreed to be interviewed were unknown to me. Interviews with these participants were on the phone.

I knew the other six interviewees because they had all been clients of the company of corporate actors for which I have worked. Four of these were commissioners of the work. This was useful because they were able to give their view of the long-term impact of Forum Conversations on their teams. All six were happy to be interviewed after being contacted by email. Five of them were interviewed face to face and the sixth was interviewed on the phone.

No ages are specified although it is assumed no participant was less than 30 and none over 60 years of age. There were 8 men and 7 women in this study. All had managerial roles though some undertook their Forum Conversation whilst training to be coaches and so they had more of an interest in conflict work with individuals than with teams. In all cases the interviews were held at least a year after
participation in Forum Conversations. This timescale was circumstantial rather than planned in that the research study began some time after these participants’ experienced Forum Conversations. Nevertheless, the time period was fortuitous in that it was considered that any enduring effects at more than a year after the event might be firstly, a good indication of the longevity of the impact of Forum Conversations on participants and secondly, might give an indication of the sustained transfer of any learning.

6.2.3 Interviews

Fifteen interviews were held. There was no discernible reduction in the quality of interviews on the phone as opposed to those carried out face to face. This was shown by the readiness to talk and the willingness of interviewees to explore the topic beyond the set questions. If anything, the quality of the interviews improved on the phone, although this might have reflected a gradual improvement in interviewing skill as the study evolved.

An iPhone switched to loudspeaker mode was used to audio record onto a Macbook Pro computer. All interviewees were offered the opportunity to receive a summary of the research findings. Most interviews lasted between 45 and 55 minutes. All interviews were transcribed and stored on computer before being transferred to a hard disc memory device.

The Interview guide is shown in Appendix 6.3. Questions were derived from issues raised in the literature review – see Table 5.1 for links between questions and literature. The research interviews were predicated on three main areas of questioning in relation to the Forum Conversations method.

- What are the prior expectations of this method and what is sought from it?
- What is the participant experience of this method?
- What, if any, are the effects of this method on participants after the event, in the short to long terms?

6.2.4 Nature of the interviews

The interviews with the six people I knew were friendly and engaging and respondents had clearly thought carefully about their answers. The interview with the senior official in a UK government department was particularly interesting
because of the contrast between formal security arrangements for setting up the face-to-face meeting and the warm and casual nature of the meeting itself. I knew prior to the meetings that he and others of these 6 individuals had had positive experiences with Forum Conversations so I had some concern that I might unbalance my report by selecting interviewees with a known positive view. However, this was set against interviews with nine managers from the NHS, none of whom I knew and prior to the research interviews I had no knowledge as to whether their experience of Forum Conversations had been positive or negative. As it turned out all of the fifteen interviews were generally positive and all participants showed a spirit of helpfulness and interest in my project. There were a few less positive comments about the Forum Conversations experience but these all came from the NHS managers. Because these individuals were unknown to me it is likely their comments reflect a more balanced view of the process.

All interviews were transcribed and anonymised in preparation for the thematic analysis and development of the template.

**6.3 Template Analysis**

The methodological aspects of the development of the template are given in the methodology chapter 5. The final template is included here as a reference for a discussion of the findings

**6.3.1 The Final Template**

The final template (Tables 5.3 and repeated in 6.1 below) is arranged into three first order themes. These are

- The conversation
- Safety
- Learning

Findings are an interpretation of participants’ responses and perceptions organised under the main headings of this template.
Table 6.1 *Study 1. Final Template*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>1st level</th>
<th>2nd level</th>
<th>3rd level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Conversation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Engagement</td>
<td>1. Attraction (attractive) – being drawn to the process</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2. Accessible – it is easy to get involved with the process</td>
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<td>3. Contracting</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2. Realistic</td>
<td>1. Accuracy</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Suspension of disbelief</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>3. Participants’ scripts</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Emotion</td>
<td>1. Replication of felt experience</td>
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<td>2. Key to actual experience</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. The Actor</td>
<td>1. In the moment</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>2. Rapid engagement</td>
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<td>3. Speed</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Safety</strong></td>
<td>1. Realistic without risk</td>
<td>1. Away from work</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Everyone participates</td>
<td>1. It is for the participants</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Everyone is exposed</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Group effects</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Credibility</td>
<td>1. Acting</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Other participants</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Learning</strong></td>
<td>1. By doing</td>
<td>1. Experience of self</td>
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<td>2. Saying and hearing the words</td>
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<td>3. Provides material evidence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. By witnessing</td>
<td>1. Range of issues</td>
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<td>2. Reflect on own reactions</td>
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<td>3. Feedback</td>
<td>1. Constructive</td>
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<td>2. Quantity of evidence</td>
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<td>3. Range of Perspectives</td>
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<td>4. Outcomes</td>
<td>1. Self-awareness</td>
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<td>2. Confidence</td>
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<td>3. New behaviour</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Wider organisational effects</td>
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</table>
6.4 Findings of study 1

6.4.1 Structure of the report

The findings are discussed in three sections, which are taken from the first order themes of the final template. Sub-sections within each of these three sections follow the second order themes. The intention is to present the findings as advised by King (2004, p.268) as “an account structured around the main themes identified, drawing illustrative examples from each transcript as required”.

Conclusions reflect the contribution that findings from Study 1 make to answers for the main research questions of the total study.

- What is the nature of the Forum Conversations process?
- What is the impact of Forum Conversations?
- Why do Forum Conversations have impact?

Sections on Discussion and Conclusions complete the report for Study 1. All respondents’ names are changed. Appendix 6.2 shows the participants’ changed names alongside their actual roles.

6.4.2 The Conversation

6.4.2.1 Overview

In general, participants are attracted to what is seen as a novel training intervention. Nevertheless there is a tendency for an initial anxiety about participation. This disappears as participants become rapidly immersed in what they recognise as an accurate simulation of their own ‘real’ experience. This sense of reality can give rise to strong emotional reactions that may be cathartic. For some of the participants from the NHS there seemed to be a need for more emphasis on ‘contracting’ and preparation coming into the process. Although actors are admired for their professionalism and their ability rapidly to recreate realistic simulations there are some perceptions of a gap between their abilities as actors and their abilities as facilitators of learning.

6.4.2.2 Engagement

The theme Engagement reflects the participants’ willingness to connect and commit to working with the process and with the actors. This includes how they were drawn or attracted into the process at outset and how easy it was to get involved; in other words how accessible the process was. At the same time an important aspect of
facilitating participant engagement was the clarity with which boundaries of the process were set.

There was a general sense in anticipation of the Forum Conversations that they would be interesting, even exciting, and they were a novel approach to training. For example, Sarah (head of learning and development) thought that "having the actors there was bringing sort of a freshness to it" and Philip (internal coach NHS) was “actually excited at being involved”. Many people felt that the FCs were a learning opportunity and as Jim (internal coach NHS) said, “We are exposing our vulnerability because we want to learn”. People came eagerly to the event, though perhaps with some nervousness about having to expose themselves in performance in front of their group. Judith (internal coach NHS) talked about the fear of being judged and Jim felt that in general people are very apprehensive about role play. For many this nervousness was diminished by previous direct or vicarious experience of working with actors in this kind of way.

Occasionally interviewees talked less positively about the process. A number of participants felt that there was insufficient preparation of individuals before the event for what was expected of them. Furthermore, it was felt that on occasion the group dynamics either overwhelmed or inhibited the effective facilitation of the Forum Conversation. This had consequences on turn-taking, time management and constructive facilitation.

"I learned that if you want to 'get in there' you have to make more noise…as the day progressed it was inevitable that not everybody would be given an opportunity“ (Andrew, internal coach NHS)

This was expressed as inadequate ‘contracting’ between groups and individuals and the facilitative team, which included the actors. The notion of ‘contracting’ was particularly prevalent amongst the participants from the NHS. Preparation and ‘scene-setting’ may be thought of as necessary and desirable in any group work, but it may be that there is a particular focus on the idea of ‘contracting’ in this context in the NHS.

6.4.2.3 Realistic

Of particular note in terms of the participants’ engagement with the work was the fact that Forum Conversations provide an opportunity for participants to create scenarios from their own difficult conversations in their working lives, and to brief
the actors so that they could portray the ‘difficult others’ in the participants’ scenarios. This led to a sense that these conversations were directly relevant to the participants, and enabled them fully to participate in the interaction, even to the extent that these role-plays felt ‘real’ rather than ‘acted’.

"I found it surprisingly real…I found myself reacting in the way I knew I would in real life." (June, internal coach NHS)

This seems to have accentuated the effectiveness of Forum Conversations as a learning experience with people expressing some surprise at how much they got from the experience and as Judith commented, "It was clearly helpful...because there was obviously light bulbs going on“.

A number of participants commented on how rapidly the artificiality of the situation seemed to disappear despite the physical and behavioural differences between the actors and the ‘difficult others’ they were portraying.

"He (the actor) was playing a female, and so a whole stack of stuff didn’t really add up...However, what it evoked in me was that it immediately took me back to how I felt...very quickly I was hooked“ (Sarah internal coach, NHS)

This is expressed thematically both by ‘suspension of disbelief’, and by ‘being present in the moment’. The former indicates that the participants seemed to lose the sense that this was an actor facing them and that they were being observed by others in the group. Participants were drawn into a conversation that required them to think on their feet and deal with what was before them in the moment, often with high emotion present in the conversation, which further drew them into a ‘real’ rather than ‘artificial’ engagement.

"It was real enough for peoples’ hair to stand up on the back of their necks” (Peter, Head of project management team)

6.4.2.4 Emotion

The replication in the conversations of the actual felt experience seems to have been a key aspect of the experience for a number of interviewees. At a year after the event it had not been anticipated that emotion would have been so much referred to as it was by participants whether as a sense of nervousness coming into the experience, expressed in the template as ‘performance anxiety’, or as an
element of the encounter with the actor playing the ‘difficult other’. There may be a number of reasons for this including the fact that participants were encouraged to provide scenarios that had been, or might be expected to be, difficult for them in their working life. This in itself is likely to have created a heightened emotional state for some participants as they spoke about their experience:

“She was almost physically shaking. Very emotionally drawn into it” (Rory, Head of training)

Furthermore, the actors tend not to restrain emotional expression if this seems true to the instructions they have been given in order to play their parts effectively. A consequence of this is that participants might find themselves in a cathartic, emotional conversation with the actors:

“It helped get at, flush out some of the frustration of working with that person – almost draw a line under it. It was cathartic” (Sarah, Head of Learning and Development)

However, it could also happen that strong emotion unbalanced facilitation of the group in the aftermath of the conversation:

“It was quite a difficult situation, a very overly assertive character…at the end the actor threw over to the group to make suggestions and the group didn’t seem engaged at that point” (Beryl, Internal coach NHS)

A small number of participants seemed to have experienced quite profound emotional effects, the impact of which lasted some time beyond the event. For Jim (internal coach, NHS) it was a matter of acknowledging that coaching can be an emotional experience for him as coach as well as the coachee and that it is important that both sides express how they feel. For Sarah (Head of learning and development) it was recognition of the power of emotion in coaching. And for Leslie (Head of DBA studies at a business school) it was the realisation that being a woman in management did not mean she could not express her emotions. Indeed, it seemed this realization had positively impacted her relationships with her family as well as at work. Thus the emotional experience of FCs can have lasting, even profound effects on participants and seems to be a key aspect of the experience.
6.4.2.5 The Actor

The actors in Forum Conversations have two roles: as actor and as facilitator. There is a genuine sense of admiration for the actors’ ability to transform themselves into ‘difficult others’ on the basis of limited though focused questioning and listening:

“The astonishing ability in 2 or 3 minutes to absorb the sort of pen portraits, the scenarios they are about to go through, and actually to be, to become that person” (Jim, internal coach NHS)

Main perceptions of the actors’ involvement were of their professionalism, their capacity to build rapport with the group, the accurate representation or mirroring of the difficult others - “the actors almost became this person” (Francis, Head of training) - and effective feedback to participants from the point of view of the characters of the ‘difficult others’ that they were portraying. As June (internal coach, NHS) noted: “The best thing about it was to get feedback as to how someone else was seeing me”.

However, less attention was given by interviewees to a perception of the role of the actors as facilitators. Where they did it was often to comment on how actors sometimes strayed into a developmental role, and two internal coaches from the NHS who had much experience of the use of actors in training aside from Forum Conversations commented on how actors could sometimes be presumptuous and even casual about their understanding of participants’ learning needs. Andrew had a clear view of the actors’ role:

“I wasn’t placing the actor in a position of expertise to tell me how good I was or anything like that. I just thought they were there to offer a means for me to access information about me” (Andrew, internal coach NHS)

The overall impression made by the actors was as having a predominantly instrumental role within the Forum Conversation process, reflecting their abilities as skilled performers with the ability rapidly and with minimal briefing to create realistic simulations. However, participants also recognised actors’ competence in relation to participants’ work cultures:

“to find someone who’d got such deep experience and understanding of what it meant to be a manager and leader was a real bonus” (Julian, senior Government official)
The comments above reflect a view of the actors’ role as that of *acting* and there was generally little comment on the actors as facilitators. This might have been because their role in this regard was not sufficiently distinct, or made little difference to the overall context of their management as *actors* in the Forum Conversations process. At the same time the actors’ facilitation was sometimes perceived to be deficient in terms of managing group dynamics outside of and around the enacted conversations.

### 6.4.2.6 The Conversation - Summary

Thus far we have seen that participants engage positively with Forum Conversations and value the realistic behaviour and challenge afforded by working with skilled actors in this way. Whilst there were doubts about effective ‘contracting’ into the process, participants experienced not only realistic re-creation of the kind of difficult conversations they have in the workplace, but some also experienced the high levels of emotion associated with such difficult communication. The impact of Forum Conversations seems to arise from a number of elements. These include:

- The relief from any initial anxiety as people are quickly engaged.
- The novel experiential nature of the work which is about participants’ own scripts and thus completely relevant to them.
- The verisimilitude brought to scripts by working with skilled actors.
- The sense of ’being in the moment’ in the interaction with the actor, which entails losing any sense of artificiality and self-consciousness.
- The emotional release that may lend a cathartic quality to the experience.

### 6.4.3 Safety

A key aspect of the experience of Forum Conversations was perceptions of a ‘safe environment’. This includes the sense of being away from any situation where participants might be ‘judged’. Nevertheless, Forum Conversations are seen as challenging and exposing. This sense of exposure is mitigated by a sense of no or little risk because the intervention is ‘for’ participants and because participants ‘understand’ the difficulties of the predicaments each of them is encountering. Occasionally this sense of exposure is made yet safer where a team leader is the first to share vulnerability. Groups were predominantly seen as supportive of each other. This sense of support may be facilitated by the ability of the actors to build
rapport in the group. ‘Knowing what the deal is’ (contracting) is also an important safety factor.

6.4.3.1 Realistic without risk

Many participants talked of the Forum Conversations as being held within a ‘safe environment’:

"My general view about what you can learn is the … it’s what you get from being able to see something. And have someone play something out in a safe place, so that you can then expose yourself to it more, and then reflect on it. I think for me that’s the really powerful bit". (Mary, internal coach NHS)

"You could see them having conversations with you in that environment and it felt quite safe" (Sharon, internal coach NHS)

For many participants one of the reasons for feeling safe was because their Forum Conversations were conducted away from the real world context of the work location. One NHS practitioner said that there was ‘no way’ she would have undertaken the Forum Conversation with her team or with people she knew.

Contrary to this, five interviewees were team managers and were in forum with their teams for their Forum Conversations. Three of these managers were from an organisation that was experiencing extreme levels of difficulty with abusive clients. These three managers regarded the Forum Conversations process as a means of bonding the team together in adversity as well as a means of improving skill levels for dealing with clients. As one of them said,

"I wanted to show them they’re not alone in dealing with difficult clients…and it was key for them to learn some tools” (Peter, Head of project management team)

The safe environment was partly construed by the recognition that the team had come to stand together in the presence of a facsimile enemy (actors portraying difficult clients) – in other words, challenge without risk. This theme was picked up across a number of interviews where people felt able to make an error because they were with actors rather than with the actual difficult others. As Leslie adroitly put it:
There were no consequences except learning consequences” (Leslie, head of DBA studies)

Another of the five managers who undertook Forum Conversations in the presence of her team chose to play out the scenario of disciplining someone from another team (an individual who was not present and who was not known to those team members present with their manager for the Forum Conversation). In interview afterwards, the manager confessed to not having felt safe in this experience. She saw herself as being exposed to the critical judgement of her team. Nevertheless, she felt that her action and the exposure of her own vulnerability about the disciplining process had added to the sense of a safe environment for others in the room.

It is clear from these examples that even though the work team was in forum together, a sense of a safe environment was engendered when managers submitted themselves to the same risks of exposure in the Forum Conversations as the members of their teams. As the manager of the team with difficult clients said,

“A lot of senior managers actually participated and opened up. You know, I think to some degree that also sets people at ease. Some of the more junior people” (Peter, Head of project management team)

The fact that some managers in this study were prepared to undertake a Forum Conversation in front of their team indicates a level of confidence in the process and its potential outcomes and this presumably justified the risk the managers were taking.

A number of interviewees talked about a ‘supportive environment’. Forum Conversations are seen as being ‘for’ the participants as a positive learning experience rather than as some kind of test of ability. The individual members of the forum groups are generally regarded as having supportive intentions towards their colleagues arising from experience of similar predicaments at work. In this sense the forums function as support groups as well as learning groups. This is complemented by the perception of high levels of professionalism on the part of the actors as well as their ability to build rapport and to recreate difficult conversations that are experienced as real but that have no risk of consequence except learning (see quote above).
However, the sense of ‘no risk’ needs to be qualified. For example, two managers noted that they were surprised by the behaviour in Forum Conversations of some of their team. They noted better skill in some individuals than they had expected and in other individuals less skill. It would be surprising if such perceptions were not transferred to the workplace. Therefore it could not be said that there is no risk to participants in Forum Conversations. Furthermore there was at least one case where the degree of aggression portrayed by an actor as an evocation of what had been described by a participant, seems to have had an inhibiting effect upon the rest of the group. Thus it seems that actors need to play their part in creating a sense of group safety by balancing reality in their acting with an awareness of the needs of the group at any time. Conducive to this is the ‘contract’ that is made with individuals and groups expressed as ‘knowing what the deal is’. In other words that people know what the process is, what its challenges and limitations are, and what they can expect to happen both during the process and afterwards.

Participants themselves constitute an aspect of ‘safety’. A number of interviewees noted that their colleagues understood the predicaments they were facing and were credible sources of feedback. Not only this but the fact that everyone in the group was facing ‘exposure’ in the Forum Conversation in front of the group provided a sense of assurance that individuals were not going to be ‘judged’.

Thus we have an overall situation where individuals may feel anxious or nervous about their performance before coming into the Forum Conversation process, but who through working with actors in the re-creation of their own difficult conversations within supportive groups, feel safe to explore the emotions and behaviours entailed in dealing with ‘difficult others’.

6.4.3.2 Safety - Summary

It would seem that an important component of Forum Conversations is the perception that it is safe to expose oneself to error or failure in front of others. And yet because of this sense of it being safe to explore, failure cannot exist in this context ("there are no consequences except learning consequences"). There are a number of components that seem necessary to the nurturing of this sense of safety:

- The creation of realistic images of participants’ realities
- The boundaries of the intervention, including confidentiality, should be clear to participants.
Members of the group need to be regarded as credible sources of feedback
The group is seen as supportive of each other
The venue is detached from the real workplace context
Managers of teams should be prepared to undergo a Forum Conversation
Everyone in the group should participate

6.4.4 Learning

It was noted earlier in this thesis that more than one year after the event there is a clear sense that interviewees regard the experience as both impactful (memorable) and beneficial in terms of learning. Of particular note is the report of new insights and behaviour as well as the sense that the learning has had a wider impact on teams and indeed organisations.

6.4.4.1 Feedback

Learning seems to be principally associated with self-awareness that is raised in consequence of three sources of feedback – constructive feedback from the audience to each participant as ‘player’, feedback from the actor’s experience of playing the difficult other to the participant and self-perception from the embodied experience – in other words learning by doing.

A number of interviewees commented on the greater focus brought to their awareness by the sharing of the triangular experience between actor, participant as player and participant as audience. It was also clear that feedback in the groups was an important element of the process. For some people feedback was the most important aspect while for others it was the experience of the conversation itself that most counted:

"I don’t remember any of the feedback particularly. The power of the exercise was the response it evoked in me” (Sarah, Head of learning and development)

People noted the volume of evidence that the feedback process made available and the different perspectives that were brought to bear within the groups on what people witnessed and experienced. This led to a degree of reflection on the experience both at the time and afterwards which resulted in new insight and the potential for new behaviour:
“I think it was the first time we realised the world (of coaching) may not be the way we wanted it” (Mary, internal coach NHS)

Participants leave the Forum Conversation event with a large amount of feedback from a number of sources: from their own experience of having a conversation with their ‘difficult other’, from the actor as to how they, in role as ‘difficult other’, have experienced the participant, from the observers’ feedback and from their own vicarious learning when observing others in the group undergoing their Forum Conversations. This is a rich resource for reflection and no study of conventional role-play indicates a comparable array of feedback perspectives.

In this study it seems that for the most part participants come to Forum Conversations with perceptions that they cannot easily manage a particular relationship or difficulty with a colleague or client. However, after their Forum Conversation back in the workplace the difficulty seems to dissolve and indeed for a small number of learners to transform into positive relationship. For one participant this seems to have had a powerful outcome,

“It suddenly came to me that I could treat him as an actor. I mean that he was playing this conversation as well. So I thought I’d try something else as if there was no risk. He loved it when I pushed back. I can honestly say that I am now a preferred supplier. Before he would try to rattle me and play me off against competitors. Now he fights for me against competitors within his business” (Brian, senior project manager)

This kind of impact is rare and clearly required courage as much as skill and awareness. Yet it demonstrates how single moments of behaviour change can break negative patterns of relationship (Rogers, 2008).

Participants find FCs an interesting process and that it provides learning at a number of levels. This is complemented by a number of different points of view being made available both from the participant and observers, as well as from the actors as ‘the difficult others’ and as themselves (they are able to detach from their character after acting and make comments about what they have observed outside of their characterisation):

"You can have lots of layers of this – the actor, as in this case Jane. So the actor being Jane for several minutes (sometimes quite powerful conversation), remains as Jane, and says 'Jane' thinks this to that - the brief that the actor’s been given. And then of course the actor can step outside
that and say: Right, my view on this (and this is more into the sort of coach or interpreter, I suppose you could say) is ‘whatever’“ (Jim, internal coach NHS)

Feedback from this array of perspectives in this supportive and supported environment could afford to be hard-hitting and constructive without being threatening. It may be that this accentuated the learning experience:

“I tell you when the real learning came. 2 or 3 months afterwards when you’re lying in bed and still playing it through in your mind….the real learning is how that then applies to broader issues” (Peter, Head of project management team)

It is partly expected that teams that undertook Forum Conversations together report an impact on their team. However, individual participants also report wider impact on their work as for example passing on the skills learned in FCs to others or simply being more aware of themselves in their dealings with those they work with:

“I tend to coach more senior people...who take stuff away and say ‘this is really good, I think I’ll try this out in my next team meeting” (Jim, internal coach NHS)

“What matters is that I know, I am more conscious of, how I’m coming over to them” (Leslie, Head of DBA studies)

There is also an indication that Forum Conversations give rise to greater confidence for some participants. A small number of participants reported changes in their emotional approach to their work and to relationships in general.

The learning process in Forum Conversations includes learning by doing (‘scripting’, playing out and feeding back) and learning by witnessing (observing others’ conversations). Learning by doing was seen as particularly relevant to work needs because it enabled people to rehearse different ways of dealing with ‘difficult others’ at work. This included the opportunity to practice saying and hearing the words they might use to deal with the real conversation:

“I was getting the chance to say something out loud. So I could see what it sounds like in public” (Leslie, head of DBA studies)

It was also noted that the pace of the action and absorption in the conversation enabled memorable learning. To some extent it was the impact of this ‘real’ acting
that engaged the audience in vicarious learning and in sharing what they had observed in feedback.

6.4.4.2 Learning - Summary

Learning from Forum Conversations seems to come from:

- The realistic nature of the conversation with the professional actor
- The wealth of feedback that participants receive from three sources – their own experience of the conversation, the feedback from the audience and the feedback from the actor.
- Vicarious learning from watching other participants’ Forum Conversations
- The opportunity to rehearse saying what participants need to say to the real difficult other

What is learned and put into practice is discursive rather than discrete in that many people talk about attitude or tonal changes that are difficult to observe from the outside. But many participants were clear that central to what they had learned was an awareness of how they were perceived by others.

6.5 Overall summary

Forum Conversations’ seems to be a powerful experiential learning method that enables people to address their difficult relations in the workplace. Participants seem to have increased confidence and awareness of themselves and others in their working relations along with behaviours that give them greater control of their interpersonal communication. This improved control may have far-reaching consequences as with the participant who treated a difficult customer as if he posed no threat, and was merely an actor.

Key features of Forum Conversations that seem necessary to the learning process include:

- Relevance (participants’ own scenarios)
- Participation
- Verisimilitude
- Support
- Feedback
- Rehearsal without risk.
6.6 Discussion

6.6.1 Contrast with conventional role play

The key features of FCs listed in the last section might also adhere to more conventional role-plays. What seems to be different in FCs is that actors are skilled at rapidly bringing to life the scenarios described by participants. It would appear that the verisimilitude is such that participants may experience the same or similar felt emotions that they have experienced previously, or expect to experience in encounter with their difficult others. For some participants this may even be cathartic but at the same time the experience is felt to be safe in that it is always an acted experience however realistic it may seem. There is no evidence in the literature of similar cathartic effects experienced in conventional role-plays though this does not mean to say it does not happen.

It may be that actors are able to draw participants into a state where both are simply reacting to ‘what is there in that moment’, reacting spontaneously to what emerges between them in the interaction and not bound by scripts or the need to address learning points as might be the case in conventional role-plays. Indeed, one interviewee stated that whether the actor was doing a credible representation of the ‘difficult other’, or not, didn’t matter because she (the participant) was dealing in that moment with a real person who was giving her a challenge that she experienced as real.

6.6.2 Added value of actors in role-play

This is not a positivistic exercise and specific learning outcomes cannot be predicted by reproducing similar conditions in the Forum Conversation for any participant. Readiness of participants and ‘knowing what the deal is’ are necessary though not sufficient preconditions, as are a safe and supportive environment. Into this perhaps also comes the skill of the actor, the transparency of the process, the openness of the group members, the emotional response of participants and the quality and credibility of feedback. Very little of this can be established at outset.

Albeit the actor’s role was in general perceived to be that of the skilled performer, actors may contribute more than this to the impact of the experience and here it may be that what was observed by many as ‘professionalism’ is a distinct feature of actor practice as opposed to conventional role plays. This professionalism may be about 1) the aspects of the ‘difficult other’ the actor chooses to emphasise in the
simulation, 2) the balancing of emotion and realistic enacting with safe ‘holding’ of the participant in the process, and 3) the speed and depth with which participants are drawn into a real encounter that is nevertheless felt to carry little risk.

These three aspects might be styled as the ‘management’ of the actor’s performance and may constitute the added value afforded by using actors rather than non-actors in role-plays in management learning. Although the realistic nature of conventional role-plays is often achievable with non-actors, what may be different in Forum Conversations in terms of realism is the accurate mimicry by actors of real people, that is to say the difficult others, after only a few minutes briefing. The degree to which the portrayal of a difficult other is accurate seems to have an impact on both the depth of engagement with the exercise as well as with the quality of the learning. Accurate portrayal of a character is something that might be expected of professional actors. However, combining this kind of skill with other elements of management of the process so as to maximise the learning experience for participants would seem to indicate a high skill level on the part of actors who took part in the study.

6.7 Conclusions

In addressing the research questions the impression gained from Study 1 about the nature of Forum Conversations is that they provide a safe environment for the rehearsal of participants’ own challenging conversations. These are sufficiently like the real thing (that is to say, like the experiences participants encounter within the context of their actual working lives) to have been regarded predominantly as ‘real’ rather than as ‘acted’. The conversations were also regarded as representing a real challenge, while remaining relatively risk free within the context of the Forum Conversation process.

The data indicates that Forum Conversations were impactful in a number of ways. They were highly valued as a learning experience and remain so beyond a year after the event. This experience was judged not only to have been useful in terms of the benefits taken into working life, but also to have been a powerful experience at the time. Indeed words like ‘powerful’, ‘transformational’ and ‘cathartic’ were used by many of the interviewees. There was also evidence that the learning gained had beneficial effects upon the wider teams in which individuals worked.

Explanation of why FCs have impact seems to be centred on increased self-awareness arising from the range of feedback that comes from ‘hearing oneself,’
from the actors and the peer participant group. However, the exact nature of learning is diffuse and unpredictable by virtue of the fact that the method responds to learners’ specific needs rather than purveying standard sets of skills or behaviours as in the more conventional use of role-play.

In conclusion, Forum Conversations can be said to be an OT method that radicalises conventional role-play in management learning around effective handling of difficult relationships in the workplace. To a great extent the learners themselves determine the learning agenda within Forum Conversations and consequently the process can be regarded as encouraging participation and dialogue that leads to positive learning outcomes in practice.

6.7.1 Limitations

Study 1 was of participants who reported their interpretation of their experience at some time after the event and who merely reported the post FC experience. Limitations that might arise from interviewing a long time after the event have been discussed in Chapter 5. Further, as noted, there was a range of organisational issues coming into Forum Conversations. It is therefore possible that different agendas influenced both the way participants approached the work and how they responded to it. For example project managers who had been badly treated by clients might have regarded Forum Conversations as an opportunity to unburden and thus have been more positive about the learning experience. NHS coaches dealing with diversity as an issue might have been more academic about their learning from Forum Conversations. Thus different agendas might have brought different attitudes both to the process and to what it meant to participants in aftermath. Consequently thematic content across groups might be somewhat distorted particularly in view of the larger proportion of internal coaches from the NHS. Template analysis is recommended for comparison across groups and on another occasion it might have beneficial to have more balanced numbers of representatives from different groups.

The next chapter reports the operation and findings of Study 2. In this second study there were few if any overriding organisational contingencies and participants mostly brought personal communication issues to the process. This second study also attempts to compare pre-FC with post-FC views of relationships with difficult others in the workplace in order to assess the extent of change rather than mere description of change as has been the case in Study 1.
CHAPTER 7: STUDY 2 - AN ATTRIBUTIONAL STUDY OF FORUM CONVERSATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents Study 2 of the thesis. Study 1 was a template analysis of participants’ experience of Forum Conversations (FCs). However, this was a post FC study done at least one year after the event. In order to gain greater understanding about the impact of FCs a study closer to the event was made of differences in participants’ sensemaking of their difficult conversations either side of FCs. It was decided to take a different analytical approach to the template analysis of Study 1 as it was considered that separate templates of themes made either side of FCs might not be amenable to direct comparison. It was decided to compare attributions that participants make about the relations between themselves and others in the workplace before and after FCs. There are two parts to the study. Part 1 is a comparison of attributions. Part 2 is an analytic induction of patterns of attribution making. The chapter ends with a brief summary and conclusions from the two parts of Study 2.

7.2 Part I: Attributional analysis

7.2.1 Introduction

A principal assumption in this enquiry is that people tend to seek causes for the difficulties they are experiencing in either the ‘difficult other’, or in the situation (Ross, 1977; Wong and Weiner, 1981; Gaertner et al, 1985; Stone et al, 2000). Another assumption is that the difficulty is perceived as either intractable, or that the participant feels they have little or no skill or resource to draw upon in order to address the difficulty. In both cases there would seem to be locus of control implications (Rotter, 1954; Heider, 1958; Abramson et al, 1978). However, findings from Study 1 indicate that after FCs the participants are more likely to be aware of a number of different perspectives on their difficult situation including:

- Their own contribution to the difficulty
- Insights into the difficult behaviour of the other

If there are such changes in awareness it is assumed that changes might also be observed in attributions made pre and post FCs. This study is about determining if
any changes in attribution were made and what this might indicate about the impact of Forum Conversations. Attributions are regarded here not as an expression of an objective reality but rather as interpretations of participants’ experience.

7.2.2 Method

For this research it was decided to interfere as little as possible with the FCs process as used in practice. The FC process has been described in Chapter 1 but to reiterate, it largely involves participants generating their own solutions to their perceived difficulties by simulating the experience of conversing with a ‘difficult other’ played by an actor, and then discussing the experience with peer observers. There were two actors used in this study. This was because of (a) limited funding and (b) difficulties in coordinating actor availability with participant availability. Whilst I am author of this thesis I am also an experienced practitioner of Forum Conversations and was one of the two actors in the study. I conducted 17 of the Forum Conversations whilst another female actor conducted 7 of them. There is not an equal division because of limited resource to engage the female actor for a longer time. Although the second actor audio recorded the pre-FC briefings for 7 of the interviews she merely switched on the recording device at the beginning of the briefing and switched off the device at the end. She was not involved in any other way for data collection, nor in any of the subsequent analysis.

The initial briefing by participants about their difficult others, which is a normal part of the Forum Conversations process, was seen as akin to a semi-structured interview and with participants’ permission all briefings were audio recorded. The recording was the only departure from the normal Forum Conversations process. These recorded briefings were the source of attributions made by participants immediately before the Forum Conversations. The initial briefings lasted between 8 and 12 minutes. Further recordings were made at about 3 months after the FC when each participant was interviewed individually on the phone about their current situation with their actual difficult other. Again, these were semi-structured interviews. These second audio-recorded interviews were the source of the second set of attributions made 3 months after the FC. This time period is to enable participants to put any learning from the FC into practice and to reassess their relationship with the difficult other. These post FC interviews usually took between 20 and 25 minutes.
7.2.2.1 Participants

27 participants took part in the study though it was only possible to contact 24 participants for a second interview. None of these participants took part in Study 1 of this research. Of the 24 participants in Study 2 three people took part in Forum Conversations as part of their internal training in a large commercial Law firm. There were two women and one man. Each person was the head of a department within the firm. The other 21 participants were global MBA students at Manchester Business School but continued to undertake their full time roles as managers in a range of businesses from a number of different sectors including Public Health, Manufacturing, Commercial Law, IT Services, and Banking. There was also a range of nationalities including Russian, German, American, Indian and British. There were 5 women and 19 men. There were 24 complete sets of interviews from before and after the Forum Conversations. The Forum Conversations were held in groups of no more than 6 people at a time, which is normal practice. The total time given to any one participant’s Forum Conversation was 45 minutes. All data obtained by recording was anonymised as soon as possible.

7.2.2.2 Extraction of attributions

The interviews were transcribed and attributions extracted from the transcribed text. Attributions were identified in the text on the basis that an attribution is “any answer to the question why” (Munton et al, 1999, p.8). In any attribution there will be at least two components - the cause and the outcome. The general template for denoting an attribution in the text is -

1. **Cause** > Outcome /

Thus the example sentence:

“I was tired so I went to bed early” is denoted as **I was tired** so > **I went to bed early** /

A full range of the way attributions were denoted is given in Appendix 7.1. A full set of attributions extracted from one interview is given in Appendix 7.2.

The Agent of the cause and the Target of the outcome in the causal sequence of each attribution are also determined. The person being interviewed, ‘the Speaker’, may or may not be the Agent and/or the Target of any attribution.

In the sentence:
I made > Roger do the washing up/

‘I’ is both the Speaker and Agent and Roger is the Target of the outcome (which presumably is clean dishes).

All attributions were coded for Speaker, Agent and Target. The Speaker could be both Agent and Target at the same time. The Speaker (always the interviewee) was coded ‘1’, the Agent was coded ‘1’ when it was the Speaker, ‘0’ when it was a ‘difficult other’ and ‘2’ when the Agent was a situation or circumstance. The Target was coded ‘1’ when it was the Speaker, ‘0’ when it was a difficult other and ‘2’ when it was a situation or circumstance.

All attributions were coded against a number of dimensions on the LACS. However, for this study a number of adaptations of this system have been made. This is encouraged by Munton et al (1999) to fit the particular focus of investigation.

7.2.2.3 Attributional dimensions

Munton et al propose 5 dimensions in their LACS model (1999). These five dualities with suggested codes in parentheses are as follow in Table 7.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal (1)</th>
<th>External (2)</th>
<th>Ambiguous (0)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unstable (1)</td>
<td>Stable (2)</td>
<td>Ambiguous (0)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Specific (2)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal (1)</td>
<td>Personal (2)</td>
<td>Ambiguous (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controllable (1)</td>
<td>Uncontrollable (2)</td>
<td>Ambiguous (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Internal/External dimension reflects the sense that the attribution is to something that arises from some internal motivation of an agent. Otherwise it is an External attribution. Stable/Unstable means the extent to which a perceived cause is relatively constant. Global/Specific is about whether a particular cause may impact on a range of different outcomes or whether a perceived cause has a single outcome. Universal/Personal reflects the sense that something that an individual has done might reasonably reflect most peoples’ behaviour in the same circumstances (thus Universal). This is opposed to something which is likely to reflect that individual’s own idiosyncrasy (Personal). The Controllable/Uncontrollable dimension is about whether an individual perceives they can control a situation or not in terms of the causal sequence of themselves as an Agent that causes an Outcome.
7.2.2.4 Other dimensions

The literature on conflict suggests that in broad terms people’s motivation in conflict may be directed towards relationship maintenance (Affect) or goal attainment (Interest) (Peterson et al, 1982; Volkema et al, 1996; van Vliert, 1990; Aquino et al, 2003). Affect/Interest may constitute an attributional dimension as people search for causes for others’ difficult behaviour (“He doesn’t like to make a fuss” – Affect or “He only wants to make money” – Interest”). Thus this dimension was added to Munton et al’s five dimensions.

7.2.2.5 Adapting the LACS coding for this study

When coding was attempted on the first transcribed interview it became clear that the coding suggested by Munton et al seemed inadequate to distinguish between a response that was ambiguous in terms of the two poles of any attributional dimension and a response that was not relevant to that dimension. Therefore some adaptations were made to the coding scheme in order to add a fourth category to the coding system. Munton et al categorise any attribution that cannot be coded in either of an attributional dimension’s poles (e.g. stable or unstable) into a third ‘ambiguous’ category. It is assumed that when attempting to measure change from one state to another as in this project (pre FC attributions to post FC attributions), if an attribution changes away from one pole but cannot definitively be placed in the second, and thus is ambiguous, then the ‘ambiguous’ category still represents a marked shift in attribution. Consequently a fourth ‘not relevant’ category was created. This is the place for attributions that do not lie on the bi-polar spectrum for the agents involved, who for the most part are the participant and the ‘difficult other’. Table 7.2 shows the adapted coding system.

Table 7.2 Numerical codes of attributional dimensions used in this study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal (1)</th>
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<th>Ambiguous (2)</th>
<th>Not relevant (3)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Unstable (0)</td>
<td>Ambiguous (2)</td>
<td>Not relevant (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific (1)</td>
<td>Global (0)</td>
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<td>Not relevant (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Universal (0)</td>
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<td>Not relevant (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Uncontrollable (0)</td>
<td>Ambiguous (2)</td>
<td>Not relevant (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect (1)</td>
<td>Interest (0)</td>
<td>Ambiguous (2)</td>
<td>Not relevant (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.2.2.6 Examples of attributions and codes

Every attribution was coded for Speaker, Agent and Target for each of the 6 attributional dimensions except for Stability and Globality. This is because these two dimensions describe the nature of cause rather than its origin or direction and thus the designations of Agent (origin) and Target (direction) are not necessary. Appendix 7.3 gives the complete coding for one participant. Table 7.3 below shows examples of coding for two attributions taken from an interview with one of the participants who was a university administrator dealing with a ‘difficult other’ who was one of the university’s external funders. The participant is the speaker.

Attribution 1 - This guy has not only funded this project, he has funded PhD students through research councils. So he has invested substantially in getting something out from the University/.

Attribution 2 - Of course having a PhD I knew a lot about the science that was going into the funded research project/.

Table 7.3 An example of attributional coding in this study using the LACS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribution number</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<tr>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agent</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable (1) Unstable (0) Ambiguous (2)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific (1) Global (0) Ambiguous (2)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal (1) External (0) Ambiguous (2) [Speaker]</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal (1) External (0) Ambiguous (2) [Agent]</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal (1) External (0) Ambiguous (2) [Target]</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal (1) Universal (0) Ambiguous (2) [Speaker]</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal (1) Universal (0) Ambiguous (2) [Agent]</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal (1) Universal (0) Ambiguous (2) [Target]</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controllable (1) Uncontrollable (0) Amb (2) [Speaker]</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controllable (1) Uncontrollable (0) Amb (2) [Agent]</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controllable (1) Uncontrollable (0) Amb (2) [Target]</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In attribution number 1 the Speaker is neither the Agent nor Target of the attribution but is reporting about someone else, the funder. This attribution is coded Stable, because the funder has been funding consistently over some time. It is Global because the attribution concerns a number of funding activities and a number of ‘somethings’ to be got from the University. The attribution is External to the speaker but assumed to be Internal to the agent or funder in that his actions are motivated from within himself. The target, which is ‘getting something from the
University’ is coded as External. The attribution is coded as Universal from the point of view of the Speaker in that the Speaker’s attribution for what the funder seeks from his investment is assumed to be one that others would also make. However, the code is Personal for the funder as Agent and also for the Target in that the funder has made unique decisions about how to invest the funds and what he seeks by way of return. The attribution is coded as ambiguous for Controllable in regard to the speaker in that it is unclear as to whether the Speaker, as the funder’s point of contact at the University, is able to block the funder’s wish to get something from the University. The attribution is coded as Controllable for the Agent because the funder as Agent no doubt has control of his funding activity. However, he has less control of what he can expect from the University and so Target is coded as ambiguous for Controllability. It will be noted that the coding depends entirely on the coder’s interpretation.

Similar rationale underlies coding of the second attribution. For example, the Speaker attributes his greater knowledge of science to having a PhD. He is both the Agent and the Target. This is a Stable condition as his knowledge cannot be easily removed. It is also Global in that his PhD gives him knowledge across a range of contexts. His attainment of a PhD is internal, as is the knowledge gained. It can be assumed that most natural scientists with PhDs will have in depth scientific knowledge and thus the codes on the Personal/Universal dimension are for Universal. The attribution is coded as Controllable because presumably the Speaker was in control of his PhD and the derived knowledge.

7.2.2.7 Comparison of attributions

The coded attributions of the pre and post Forum Conversation interviews were compared for changes in each attributional dimension. There are two types of comparison in this study. Silvester (1997) notes that attributions within the different dimensions (for example, Affect, Interest or Ambiguous) can be converted into percentages of the total number of attributions made on that dimension. These can then be compared across different dimensions and also across different individuals. Therefore simple counts of attributions on each dimension were converted into percentages and comparisons made between percentages for each dimension for pre and post Forum Conversation attributions. For simplicity Table 7.4 gives an example of the comparison of percentages for only those attributions coded ‘1’ for each dimension. Each percentage is the percentage of attributions given to that particular code out of the total number of attributions.
In the example below (Table 7.4) it will be seen that there have been big shifts pre- to post- FC in Internality and Controllability for this Speaker’s attributions. The Speaker also shows a shift towards Affect in their attributions. For ease of comparison the percentages shown are for only one element of each dimension. Thus on the Stability dimension what is not shown in the Pre-FC percentage is that the remaining 32% of the dimension is accounted to Unstable and Ambiguous. Similarly on the Global/Specific dimension Post-FC 60% is accounted for by Global and Ambiguous codes.

Once the coding had been completed it was possible to undertake a range of analyses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of attributions</th>
<th>Pre FC</th>
<th>Post FC</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specific</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal [Speaker]</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal [Speaker]</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Controllable [Speaker]</td>
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<td>69</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affect [Speaker]</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50</td>
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</table>

### 7.2.3 Results

#### 7.2.3.1 Numbers of extracted attributions

A total of 1901 attributions were extracted from 48 interviews. Of these, 664 were extracted from initial briefings given to the actor at an average of 27.7 attributions per participant. 1237 attributions were made in the post FC interviews at an average of 51.5 attributions per participant. Silvester (2004) notes that it is usual to obtain between 1-2 attributions per minute of interview, whereas here we see slightly more than 2 attributions per minute in the post FC interview but 3 attributions per minute in the pre FC briefings. This may be explained by the focused questioning that the actor carries out in order to get enough information to take on the role of ‘the difficult other’ effectively. This is likely to engender more attributions.
All frequencies of codes were converted into percentages of the total number of codes across each dimension for all the attributions made in each participant’s interview. Thus for example, if 32 attributions had been made in a pre FC briefing, it might have been that 17 of these attributions were coded as ‘Internal’, 12 as ‘External’ and 3 as ‘Ambiguous’. These would be converted into 53.1% ‘Internal’, 37.5% ‘External’ and 9.4% ‘Ambiguous’ = 100%. These numbers could then be compared with percentages of coded attribution on the same dimension in the post FC interview. Tables 7.5 and 7.6 below show pre and post FC percentage comparisons made for the individual dimension elements coded ‘1’ for all the dimensions, thus for Stability, Specificity, Personal, Internality, Controllability and Affect. Columns 2 and 3 in each table show the raw frequencies, which were then converted into percentages. Where percentages do not add up to 100% it is because small percentages of attributions were coded as ‘not relevant’ on the attributional dimensions used and these percentages are not given in the Tables.

Because the data is ordinal and arguably random the Wilcoxon signed rank test for the comparison of means was used. The direction of change in attributional dimensions was not anticipated and therefore calculations were computed for two-tailed tests.

7.2.3.2 Statistics

In Table 7.5 there is seen to be an increase in ‘Internality’ with average increase across all participants of 31%. Average increases in ‘Stability’ and ‘Specificity’ are minus 7% and plus 7.3% respectively. Wilcoxon signed rank tests for paired samples of ordinal data (Statistic is W value) show the increase for Internality to be significant at the p< 0.01 level while changes in Stability, Specificity and the Personal dimension were not statistically significant. In Table 7.6 there is seen to be significant change for ‘Controllability but not for ‘Affect’. However, unlike other dimensions there was a large percentage of attributions that were coded as ambiguous on the Affect-Interest dimension and therefore the Wilcoxon comparison was applied to the ‘Ambiguous’ code for the Affect/Interest dimension. The changes in ‘Ambiguity’ from pre to post FC appear to be statistically significant at p< 0.05.

It will be noted that the change in percentages is not always in the ‘improved’ direction, particularly for the Controllable/Uncontrollable dimension, and that there are 7 out of 24 scores for ‘Controllability’ that show negative changes. However, it is argued later that this is an indication of positive change for these 7 participants.
Table 7.5 Comparison of percentages of coded dimensions Stability, Specificity, Internality and Personal

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<tr>
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<th>Post Att f</th>
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<th>SPECIFICITY</th>
<th>Diff</th>
<th>INTERNALITY</th>
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Average

W Values

Significance at p >0.01 for N = 24 is W value less than 61

Significance

NOT SIG.

NOT SIG.

P < 0.01

NOT SIG.

160
Table 7.6 Comparison of percentages of coded attributional dimensions Controllability and Affect

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<th><strong>AFFECT</strong></th>
<th><strong>DIFF</strong></th>
<th>AMBIGUITY on AFFECT DIMENSION</th>
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**W Values**
Significance at p >0.01 for N = 24 is W value less than 61Significance at p >0.05 for N = 24 is W value less than 81

**Significance**
SIG at p< 0.01 NOT SIG. SIG. at p<0.05

161
7.2.4 Discussion

7.2.4.1 Interpretation

After FCs there is a tendency for participants to see themselves much more as the causal agents in their attributions. This is paralleled to a degree by the increase in the Internality dimension and also by the Controllability dimension. The over-riding inference is that as a consequence of the FC participants gain some sense of positive competence when dealing with difficult others and see themselves as being more comfortable and 'in control' in these difficult relations.

Reference to the literature on attributions suggests that locus (internality), stability, and controllability are dimensions that are related to both success at work (Weiner, 1985; Seligman and Schulman, 1986; Peterson et al, 1982) and job satisfaction (Spector, 1982; Welbourne et al, 2006). The results of the analysis in this study are therefore consistent with the widely held view that increases in internality and controllability may be correlated with positive achievements and outcomes in the workplace.

In the present study this seems to reflect improved communication and work relations. At the same time it must be recognised that improvements in satisfaction and positivity can have reciprocal effects on attributions (Weiner, 1985; Metalsky et al, 1982). Thus one must ask if the study is measuring not attributonal change but mood change, and also, what is the direction of change? This is where referring to the text of the transcribed interviews can be helpful. For example, there are numerous instances in the post FC interviews where interviewees identify the FC itself as instrumental in the changes in self-perception that they observe:

“You know it [the FC] has had a big impact and I can only say it was a positive thing for my career.”

“I actually had one of those eureka moments the other day. I actually felt like a ‘flash back’ to when we were doing that practice session (FC) with you. It was just weird but for some reason I pictured you sitting across the table and it was just – OK, I need to think about what I am saying, repeat it slower, - “I hear you, I understand”.

Some aspects of the observed changes in attributional dimensions seem to be negative in direction. For example there are a number of changes towards Unstable from Stable, which might be thought of as unwelcome. In the context of FCs where relations with ‘difficult others’ are explored many of the situations are Stable in the sense that they are negative and ‘stuck’. In releasing this negative tension after the FC a number of
participants make positive attributions towards the Unstable dimension – the particular difficulty has eased or is being looked at in a different way. Thus an element of Unstability in attributions may indicate improved communication.

It might be expected that if FCs make positive impact that interviewees would make more attributions with themselves as Agent causing – controlling - outcomes. This was observed for the most part although some participants’ attributions moved towards less control (Uncontrollability). It is suggested that an aspect of these participants’ original difficulties pre FC were that they had a fixed view of how things should be (monologic) and their own intransigence was part of the problem. Thus post FC they were trying to listen more to others and this translated into attributions of having less control. Other participants had either changed their jobs as a way of resolving their issues with a ‘difficult other’ or were exploring new jobs at the time of the post FC interview and did not feel that they yet had control of their new roles. Nevertheless, the predominant changes across all participants were towards attributions where participants had more control and again this is consistent with positive impact of the FCs.

On the Affect/Interest dimension, unlike other dimensions, there is a large percentage of attributions that are coded as ambiguous. Further, the changes in ambiguity from pre to post FC appear to be statistically significant at $p< 0.05$. An increase in ambiguity indicates that there is less clarity post FC about whether an attribution can be coded as either Affect or Interest. Thus the ‘either-or’ aspect of coding possibly becomes ‘both-and’ or ‘maybe this-maybe that’. From this it might be inferred that the increase in ambiguity post-FC indicates that participants tend to be more balanced in their attributions to Affect and Interest. This resonates with recommendations made by Thomas (1992) that people in conflict might try to balance the maintenance of relationship with the achievement of goals. It may be that in consequence of Forum Conversations people achieve more distance from the difficult issue and are able to view it from a more balanced perspective.

7.2.4.2 Limitations

Although this study seems to indicate positive changes in line with attribution theory, there are a number of potential limitations in this study.

Firstly, the contexts in which the pre and post FC interviews were held were very different on a number of points. The initial briefing was held face-to-face in front of a number of the participants’ peers and lasted no longer than about ten minutes. The post FC interviews were carried out 3 months after the event on the phone and lasted for about 25 minutes.
Secondly, the focus in the initial briefing was on finding out about the ‘difficult other’ and consequently questions were directed towards what might be thought of as an external target. Post FC interviews were focused on finding out about the participant (internal target). This differential focus may be partly responsible for the significant changes in Internality that were observed.

Thirdly, I was the only coder of attributions and so the codes reflected my interpretation alone.

Finally, 24 participants were studied which some might regard as a limitation. However, this number is generally regarded as acceptable for a qualitative research taken to saturation (Mason, 2010), but is usually considered less acceptable for a quantitative study, as noted by Cassell et al, (2005).

7.2.4.3 Conclusions from the attributional analysis

The attributions people make to explain events and behaviour is regarded as a way of managing themselves and gaining predictive control within their environment. Attribution theory has described a number of dimensions along which people tend to make attributions. The Leeds Attributional Coding System (LACS) has been used in this study to extract and code attributions made in pre and post FC interviews. Comparison of changes in attributions between these two interviews indicates increase in attributions along the dimensions of Internality and Controllability in the post FC interviews. This is consistent with changes predicted by attribution theory when people feel themselves to be able to manage themselves more confidently in relations with others. Therefore it is concluded from this method of attributional analysis that FCs are a powerful means of improving peoples’ confidence and sense of control of events when dealing with others. Additionally, there is an indication that participants are less polarized on the Affect/Interest dimension after their FC experience. This might show a more balanced approach in their dealings with others.

7.3 Part II - Analytic induction

7.3.1 Introduction

Analytic Induction (AI) is about empirically establishing the causes of a specific phenomenon via intensive examination of a selected number of cases (Johnson, 2004, p. 165). It also entails readjustment of concepts and hypotheses and definitions throughout the analysis (Manning, 1982). Further, Johnson suggests looking for what Blumer (1954, p.7) calls ‘sensitising’ concepts that might guide development of theory.
Because AI is about analysis there is no prescription for how the data is collected (Johnson, 2004).

Analysis begins by developing cases or categories that seem to describe distinct differences within the available data. Thereafter an explanatory framework is developed that in conjunction with ‘sensitising concepts’ may lead to the development of theory to explain the variance in the cases that have been described. Bloor (1976) developed a framework for this process of analysis that goes through four phases. Table. 7.7 shows a simplified adaptation of this framework as shown in Johnson (2004). The framework is further adapted for this study:

Table 7.7 Adaptation of Bloor’s 1976 AI model showing four phases of analysis and parallel progress of this study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Bloor sequence</th>
<th>Parallel sequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase I</td>
<td>Gain access to the phenomenon of interest</td>
<td>Forum Conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase II</td>
<td>Define phenomenon whose variation is to be explained</td>
<td>Comparison of attributions to causal agents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify variations</td>
<td>Attributional changes highlighted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Categorise variations for similarities and differences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase III</td>
<td>Develop categories by distinguishing between shared and unique features</td>
<td>Develop categories by reference to text of interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase IV</td>
<td>Present theoretical explanations of variance in the phenomenon to guide development of theory</td>
<td>Use Attributional Style to explain variance and develop theory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.3.2 Analysis

The intention in this study is to follow Bloor’s sequence as elucidated by Johnson (2004) in so far as the same phases can be followed. It is unusual to begin this sequence from observation of numerical patterns in descriptive data though as Tesch (1990) notes, qualitative researchers sometimes use numerical data for observation of distinct patterns just as quantitative researchers use words to generate numerical data. Analytic Induction (AI) was chosen rather than further statistical factorial analysis because of (a) the interpretive derivation of the codes and (b) an epistemological decision to revert to an interpretive analysis of the text of the transcribed interviews.
There seems to be a pattern of attributional change that emerges from the data about who it was that participants considered to be the principal causal agents in the attributions made in their two interviews pre and post FCs. In contrast to the usual approach in AI where Bloor’s phase II usually entails separating out distinct categories by looking for differences and similarities in the data (see Table 7.7), this process has been done numerically by a comparison of the pre and post FC attributions to the main causal agent in these attributions. Table 7.8 shows this comparison, which is the change of percentages of the perceived causal agent, either the participant (coded ‘1’) or the ‘difficult other’ (coded ‘0’) in the attributions made.

Four observed patterns or cases of percentage change are deemed to constitute Bloor’s phase II developmental step in which variations in the data are found. Having assumed that these four cases were indeed distinct, the normal process of theorisation in Bloor’s phases III and IV in the AI process was then adhered to.

Table 7.8 shows the percentages of the split between the participant (coded ‘1’) and their difficult other (coded ‘0’) as the dominant Agent in the attributions made by each participant either side of the FC. A comparison is made between the percentage of the attributions for each participant where the Agent of the cause-effect sequence of the attribution is either the participant or the difficult other. This is done for both the pre and post FC attributions for each participant. Other Agents such as environmental and situational factors or individuals who were not the difficult others may have been nominated for some of the participants’ attributions but these are not shown in the percentages. Thus for participant 1 in the pre FC columns 74% of the attributions had the participant as Agent and 24% of the attributions had the difficult other as Agent. The remaining 2% of attributions had Agents other than the participant or the difficult other.

The patterns of change observed are:

- **Reversal** – where the ratio of the percentage of attributions between participant or difficult other reverses from pre to post FC.

- **Separation** – where the ratio of the percentage of attributions between participant and difficult other is roughly equal pre FC but separates post FC with the participant as Agent having the larger proportion of attributions.

- **Little Change** - where the ratio of the percentage of attributions between participant or difficult other stays roughly the same from pre to post FC.

- **External Factors** – where post FC there is a distinct increase in attributions made to Agents other than the participant or difficult other.

The final column in Table 7.8 shows the descriptive labels given to the four cases at a later stage of the analysis.
Table 7.8 Comparisons between pre and post FC percentages of attribution for causal agent of attributions showing patterns of change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>PRE '1'</th>
<th>PRE '0'</th>
<th>POST '1'</th>
<th>POST '0'</th>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>Strategist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Reversal</td>
<td>Dialogist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>External Factors</td>
<td>Strategist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>46</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>23</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Little change</td>
<td>Theorist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>Dialogist</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Reversal</td>
<td>Dialogist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>37</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Indeterminate</td>
<td>Theorist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
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<td>47</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>Dialogist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>41</td>
<td>60</td>
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<td>42</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
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<td>76</td>
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<tr>
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<td>30</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Instrumentalist</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>Reversal</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>Dialogist</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>Instrumentalist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.3.3 Bloor phase II, categorisation of variations - four distinct cases of change in causal agent for attributions

It had been anticipated from the comparison between pre and post FC causal agents that post FC there might be an increase in the number of attributions where the causal agent was the participant him/herself. This was an initial impression gained from listening back to the recordings of the interviews. In fact a review of the changes in percentages of attribution to causal agents as shown in Table 7.8 indicated four distinct patterns of change. In the analysis an ‘indeterminate’ change (participant 8) is included in the ‘little change’ explanations because there seems no clear indication of change.

The analysis returns to the qualitative data in order to enhance understanding and interpretation of the patterns of changes observed in the attributional coding.

The four patterns, expressed as cases, are as follows:
Case 1 - In the pre FC attributions the principle causal agents were seen to be ‘the other’ with the participants themselves seen much less as causal agents. Post FC there was a clear, sometimes symmetrical reversal in this ratio. This is described as ‘reversal’. This change is by far the most common change in perceptions of the main agent of causality. The first example of this in Table 7.8 is participant 2. The participant was Head of IT in a UK based firm. Some months before his FC he had decided that the best strategy for the development of the firm’s IT resource was to buy from a US based supplier, but this had no representation in the UK. He decided to go to the US to select the equipment. However, two things stopped him doing this.

Firstly, he was anxious that other people might suspect him of going to the US for a ‘jolly’. Secondly, the participant said that the COO was a dominant personality and he found it extremely difficult to persuade the COO to take his views into account. In the matter of the new IT equipment the COO had recommended a London based supplier. The participant took this suggestion but said in the FC briefing that he still felt it was the wrong decision.

In the analysis of the FC briefing the participant tended to attribute cause and effect to Agents other than himself, especially to the COO, and this is reflected in the pre FC attributions in Table 7.8. In the participant’s FC he played out the conversation with the COO, played by an actor, where he asked to go to the US to check on a supplier. Subsequently, in the post FC interview, the participant said that his FC had made him aware of how he tended to defer to others even when he felt that his opinion offered the best option. The participant said he was now much more assertive with his boss. He said he tended to prepare his arguments much more carefully before making suggestions and was surprised to discover that the COO and others now usually accept his suggestions. Again, this change is reflected in a greater number of attributions to himself as Agent for outcomes. Here is a clear case of reversal of the causative agent in the participant’s attributions.

Case 2 - In the pre FC attributions there is little to no difference between the percentage of attributions where the causal agent is either the participant or ‘the other’. In the post FC attributions there is a change in ratio where attributions with participant as Agent increase while attributions with difficult other as Agent decrease. The change is described as ‘separation’.

Participant 4 in Table 7.8 demonstrates this pattern. His work involved conducting exit interviews in redundancy programmes. He said he was often uncomfortable with this and did not know how to deal with emotion from those being made redundant. In his
pre-FC briefing he explained the impact on himself of the reactions of people he was ‘exiting’. The Agents of his attributions in the briefing were largely divided between his generalised, difficult others (those being made redundant) and himself.

In the post FC briefing he said that he had used his FC experience to develop a precise method for the redundancy interviews. He described a number of features of this method and its effectiveness both in managing the emotions of those being made redundant, and his level of comfort within his role. It was not that previously he lacked assertiveness. Rather it was because he had lacked control. In other examples of this attributional pattern participants talk as if there were a contest or ‘pull’ between themselves and their difficult others. In all cases the post-FC changes included behaving differently as a consequence of greater self-awareness.

Case 3 - There is little to no change between percentages pre and post FC either in the percentages or in the participant to ‘other’ ratios. This is described as ‘little change’.

This indicates that Forum Conversations had little impact for the individuals showing this pattern.

Returning to the text of the interviews, participant 5, for example, reveals a single-minded CEO who wanted to move a long-serving employee to a lower profile role. He said he had concerns about her reaction to the role move because she tended to cry when criticised. Post-FC he said that the necessary conversation had been successful and without tears. Other than this he said he now reflected more about himself as a leader and the impact he might have on others but ‘in the heat of the moment’ he was unlikely to do anything differently – hence little change in the dominant Agent in his attributions. Two others demonstrating this pattern confirmed this view that in everyday organisational life there tends to be little time to think about changing behaviour. At the same time these participants all talked about understanding themselves and others better and felt the FCs had been a valuable learning experience. Two of the participants enthused about their new confidence and skill from the FC without giving much concrete evidence of this in practice. Thus it seems these participants have a raised self-awareness from FCs but may not change their practice.

Case 4 – In the three observed instances of case 4 there is contrasting ratio change in the Agent of the attributions from pre to post FC comparison. However, there is a clear change in the proportion of attributions that have been made to Agents other than the participant or difficult other. This is described as an increase in ‘external factors’.

Referral to the text shows participants who have moved away from the difficulties presented in the FCs. Participant 1 had been very stressed and emotional in her FC
because of a negative relationship with her manager where she felt undermined when she approached him for new resource. The high number of pre FC attributions with her as Agent reflected her attempts to make changes and to influence her manager through other people. Post – FC she said that her FC had helped her to get a sense of perspective. She now focused on how she could enable her team to be effective within the strategic environment rather than push for specific changes with her manager. In other words she had moved away from confrontation with him. Consequently post FC there was a higher number of attributions to situation as Agent. This was also observed for the two other participants with this pattern of change. Both showed that they had moved away from confrontation by thinking more about the demands of the wider work environment.

Having established case categories the next phase of the analytical sequence in AI is to identify particular features of each case.

7.3.4 Bloor phase III - Identification of case features

Case 1 – Reversal - Most participants in Case 1 mention that in consequence of their FC they feel much more in control of dealings with others. They plan more for their meetings with others, seem more assertive and also have found ways to establish more open and more productive communication with their difficult others.

Case 2 – Separation – Pre-FC there is a somewhat confrontational stance amongst these participants with their difficult others. Post-FC participants indicate that they take more time to reflect and adapt their behaviour to others with consequent increases in the percentage of attributions with themselves as causal Agent.

Case 3 – Little change - Participants felt they had for the most part solved problems with difficult others or problems had disappeared simply because the difficult others had moved elsewhere. Participants seemed particularly interested in learning about what might be termed the psychology of communication and how that manifests in behaviour, but gave limited sense that they had effected much change despite this interest.

Case 4 – External factors - In this case it would appear that the pre-FC focus of the attributions within the interviews has shifted away post-FC from confrontation with the difficult other to the total situation in which participants find themselves.

7.3.5 Bloor phase IV - sensitizing concepts and theorisation

At this stage a search was made of the literature on attributions and conflict in order to find some sensitising concept that either described these four cases above or that might
be used to develop new constructs by refining the picture that was emerging from the analysis. The most obvious conflict model was that of Thomas (1992) in which approaches to conflict are defined by the relationship between a need to assert one’s position and the need to preserve relationships. In this study however, it would have meant re-analysing the data from the beginning and looking for participants’ actions rather than attributions. Since this aspect of the study is based on attributions as data it was decided to focus on attribution theory and particularly on attributional style theory.

Attributional style theory originated in research on clinical depression (Abramson et al, 1978; Seligman et al, 1979). It conceives that people who are depressive in style see failure as internal – i.e. their fault; as stable – i.e. will always tend to happen; and as global – i.e. they will fail at many things they attempt. Conversely, optimists see failure as external – something from their environment that is as yet outside of their control; as unstable – something that is an unusual event, and as specific – as something that happens in isolated events. In other words depressives and optimists have inverse attributional style for failure.

Applying this fundamental theoretical structure of attributional style – the interplay of Internality, Stability and Globality - to the four cases in this analytic induction meant applying a predictive theory, but AI is not about predicting events from established theory. Rather it is about developing new hypothesis and theory by applying sensitising concepts to inductively derived data (Johnson, 2004).

Attributional style theory predicts that optimists are likely to see unresolved and persistent difficulties with others (i.e. failure) as a consequence of external, unstable and specific factors and circumstances. Conversely, depressives might attribute unresolved and persistent difficulties with others to internal, stable, and global factors. In applying this distinction to the four cases of this study there is little way of knowing from the data who amongst the 24 participants in this study might demonstrate a particular attributional style, or indeed any attributional style at all, for according to Alloy and Tabachnik (1984) it may not be that everyone has a described attributional style - weak, strong or otherwise. Further, as Mangham (1986) points out, the sensitising concept is a guide rather than a prescription, thus conceptual categories of depressive and optimist need not be applied. Nevertheless, in applying the rationale of attributional style to the four cases of this AI the following speculations can be made:

**Case 1 - Attribution reversal** - Study of the text of the interviews indicates that many of this group see their issues as being attributable to their general lack of confidence when dealing with disputes and difficulties with others. This indicates internal, stable
and global attributions that in attributional style theory would point towards a depressive or disempowered attributional style. Because these participants do not act effectively it is more likely that external Agents determine what happens. Nevertheless, post FC there is a reversal of attributions with a far greater tendency for these participants to attribute to themselves causal agency for events and this is more characteristic of optimists.

If one thinks of the FC learning event to have strong situational impact and these participants to have weak (in the sense of not rooted) attributional style then according to Metalsky and Abramson (1981) it is likely that a strong learning situation dominates the weak attributional style. The change in the attributions seen in this case suggests that this might be one explanation for the observed changes. Indeed many of these participants say that FCs have increased their awareness about how little assertive they have been in communication with difficult others, but that since the FC they see themselves as generally more assertive in their dealings. In sum, a pattern of attributional reversal may be a consequence of FCs as a strong learning experience helping participants who feel disempowered in confrontation to become more assertive and enabled in style. With their combination of sensitive awareness to others (Tsoukas, 2008, p.162) and new sense of being empowered to advocate their own views (Isaacs, 2000) this group is described here as ‘Dialogist’.

**Case 2 – Separation** – Pre-FC we see a roughly equal percentage of attributions with participant and difficult other as Agent. The post-FC percentage of participant as Agent increases and the percentage of difficult other as Agent decreases. From the text, participants’ attributional style might be assumed to be ‘External’ because whilst they appear to have confidence they have tended not to act to make changes in their relations with difficult others, instead letting things ride. Their attributions are ‘Stable’ because they tend to have fixed, even intransigent views about the difficult other and ‘Global’ because their total assessment of the other person ‘explains’ their behaviour in a number of different contexts. In all cases there seems to be a sense of disengagement from the difficult other and a sense of disregard for them.

Post FC one of the participants with this attributional pattern said she now thought more about the impact of her own behaviour and had noticed improvements in her communication with the difficult other. Another participant said he was now being more ‘technical’ in how he monitored his own behaviour, particularly in taking more time and controlling his body language. The remaining three participants seemed to have radically altered their communication behaviour and were now applying a range of behavioural ‘tools’ in their dealings with others. One participant had evolved his own
detailed system of communication. Another was deliberately applying the principle of sharing to every communication exchange. Thus for the most part this group seemed to be applying discrete tools and systems as the agency for improvements in their communication. Arguably this approach is consistent with an External, Stable and Global attributional style in that they apply external means – tools and systems – in all their communication. This pattern of behaviour is described here as **Instrumentalist**

**Case 3 – Little change** – In this case, attributions remained much the same in scale and ratio pre and post FC. Examination of the text of the interviews indicates individuals who see solutions to their problems with difficult others as being about understanding their own and the ‘other’s’ state of mind. Pre-FC they talk about wanting to understand why the other behaves as they do in order to fix the perceived problem and create a less emotive working relationship. They find that a ‘logical’ approach does not achieve this. Attributional style in this case indicates Internal, Specific, and Stable. This is because there is a sense of internal control of behaviour where participants’ expectation of understanding how others are, which is a stable state, means that specific behaviours will yield specific results.

Post-FC these participants seem to be interested in the theoretical aspect of learning about themselves and others and acknowledge that FCs has improved their awareness of self and their own behaviour. Two participants continue to think about their individual learning on a theoretical basis but seem not to have made any links to their practice. The other two participants talk about how they manage their behaviour on the basis of their understanding of the other person but produce little evidence of concrete change. Thus in sum, the participants’ understanding may have improved but this improvement seems to be weakly linked to their agency. This case is described as **Theorist**

**Case 4 - External Factors** – in this case we see a small number of participants who attribute agency to themselves both pre and post FC but who give fewer attributions to themselves or ‘the other’ as causal agent post FC. Post-FC, participants give much more attention to environmental factors that impact their working relationships. In this case it seems that the difficult issue participants faced was specific and unstable and their sense of difficulty arose partly from their frustration at not being able to solve the problem. This is often the case for people with an optimistic, internal attributional style who feel they should be able to control events. In this case the problem did not arise from them but was an external attribution. Post-FC participants had moved away from the specific and unstable presented problem and now indicated many more situational causal agents.

In AI sensitising concepts are used in conjunction with inductive evidence. It is
speculated that for these three participants the difficulty they experienced pre FC was specific, unstable and external in origin. Post FC they were enabled to move from the local problem of the difficult other to thinking more globally about their workplace situations and the total picture of influences upon it. This might be characterised as strategic thinking. This is not to say that FCs caused strategic thinking. Rather it is suggested that FCs enabled thinking to move from the specific to the global wherein the local difficulties of their problem with the difficult other diminished in importance against the total impacting environment. These participants are described as ‘strategist’.

7.3.5.1 Overview of the cases

FCs seem to have considerable impact on participants’ behaviour back in the workplace but not for everyone and not always in the same way. It may be that this simply reflects different learning styles – Activist, Theorist, Pragmatist, Reflector (Kolb, 1984). But it may also reflect that the power of the method has differential traction, contingent both on the particular scenarios brought by participants and the importance of their scenarios to them, as well as on the strength of their individual attributional styles. As Metalsky and Abrahams (1981) suggest, where a style is not well rooted, or ‘weak’, a strong learning intervention may affect a change in attributional style with consequent impact on relations with others. Conversely, where there is a rooted or strong style, a learning event like FCs may not affect any change. In this case individuals may feel that their views are merely reinforced by the learning event or they may note the learning but not change their style or behaviour.

In the four, separate cases that have been distinguished here half of the participants, the dialogists, show a change in their relations with others at work and at home. There is a sense that they themselves have changed. The remaining participants show little change in their personal relations. Some, the strategists, moved away from the local difficulty they had presented in their scenarios but this did not indicate a change in their relations. Others, the theorists, had changed little, though they reflected on their learning. And the fourth group, the instrumentalists, had taken some kind of agency from their FC experience in order to improve their management of others in the pursuit of their goals. Thus it might be that FCs have most impact on people with weak or unfixed attributional style, whilst those with stronger style are more likely to take learning from FCs to reinforce their approach.
7.3.5.2 Summary of cases

The four separate cases that have been discerned as distinct patterns of change in the causal agents of attributions made pre and post FC have been analysed in terms of attributional style. AI is seen as a means of developing theory from inductively derived data. In this case attributional style has been used in conjunction with the data to develop potential insights into different people’s responses to their FCs. Four different responses have been postulated:

1) **Dialogists** who more actively deal with their difficult others in their communication.

2) **Instrumentalists** who seek ‘tools’ to be more effective in their communication.

3) **Theorists** who are interested in learning about themselves and others in communication but who seem not to apply this learning in practice, being content to think rather than do. This indicates that they find their normal practice sufficient to their needs.

4) **Strategists** who move from the local disturbance of difficult conversations to a more strategic overview of the total environmental impact on their communication situation.

7.3.5.3 Limitations

This AI exercise has attempted to explain that every participant’s pattern of attributional change either side of FCs seems to reflect an aspect of attributional style. It has been assumed that ‘style’ can be applied to the changes seen. Other assumptions are that:

- Attributions extracted from the text are valid attributions
- It is valid to compare attributions extracted from pre and post FC interviews
- FCs have been instrumental in some way for the observed changes
- Observed changes define the total possible responses.

There is perhaps a case for arguing that the difficulties participants experienced were mostly about the way they handled dispute based on limited skills rather than on a tendency to respond in a certain style. Despite these doubts and assumptions it has been shown here that more work can be done on elucidating the complexity of the components of attributional style and it has further been shown how these may be differentially manifested according to situational impact.

Theory building from this emergent pattern needs to include tests for predictive and explanatory power and this is not feasible at this stage of the thesis but requires longer-term depth research. Nevertheless, this starting point shows opportunity for significant
contribution to knowledge of attributions and attributional style and demonstrates a further aspect of the impact of Forum Conversations on participants’ ability to deal with difficult relationships at work.

Fundamental changes may arise in consequence of the experience of FC. As one participant put it:

“I am trying to improve the quality of my communication not only in a job situation but in the family situation as well. I mean control of negative emotions. And to give some positive emotions or just calm down instead. I can say that my family feels better. I can feel it. My wife looks differently at me. My children look differently at me as well. Because of course they feel my emotions when I can give more positive emotions and when I give my negative emotions – the overall relationships are better.”

7.4 Summary of study two

To summarise, Study 2 constitutes an attributional study of 24 participants who participated in Forum Conversations. Attributions they made about their experience with ‘a difficult other’ were extracted from interviews made before and after Forum Conversations. These attributions were analysed in two different ways in order to find out:

1) Whether after FCs participants had changed their attributions about themselves and their difficult communication situations

2) Whether any changes in attribution happened in a consistent way. Out of this came an analytic induction of attributional style differences and how these manifested in behaviour

3) Whether after FCs participants bring a wider perspective to bear on their difficult communication situations

It was found in Part one that by comparing attributions made before and after FCs participants tended to have an improved sense of confidence and control when dealing with difficult communications at work. This is consistent with attribution theory on locus and controllability (Weiner, 1985). This part of the attributional study gives insight into the main research question about the impact of FCs and demonstrates a significant impact on change of behaviour as well as confidence.

Different people found different ways of expressing and practicing what they had learned from FCs and in part two the analytic induction exercise indicated some patterns
in how people explained changes in the way they did things post FC. There appeared to be four discrete patterns, which were highlighted by viewing them in terms of attributional style. This showed a general move to a more positive style. This study contributes to a response to the research question about why FCs have impact. It seems that post-FCs participants respond in different ways either becoming more assertive, applying new skills and techniques, being enabled to move away from local difficulties or simply reflecting on their learning. In some degree this reflects individual learning styles. FCs enable people with different learning and attributional styles to look at and interact directly with their presented difficult communication issues. It seems that participants are able to apply their learning in ways that match their own style.

In the next chapter a third study of FCs looks at the perspective of the actors in the process. This is in order to look further at the nature of the interaction between actors and participants such that the FCs method seems relevant to people with widely different attributional styles. The next study returns to a thematic analysis of the data gained from interviews.
CHAPTER 8: STUDY 3. A TEMPLATE ANALYSIS OF ACTORS’ EXPERIENCE OF FORUM CONVERSATIONS

8.1 Introduction

Actors’ experience of Forum Conversations (FCs) was investigated as a separate study within this thesis for a number of reasons. Firstly, I am an actor and I wanted to compare my experience of FCs with other professional actors. Secondly, the actor’s ‘voice’ is barely heard in the literature on TIO. Although dramaturgical and dramatistic language and analysis fills the literature on TIO little access, other than a study by Rae (2011 and 2013), has been made to those whose working environments are literally dramaturgical and perhaps for whom the assertion ‘life is theatre’ (Clark, 2008) is particularly apt. Thirdly, actors who act in FCs might provide insight into its nature and impact. Finally, actors are also participants in FCs and it is deemed necessary to understand both organisational and professional actors’ experience of that participation.

Brief reflexivity notes are inserted in the discussion to reflect on my reactions to what the actors say in the interviews.

8.2 Method

Methodological issues about development of interview questions and template are dealt with in Chapter 5. Details peculiar to the participants in this study and to the nature of the interviews with them are given below.

8.2.1. The actors/interviewees

There were ten interviewees in total. Of the ten, I knew eight from my own professional network. Two others volunteered to be interviewed after I contacted a role-playing company to ask for volunteers who were experienced in FCs.

I had been in professional partnership with two of the eight people I knew and was on friendly terms with the other six. I had seen only two of the ten actually working with participant clients in FC. I was confident that this sample of experts would throw light on the FC process. At the same time I recognise that these were potentially like-minded experts and that my friendly relations with them were partly about similar background, attitudes and approaches to the work. I reflected that the views of the two individuals I did not know might represent a useful check against the views of the others.
The ten interviewees included five women and five men. Their ages ranged from mid-thirties to mid-fifties. Four of the interviewees had begun their working lives outside of professional theatre, becoming actors after several years of other work. One had been a lawyer, one a commercial director, another a retail manager and another a business consultant. The other six interviewees had all begun their working careers as professional actors and had taken up organisational theatre as part of their income generation. At the time of the interviews all but two of the interviewees sought conventional theatre work alongside their organisational theatre practice. Their real names are not used in the extracts included here.

8.2.2 The interviews

Most interviews were conducted over the telephone and two were conducted face to face. While each of the ten interviews had a different ‘feel’ this seemed more about the personalities of the respondents than about the interviewing medium. For example, some interviewees gave extended answers even to closed questions, whilst others gave short sentence answers. All recordings were made via the audio recording system of a Mac computer.

The longest interview was 1½ hours and the shortest interview was ¾ hour. The average interview time was 1 hr and 5 minutes. The two interviews with people I did not know were the shortest interviews. It is difficult say whether this was because I was more relaxed as an interviewer with people I knew or conversely these interviewees were more relaxed with me.

The interviews were semi-structured (see chapter 5) and a question guide was drawn up beforehand. This is shown in Appendix 8.1. Questions and probes were drawn from my own practical experience and from a review of the literature. Examples of the linkage between questions and literature are shown in a Table 5.2 in Chapter 5.

I found no difficulties interviewing the actors and this might be expected from our shared background. However, occasionally some interviewees were hesitant. Two interviewees wondered if they were being helpful enough with their answers. One or two interviewees questioned whether what they did in FCs could be analysed rationally without losing the sense of its essence. One person dominated the interview somewhat, possibly to emphasise their credentials as an expert. Nevertheless, most interviewees readily gave expansive answers to questions. I personally transcribed all interviews.
8.2.3 Template analysis

The development of the template for Study 3 is detailed in the methodology Chapter 5. The final template is shown in Table 8.1. Findings are an interpretation of actors’ responses and perceptions organised under the main headings of this template.

Table 8.1 Final Thematic Template of Study 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>1st level themes</th>
<th>2nd level themes</th>
<th>3rd level thematic contrasts</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rehearsals</td>
<td>1. Diagnosis</td>
<td>1. ‘Tuning-in’</td>
<td>1. Authenticity of acting</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Making it real</td>
<td>2. Heuristics</td>
<td>2. 3rd eye detachment</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2. Effort- hard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>1. Intuitive Expert</td>
<td>1. It just happens</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Extensive skill requirement</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Corporate theatre = being</td>
<td>2. Power imbalance</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. ‘Improvisation’</td>
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<td>4. Script</td>
<td>1. Client led</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Actor led</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Direction</td>
<td>1. Safe environment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Challenge</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Rehearsal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aims</td>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>1. Sense of Service</td>
<td>1. Fixing problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agenda</td>
<td>2. Fixing (what isn’t working)</td>
<td>2. Little clue about outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Solutions</td>
<td>1.Behavioural solutions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>2. Subjective assessments</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>1. As character</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. As Self</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
8.3 Findings of study 3

8.3.1 Introduction
Merriam (1998, p. 48) states, “our analysis and interpretation – our study’s findings – will reflect the constructs, concepts, language, models, and theories that structured the study in the first place”. In view of this the findings are expressed dramaturgically. The findings are discussed in four sections, which are taken from the final first order themes of the template. Sub-sections within each of these four sections follow the second order themes. The intention is to present the findings as advised by King (2004, p.268) as “an account structured around the main themes identified, drawing illustrative examples from each transcript as required”. Conclusions reflect the contribution that findings from Study 3 make to answers for the main research questions of the total study.

8.3.2 Rehearsals
The declared aim in Forum Conversations is to prepare participants for an actual conversation with their difficult other. Thus there is a strong element of rehearsal to the process. The first order theme ‘Rehearsals’ contains themes of inquiry into how actors determine what the participants might need (coded as Diagnosis), how Actors turn this inquiry into realistic enactment of the problem (coded as Making it real) and the dynamics of performance.

8.3.2.1 Diagnosis
This looks at how the actors assess the needs of the participants

8.3.2.1.1 Tuning In
Nearly all of the actors gave the impression that they ‘tuned in’ to the participants from early in the process. This suggests that they start to make subjective judgements about personality and behaviour from first impressions. None of the actors could clearly describe what they were doing when ‘tuning in’ but Deborah described it as ‘psychological’ and Christopher as an ‘intuitive feel’. Others said that they had improved in this over time. A key feature of the responses is that even very experienced actors work from ‘feel’ without being able to describe what they mean by this and some doubted that ‘feel’ could be analysed without diminishing it in some way.
8.3.2.1.2 Heuristics

Several of the actors were clear that at the early stages they worked from stock characters and behaviours that they developed as the conversations progressed.

"More often than not I will think of someone I know that is similar to the character in real life" (Linda)

This indicates that the tuning-in process is not only about intuition but also about heuristics and biases of perception. It is unclear as to the extent actors are working from intuition or stereotypes and so there remains ambiguity about how they make early assessments of participants.

8.3.2.2 Making it real

There is a strong commitment from all the actors to making the experience of the acted Forum Conversation as realistic and authentic as possible. That is to say, that their portrayal of the difficult other should be as close as possible to the actual experience participants might expect in their normal working relations. The actors often receive feedback from participants that their portrayal of the difficult other was very like the actual person:

"At the end they say, 'you see, this is exactly what this person is like’” (Susan)

"Often as not you’ll get feedback, ‘Oh God, that was exactly like them’” (Linda)

This feature of the work seems exceptional given that actors claim to take no more than 5 to 10 minutes of briefing from participants about their difficult others, and may be asked to play different gender, age and ethnicity. When questioned as to how this ‘reality’ could be achieved actors responded with comments of the nature, ‘it just happens’.

When probed further about how they created this perceived reality the actors talked about a number of sources of inspiration and ‘feel’:

"I just feel that I am happy where I am going with this conversation. I know what I need to do, but I have no idea what is going to happen. I suddenly feel happy. ‘Ah, yes, I have got it. I’ve seen the key to this.’” (Alastair)

"When you are seeing this television picture of the person you are playing then you are ready to go” (Susan)
While some actors need to ‘fill up’ with the character during the briefing, others merely work from a single behavioural trait that a difficult other has been described as having. This means that they can ‘in an instant’ (Rachel) begin to role-play. Once the actors are interacting with participants it seems participants’ responses enable the actor to develop their specific character and behaviour further. For example:

“Theyir responses are key to how you then progress with the character. Because whether they are aware of it or not, they are probably exhibiting their own learned responses. If this person (the difficult other) frightens them they are going to come in with a certain level of prepared response whether they are aware of it or not” (Elizabeth)

However, the actors’ immediacy of action might stem from previous experience of similar situations. Christopher pointed out that various common themes are presented in the difficult workplace relations that participants bring into FCs. Yet he also felt that every situation is unique and that it is important not to cloud the interaction with something from a previous situation.

This sense of uniqueness was amplified by Susan saying that it ought to be possible to do FCs without any initial briefing at all, purely responding to the participant’s behaviour.

Whilst most of the actors felt that things ‘just happened’ in the Forum Conversation, on further probing they reflected on the complexity of their task:

“You’re on a journey of discovery. You’re finding out about them as the conversation plays out. You’re hearing...it’s a funny thing, but you’re hearing...you’re hearing for the first time what this person says and does. And so you’re starting to....you’re an observer, although you’re kind of observing...but are you? Are you observing yourself or are you observing this person who isn’t you, who’s been described to you...you’re just, you know, kind of giving a body to (the character), but actually it’s a person” (Alastair)

Christopher described what he called a ‘third eye’ that gives him an objective overview of the process even as he is performing the character of the difficult other. Consequently he felt sure that the emotions being experienced in the process were not his but the character’s. Rachel thought of the third eye as her own voice at the back of her head ‘almost telling her what to do next’. Each of the actors added their own representation of this detached, objective presence. They talked of ‘the watcher’, ‘the witness’, ‘the little facilitator in the head’, ‘the controller of ‘in the moment’, or simply ‘themselves’ as
distinct from the character they are playing. Alastair explained that this detached perspective happens as a matter of course in theatre or in front of the camera because there are technical aspects that have to be controlled even as the character is playing (“Have I arrived at the right position for the camera shot?” “have I remembered my prop?” and so on). Nevertheless, the complexity seems greater in Forum Conversations because there are multiple levels of observation and control. The following list drawn from actors’ comments attempts to capture this multiplicity:

- The actor critically observes his or her own attempt to create the character. The actor watches and listens for a range of verbal and non-verbal cues from the participant during the conversation and the actor uses these to develop the character yet further.
- The actor observes the participant in their role as a facilitator or trainer, remembering aspects of the participant’s language, behaviour and tone as accurately as possible so that these can be fed back to the participant later.
- The actor observes him or herself in the role of the character and modifies the character’s behaviour as distinct to how the actor might respond as himself or herself.
- The participant may want to achieve a particular objective in the conversation and the actor watches to see if and how the participant goes about this.
- The actor watches for any discomfort the participant might have from the challenge they are experiencing in the conversation. If so, the actor moderates the extent of the challenge.

Thus there are multiple seen and unseen operations performed by the actor during the FC. Different actors are able to juggle all or only a few of these tasks synchronously and several of the interviewees, accustomed as they were to both acting and facilitating, confessed that they preferred it when another person facilitated the event so that they could concentrate on the acting and interplay between character and participant.

The interviewees also felt a ‘duty of care’ in their interactions. That is to say, they were ‘watching out for’ the participant from within the performance of the character. This was both in terms of maximising the learning experience as well as moderating the playing to account for any sensitivity if the participant was challenged too strongly. For example, a participant might experience strong catharsis within the conversation or strongly reject the process. ‘Rachel’ told of one participant who attempted to reject the conversation by stepping out of the role-play and declaring that Rachel, as an actor, was after all a professional liar and therefore not to be taken seriously (note earlier comments about ‘hypokrites’). Rachel said she remained in character and pretended
that this accusation had been made to her as a character rather than as an actor, easing
the participant back into the role-play.

Ethically important as this ‘duty of care’ may be, it means the actor is not fully taken up
with the portrayal of the character but is also mindful of modulations and moderations
that make it a learning event. Further, as both Christopher and Rachel point out, they
feel constrained to stay in the conversation by virtue of the developmental context.
They might feel that ‘authentically’ the character would stop the conversation, but the
actor is obliged to sustain it. Consequently, for all that the actors claim that the
character portrayal is as authentic and true a reproduction of experience as possible,
this comes with some qualification because of the controls they are operating outside of
the characterisation. Thus there is some ambiguity around what authenticity means in
this context.

8.3.2.3 Performance dynamics: Flow and effort

Despite the multiple levels of observation that are taking place within the actors and the
intensity of concentration that is required in playing up to six different difficult others in
the course of one session of Forum Conversations, several of the actors say that the
experience is easy. Susan told how she did a session of Forum Conversations only three
weeks after having a baby. She said that struggling across London and sitting waiting to
run the session she felt like a zombie. But this changed as soon as she began the
session:

“I went into a room to do the session and it was locking into a tunnel and I just
locked on and did the job and I think it went really well. And it was just like a
complete bubble, tunnel vision; complete concentration on them. And then at the
end I walked out of the room and I felt completely exhausted” (Susan)

It is likely that Susan experienced the psychological characteristics of Flow
(Csikzentmihalyi, 1997). Throughout the interviews actors talked about excitement,
challenge, enjoyment and total immersion in the experience. They also talked about the
process ‘just happening’ and of being entirely ‘in the moment’, which are Flow
characteristics. For some actors it was only in reflecting on the process during the
interviews that they became aware of the many levels of their cognitive activity in
Forum Conversations, even though their perception is that ‘it just happens’.

Another common Flow characteristic is tiredness once the in-flow activity has ceased.
The actors talk about the intensity and effort required of them in the process even
though at the time this is ‘not difficult’. But this process effort can also be compounded
by the effort entailed in the facilitation of the group and the facilitation of learning. This may be further entangled by the relationship with another facilitator if there is one, particularly when this person has little experience of actors and the Forum Conversation process. There can sometimes be a wrestling for power between actor and facilitator, which makes some actors feel that the effectiveness of their work might be compromised. It is difficult to ascertain whether this tension has any impact on the participants. Whatever the case, Flow effects seem to attend the acting process rather than the facilitation process.

This overlap between acting and facilitating is a further ambiguity in the rehearsal process and some of the actors are relieved when the functions are separated. Paul is one of the more experienced actors with a background in the Law and with a coaching qualification. Yet he explained what happened when he was asked by a trainer to concentrate only on the acting process in Forum Conversations and to give feedback to the participant on the impact of their behaviour rather than facilitate learning:

"I was given some feedback by a trainer about a year ago saying, "I want you to steer away from the coaching bit and just make it really simple – ‘when you did this, I felt that’, which I felt really narked about. But actually it became really powerful. And it took away the pressure to come up with answers” (Paul)

8.3.2.4 Conclusions about Forum Conversations as rehearsal

This section has posed contrasting interpretations of a number of aspects of the Forum Conversations experience of actors as they initiate rehearsals with participants and interact with them. The experience includes: the basis on which they decide how to play their characters (Tuning-in); how they play their characters (Authenticity); and what is going on for them throughout the process (Flow). By contrasting seeming contradictions or ambiguities in relation to each of these aspects it is possible to construct a fuller picture of how the actors work in process.

Firstly, the actors seem to rely on subjective impressions of the needs of the participants. Some actors ‘tune-in’ to the participants’ attitude, others are cued by participants’ behaviour and yet others refer to their repertoire of experience of people who seem similar to the participants and their difficult others. The magical thinking of ‘it just happens’ is contrasted with a heuristic decision-making process that refers back to stock characters. Yet it seems that this is merely an initial step so as to get quickly into the Forum Conversation. Once in progress actors refine their initial impressions by focusing intently on the responses of the participants.
Secondly, the actors attempt to create a realistic simulation of participants’ difficult others so that the conversation can be as ‘authentic’ as possible for the participants. However, the operating process of the actors consists of a number of controls of the action that, although focused on care and learning for the participants, mitigates against the authenticity of the experience in the sense of a genuine encounter with a difficult other who is unlikely to ‘pull punches’. Nevertheless, it seems that many of the participants comment on how close the conversations have been to the actuality of their experience of their difficult others.

Thirdly, the actors appear to go into a Flow state when engaging with participants. In this state they find the complexity of the engagement ‘easy’. However, they also talk of how tiring the process can be and although this is commonly seen after Flow activities it would appear that additional difficulties are more to do with the facilitation than with the acting out of the characters in the conversations. Several interviewees said they preferred an independent facilitator of the event.

8.3.2.5 Reflexivity note

I understand the interviews with the actors to be interpretive conversation as much as interview (Fontana and Frey, 2005). Much of what the actors said was familiar to me. Reflecting on my own practice I can see how I initially adopt a position towards the ‘difficult other’ I am about to play based on an embodied memory of other encounters with similar dynamics to those described by the participant. As the conversation begins I too ‘feel’ the character develop in precise response to the participant’s behaviour and attitude. I was however, surprised by the actors’ dedication to service, by how some of them decided what the participants ‘needed’ from first impressions and also by how confidently they seemed to undertake the work with almost no qualified training and development background. It also seemed strange that they had thought so little about what they were actually doing during the process of character building and enacting of the difficult others – ‘it just happens’ and is ‘easy’.

8.3.3 Dialogue

8.3.3.1 Intuitive expert

Actors seem to plunge into the work with individual participants with little information yet trust that the right things will happen. Their confidence in themselves in this work is clear. Alastair said it is merely a question of ‘letting go’. Deborah adds:
“When you have them in front of you, you have a sense of what you can do as a role-player and what level you can play at, what challenge you can offer them, what their needs are. And that is just instinct”. (Deborah)

She says there is little need for background information and preparation because all that is required is ‘in the room’. By this she means both the participants’ stories of their predicaments and also the way the participants themselves come over to others – that is, how they come over to Deborah. Paul adds:

“You actually need very little (information). I find I need a clear sense from them of how this person makes them feel.....It’s a quite gut level, emotional thing” (Paul)

This resonates with what Susan said about it being possible to do a Forum Conversation without any briefing at all, simply by responding in the moment to the participants.

This mix of expertise and instinct in management has been termed ‘the intuitive expert’ (Sadler-Smith and Shefy, 2004). The impression that the actors work predominantly through instinct is at odds with replies to questions about the skills that are required to do this work. The actors describe over twenty specific skills. They claim that not every professional actor can do this work though they say a full gamut of actors’ skills are required for it, along with speed of thought, listening skills, analytical skills and objectivity and so on. Indeed, listening and sensing skills were highlighted as a key feature both of tuning-in and in the playing itself:

"In terms of levels of listening and listening for stuff about the character I am going to play, I am also listening to the participant to hear what sort of person they are – what they think; what sort of issues they might have” (Susan)

"You have got to listen all the way through. Not just to the initial information you are given about what the issue is. You’ve got to listen to what they are saying while you are performing and watch what is being given back to you and behave and respond accordingly.’ (Rachel)

This last sentence gives some hint of why the thematic line under discussion is coded here as Dialogue. Many of the skills and operational dynamics that the actors refer to might be included on a list of communication skills necessary to create the conditions for dialogue. Listening, being present in the moment, suspending one’s own opinion, respecting what the other has to say, are all advocated by Isaacs as conducive to dialogue (Isaacs, 2000). Nevertheless, while the actors acknowledge the high level of skills required for the work, they claim much of what happens is instinctive. The next
part of the discussion on co-construction seeks to give some insight into why they might feel this.

8.3.3.2 Co-construction

‘Paul’ summarises the whole experience of forming an initial character and then developing it within the Forum Conversation as:

"I think it probably starts off as sort of one note and then more notes get added to it. The ones (conversations) that work really well are those where both them and I are responding off each other and although primarily I am responding out of that first note you are aware of more of the music, more of the score coming out.” (Paul)

The ‘first note’ is what might be regarded as the proto-character that the actor has decided upon after the initial briefing. Thereafter in the Forum Conversation, the interaction with the character develops into a whole musical score. Many of the actors recognise this developmental process where the character comes to life as a result of the interchange of responses between the character and the participant. Indeed, the character ‘becomes’ largely because of how the participant is responding. Thus the character can be said to be co-constructed in the conversation between the two players. Yet the actor has no agenda other than to follow the simple line of the difficulty described in the participant’s initial briefing. If the difficult other has been described as aggressive, the actor will respond with aggression to what the participant is saying. This in turn leads to further specific responses from the participant.

"Obviously their responses are key to how you then progress with the character. Its almost having that initial exchange and you realise, yes, I am on the right track here, and then you can refine it and refine it and add frills to it so that you know you are giving them something that is the shape and tone of their bête noir”. (Elizabeth)

Similarly, for Christopher the character only starts to form when the conversation begins:

"The way they are treating you, what it is doing to you, the things they are saying – all this begins to put little edges round the character...it begins to give me a sense as to where this might be going. It then distils an emotional state in me” (Christopher)

Thus the co-construction involves building both behaviour and feelings in the character.
There are at least two levels of construction that have occurred in the process. Firstly, in the briefing, the participant passes on to the actor his or her own interpretation of how the difficult other ‘is’. Secondly, the character emerges more fully as an embodied co-construction from the interaction itself. Thus the participant essentially scripts the ‘character’. The participant and actor are negotiating each moment of the exchange where the one informs the behaviour of the other. One can see here something of Bakhtin’s triad of self - the ‘I’, the ‘other’, and the ‘I for the other’ (Bender, 1998, p.189) and also of ‘Bakhtin’s concept of transgredience – the co-production of identity within the unique moment of exchange, where the other plays back to the self.

8.3.3.3 Conclusions to Forum Conversations as dialogue

The actors in Forum Conversations operate as a means of realising embodied encounters between participants and their difficult others. They do this rapidly, working from ‘gut feel’ and instinct combined with a broad set of interpersonal skills that may have been honed through their work and training in conventional theatre. It might be said that they are unconsciously competent and that much of what they do comes from tacit knowledge (Polanyi and Prosch, 1975). They are adept at responding ‘in the moment’ to new information and are able to construct and synchronise the development of their characters entirely from responses from the participants with whom they are interacting. Actors are intently focused on participants’ responses during the interaction and take the character’s ‘being’ from those responses. This seems akin to processes of dialogic interaction described by Bakhtin where the ‘Self’ is both ‘I’ and ‘I for other’.

This way of working seems neither about acting nor about training and yet entails aspects of both. Consequently there seems some indeterminacy about the role that actors play within organisational training along with the question about what this way of working achieves in the training context. This question will be considered in the following sections of the chapter.

8.3.4 Theatre

8.3.4.1 Nature of acting

This section is not about the fundamental nature of acting but about the differences that actors interviewed in this study describe between acting in conventional theatre and acting in organisational theatre methods like Forum Conversations. These differences will be examined only in so far as they help to yield answers to the main research questions of this study.

The main distinctions expressed by the actors are shown in Table 8.2:
These differences are perhaps too sharply distinguished in that many conventional actors might regard their acting as ‘being real’ rather than performance, as well as ego free and often improvised. Nevertheless, the essential difference in organisational theatre seems to be the privileging of the audience over the performer. More than this, it is to enable the audience to take action. This distinction has a big impact on the actor’s way of working. The actor in Forum Conversations enters the audience’s organisational world, adopts its language and uses its own scripts in order to help it tell its own stories. This is done so as to help organisational audiences to learn rather than be merely entertained.

Table 8.2 Differences between conventional and organisational theatre as described by organisational theatre actors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conventional theatre acting</th>
<th>Acting in Forum Conversations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Being real</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ego</td>
<td>Ego free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows exaggeration</td>
<td>Requires naturalistic style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Entertainment</td>
<td>For Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows imagined world</td>
<td>Must be real world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any vernacular</td>
<td>Business vernacular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scripted</td>
<td>Improvised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre-led agenda</td>
<td>Client-led agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehearsed</td>
<td>Spontaneous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience hears a story told by actor</td>
<td>Actor tells audience’s story</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following extract gives a flavour of this difference:

"For me it (conventional theatre) was all about giving a performance…it was very much ‘giving out’. I certainly felt it was a lot about ‘Am I good on stage? Am I being the best actor I can be on stage?…With Forum Conversations it is different because you are still doing a performance and you have got to entertain as well as inform, but it is completely opposite, it is not about ‘you’ performing at all. It is kind of the opposite. The light if you like, the lens is completely turned round. So rather than the light being on you as an actor on the stage, the lights and the focus are completely on your audience, the participants” (David)

Another distinction made between conventional theatre and FCs acting was that in FCs actors act with non-actors. Many of the actors point out to the participants that they should be ‘themselves’ in the FC rather than attempt to act and that it is the actor’s job to do the acting. ‘Being themselves’ might seem a difficult task in that the participants are playing out conversations with someone pretending to be an actual difficult other but who might be of different gender and very different appearance. Also this
conversation takes place in front of a small audience of the participant’s peers, which is possibly not conducive to being ‘oneself’. Nevertheless, as noted in Study 1, the participants seem quickly to forget about these constraints on behaving as themselves, becoming caught up in what might be characterised as a Flow state co-construction.

There is a question about whether there is an equivalent to the role of the director in conventional theatre. ‘Paul’ talks of writing the ‘musical score of the interaction together with the participant and throughout the interviews the actors stress that the agenda is participant-led.

"It is purely and simply about listening to the other person, getting their take on it, and responding very much to them” (Paul)

"It’s not about you. It’s about the person you are working with, very strongly” (Deborah)

Posner (2008) notes in his study of a theatre director taking rehearsals of a large-scale stage play that her direction seems to be a democratic and collaborative process, yet it is also clear that hers is the final word. FCs are also intended to be collaborative. Suggestions are made by all participants as to how any one individual might change his or her behaviour to improve communication with their actual difficult other. On the surface, no one other than the individual participant, whose script it is, has the last word about how proceed. Thus apart from the matter of facilitation of the workshop there would appear to be no directorial role.

However, in the context of the FCs session it seems there might be a power difference between the actor and the participants. Only the participants receive feedback on their ‘performances’ and none is given to the actors. The actor can behave as he or she thinks fit within the parameters of the developing character but the participant is under observation to be critiqued. Indeed some actors see the participants as needing to be, as it were, mended:

“There’s nothing worse than doing a Forum Conversation where you haven’t got a person to where they should be” (Rachel)

“When I start a session it becomes very apparent what that person might need” (Elizabeth)

Thus the accent is upon improving the participants’ performances within these rehearsals. Directional notes are given to the participants under the guise of feedback from the perspective of the ‘difficult other’ played by the actor. In this sense the
participants are like performers being prepared for a show and the directorial eye is that of the actor, however much this is positioned as collaborative.

8.3.4.2 Rehearsal

Just as in rehearsals in conventional theatre FCs are presented as an opportunity to try things out in order to find the right performance. Most of the actors interviewed see replays of the conversations, or part of them, as crucial for participants to concretise learning (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005). But at least two of the actors say they do not undertake replays saying that the necessary content for learning comes from the initial playing out. In general the rehearsal would appear to consist of one conversation per participant, followed by feedback from all participants in the session and finally a replay of parts of the conversation. The onus is therefore on each participant to be as much like 'himself or herself' as possible in the first run of the conversation so as to provide watchers with material for feedback.

To this end, actors say they are accustomed to building good levels of rapport from the outset in order to help people to engage fully and openly with the process. Actors also stress the safety of the process and environment:

"I take them all seriously and I go through exactly the same process. If they require some encouragement because they are afraid, I try to build that into the process so they feel in a safe environment“ (Christopher)

"They are safe because they know they are in the presence of someone who is absolutely professional, and that I will do my best to get them through any difficulty” (Elizabeth)

Thus the actors tend to take responsibility for ensuring a safe environment. However, they also see themselves as having to provide challenge to the participants in order to enhance learning:

"You obviously don’t want to reduce this person to rubble so they never walk or speak again. But it’s giving them enough to actually play with and kick against” (Elizabeth)

The actors have to develop a sense of trust and safety combined with delivering challenging interaction. This has to be achieved in very short time scales.

"It is key to try and get the character as right as possible. The minute they see you investing so much in it and trying to get it as right as possible and therefore
really understanding what the person (participant) is giving them, the minute they see and feel all that, they are going to buy in (to the process)” (Linda)

This again emphasises a central feature of the work, which is of creating an accurate representation of the actual difficult other.

8.3.4.3 Conclusions about Forum Conversations as theatre

The differences that actors perceive between acting in conventional theatre and Forum Conversations indicate that the focus is on helping participants to learn rather than be entertained. To achieve this there is a seeming inversion between performer and audience where the audience members determine the plot of the story that is to be told and perform their own scripts, and the actors merely provide the interaction for this to happen. Although this is positioned as an equal, collaborative process motivated by the learning requirement, the participants are arguably being critiqued as performers and the actors tend to give directional notes as feedback. In this sense the process reverts to something more akin to rehearsals in conventional theatre where the director works with the actors to get the performance right.

Forum Conversations as a rehearsal process is deemed to accentuate the safety of the participants so that they can open up and explore, but the emphasis seems to be more on feedback than on exploration. The actors see safety as something that arises from their ability rapidly to build trust; from their professionalism; and from the confidence in the process that comes from achieving a high degree of verisimilitude in the characterisation of participants’ difficult others. This achievement would again appear to be a feature of acting in conventional theatre and thus highlights the skills of the actor.

The next section deals with how actors regard the objectives and outcomes of FCs.

8.3.5 Aims

8.3.5.1 Objectives

FCs might arguably be regarded as a method of participatory action learning and this seems to coincide with the views of the actors, albeit they may not be aware of this methodological terminology. The actors see themselves as serving the participant, helping them to be more effective in their communication in the workplace. Actors focus on this objective even before the first moment of interaction in the FCs workshop:

"On the train I might do that mental thing and ask, 'what do they need out of today, how I can I help; how can I be best useful?"“ (Paul)
But for some actors it remains in their attention after the event as well:

"It stays with you and you go home and say, "I met the most extraordinary person today. You will never know what they go through. You’ll never believe what they said". (Elizabeth)

Actors say they help participants via specific behavioural solutions that emerge from interactive role-play rather than via developmental training models. Yet this is somewhat contradicted by what the actors themselves say. For example, actors can make first impression assessments of what participants ‘need’ even before the role-play. Furthermore, whilst actors say they feedback on the total interaction in the FCs, their personal style or preference might be to highlight a limited set of behaviours when commenting on the interactions with participants. For example, one actor focuses on the language that participants use. Another focuses on the participant’s personal energy levels. Yet other actors concentrate on how various aspects of the participant’s behaviour make them feel as the character. Thus there is no standard approach and the actors validate their opinions on the basis that their reactions to the participant, either as the character of the difficult other or as themselves, will be the same as anyone else’s. The implication is that their observations reflect a general ‘truth’ about the participant as to what needs ‘improving’.

8.3.5.2 Agenda

This leads to consideration of whose agenda is being followed, despite the claim that it is the participant’s. Christopher was very clear that it is the commissioning client that determines the agenda. Note this is also ‘about’ the delegate rather than for him or her:

“The agenda is about the client, the delegate that we are dealing with, but also the client who is employing you to work in these sessions. What they are trying to achieve, what their needs are, and what experience the delegate needs to have through the interaction with you” (Christopher)

Another view is “I do not feel the need to push a solution on to somebody. The solution has really to come from the participant.” (David)

Most of the other actors see the agenda as helping participants with their individual communication problems with someone at work. The plot of the conversation and to a large extent the script, are determined by the participants and thus the agenda for the Forum Conversation would appear to be the participants’. Despite this it seems that sometimes FCs may be used in relation to a more specific organisational agenda though only two of the actors mentioned this:
“It’s about the delegates’ needs in the context of what the particular session is and what the organisation that is employing wants to get - wants the delegate to take away or have from the interaction they are having with you” (Christopher)

“A training company said to me, ‘we want you to give really harsh feedback. These people need to be shocked into knowing how rubbish they are’” (Susan)

Thus the individual difficult situation that is presented by participants may be embedded within a more prescriptive learning agenda.

When it comes to the learning process in FCs we have seen that different actors focus on different aspects of behaviour. Moreover, their gut feel may suggest the participant’s ‘problem’, and they then concentrate on fixing that problem. This tends to be about improving communication behaviour. But this is mostly about passing on aspects of the actor’s own communication skills.

“It’s things like spatial awareness, tone of voice, all the usual stuff, use of language, vocabulary – I think just everything really” (Linda)

“It is about managing oneself and yes, it can be down to poise, it can be down to your posture, it can be down to how you stand, how you walk, how you sit down. Do you maintain good eye contact; do you look at the floor? Do you give off the vibe that you would rather be somewhere else?” (Elizabeth)

These skills are the kind of skills necessary for giving good performances. Some actors’ agenda seems therefore to be about imparting the performance skills of the professional actor as the best way to deal with difficult others in the workplace.

Thus there are a number of agendas at play in the FCs process including those of the organisation, the individual participants and the actors themselves. These agendas may well align in a positive sense. The actor’s subjective feel of how to fix the problem may fit with solutions provided by the participants themselves and these in turn may deliver the organisational requirement. There are other permutations of this mix of agendas. For example, the actor’s subjective feel may lead them to offer solutions that may not solve the participant’s problem but may fit what the organisation is looking for. Referring to the encouragement to Susan to give harsh feedback, she was left with an ethical dilemma. Ultimately Susan solved her problem by introducing all the feedback that she might ordinarily have given (i.e. not harsh) with the words “I am disappointed that…”. According to Susan the organisation was satisfied with this and no participants felt harmed. But this is clear example of a collision between different agendas.
8.3.5.3 Feedback

Actors see their feedback as a key part of the participants’ learning. However, there is divided and somewhat confused opinion about whether the feedback should come from the character they have played, or from themselves once ‘stepped out’ of character. Some think that the feedback from the character, especially if played accurately, is most useful because the actor can be honest but remain unaccountable; as if the character is completely separate from the actor. Others think of this separation as the reason why the feedback should be given from themselves:

“To me it always sounds odd if I say "As John, John was feeling this..." To me, to some extent we have done that (finished the acting) and there is benefit from separating the two; it gives more freedom” (Christopher)

Yet others give a picture of a tangled identity when considering the source of feedback, particularly where there has been emotion in the conversation:

“I (Paul) really do feel this in playing the character, and I don’t know if that is playing the character Paul, the observer Paul, sort of linking up both in playing the character, feeling something and as the observer perhaps understanding something. Or thinking you understand something about the way the character is reacting in the way they do. I suppose in a way you become part of, you play a distillation of that character and if you are playing a distillation at least accurately to what the participant has described, you must be feeling something similar to what that character would be feeling”. (Paul)

Confused and confusing as this picture is, it indicates not only the embodied nature of the experience of FCs, but also a leakage of affect between character and performer. And this must have a bearing on the subjectivity of the actors’ feedback to participants no matter how detached they claim to be. For example, in attempting to detach her own subjectivity from the experience of the conversation Deborah makes a global attribution about the communication style of the participant; in other words her experience of them is ‘how they are’.

"Feeding back in character I think has the most impact. And feeding back how they (the participant) communicate and how it is perceived”. (Deborah)

While the subjective, ‘gut feel’ of the actors plays a part in the active engagement with participants, the direct question about what had most impact in the process drew a variety of responses that included:
- The opportunity to have the conversation as a ‘dummy run’
- The opportunity to replay the conversation
- The emotional experience of the conversation
- A mix of the above including feedback from peers

This suggests that actors regard the enactment as a way of embodying emotion in the context of rehearsal as the most important feature of FCs. Yet this is strikingly similar to what Posner describes about the rehearsal process in the conventional theatre that he witnessed.

*What surprises me is how much the actors are already “in character” and the level of emotional depth they bring to this very first read through.* (Posner, 2008, p.37)

### 8.3.5.4 Outcomes (as a subtheme of Aims)

Given that rehearsals in conventional theatre are directed towards an eventual performance in front of an audience, what do actors see as the final outcome of the FCs? Although actors seem committed to helping the participants communicate more effectively, they know very little about the participants’ performances after the event. It seems that actors are not included in any evaluation or report back from the commissioning organisations though occasionally they meet participants coincidentally and thus get an idea of how the conversations with actual difficult others have gone:

"*An HR director gave an example of two people who used to be at loggerheads and next time she saw them after the session (FCs) they were in a chip shop having chips together and sorting out their stuff***” (David)

"*By a chance I met a participant about three months later and he said, ‘Oh yes, I remember that conversation and I have had that conversation. It went completely differently but it was well worth practicing it’***” (Paul)

But this is limited anecdotal evidence and gives only a fragmentary impression of outcomes. Thus the confidence actors have in the impact of their work comes mainly from the perceived ‘improvement’ in participants’ performances within replays during the FCs event itself, as well as commentary about this from the watching audience. However, this gives no idea about how sustained these improvements will be once the participants are back in their workplaces.
8.3.5.5 Conclusions as to the aims of Forum Conversations

The organisation, the participants and the actors may all have different agendas for the process but may declare the same aim. They may arrive at the same endpoint even though they have different agendas, as Meisiek and Barry found in a study of a large-scale corporate forum theatre project (2007). In these differences lurk the tensions of partial agendas as highlighted in the review and we have seen how FCs may be sought as a means of penalising, even abusing, participants.

Actors seek primarily to help participant overcome perceived difficult communication by addressing participants’ learning needs. In general, actors think that problems are likely to be solved by helping participants to improve the effectiveness of their communication behaviour but there seem to be no standards for this behaviour other than the kind of generic verbal and non-verbal skills that might support on-stage performance and therefore lie especially within the skill set of actors.

Actors think participants’ communication behaviour influences the characters the actors play and their consequent subjective feelings are the main basis for report back to the participants. The assumption is that what the actor experience in character when interacting with the participants reflects how the participants are when interacting with others.

Feedback is a mix of subjective and objective report though this is complicated by the confusion between feeding back as either character or actor. There is divided opinion about which of these constitutes the source of the most effective feedback to participants.

Although actors claim that there are fundamental differences between conventional acting and acting in FCs there seem to be a number of aspects of the Forum Conversation process that resonate with conventional theatre practice, particularly in regard to rehearsal for performance.

8.4 Reflexivity

I was aware that in the interviews I posed a number of questions that led participants to reflect, in a way they might not normally, on how they practiced FCs. I also found that often I shared my own views in discussion with the actors. Additionally I was aware that sometimes I asked leading questions, though I was usually aware of this and corrected as soon as I could. These interviews were intensely interesting to me because they highlighted my own experience, showing me how much I use characteristics of
performance to help participants. For example, I tend to dwell on physical spatial relations, occupation of verbal space and personal attitudes.

I find that I have a degree of conflict of interest in this study in that my impartiality as a researcher may be open to challenge. For example, I may be challenged for positive language about the advantageous effects of FCs. However, by way of contrast, I also feel that I am revealing deficiencies and ambiguities in the process but may be overemphasising these, again exposing a lack of neutrality.

I am aware that this is an interpretive piece of work and that my selection of the original interview questions along with my questioning style and topics of interest betray partiality to certain issues but neglect of others. This arises largely because of my precise knowledge of the process.

8.5 Summary of findings

During the development of the template a number of key themes emerged. These include:

- Actors’ commitment to service and a keen desire to help participants
- A view that embodied, ‘in the moment’ experience is more likely to lead to change than instruction or coaching
- ‘Tuning in’ to individual participant’s needs were regarded as an important intuitive process
- Actors talk of ‘a third eye’ that objectively looks over multiple levels of interaction during the conversations
- An awareness that ‘the difficult other’ is co-constructed with the participant during the acted conversation
- There are a number of ambiguities between the different actors including:
  - their role and identity in relation to acting and facilitating
  - feedback as either the acted ‘difficult other’ or as themselves as actors
  - the elements of the process different actors focus on
  - an ambiguity about ‘agenda’ or ‘scripts’
8.6 Overall Conclusions from study 3

Study 3 provides interpretive material that will go towards the development of answers to the main research questions. In this regard only the actors’ perspective is considered in this chapter. Overall conclusions from this study are discussed in relation to the main research questions:

What is the nature of the FCs process?

FCs are designed to help participants address communication problems with difficult others in their work environment. Actors provide simulated one to one encounters with the difficult others in front of a small audience of participants. The intention is to rehearse the encounters so that with replays and feedback participants may learn more effective communication methods for dealing with their difficult other.

Actors see this process as being sharply different to how they might work in conventional theatre. However, conventional theatre rehearsal process informs the participants’ experience on a number of counts. Although participants are encouraged to ‘be themselves’ rather than act, the part that participants play in the Forum Conversation is similar to a rehearsed performance in front of an audience. This performance is critiqued and feedback notes are given rather like those given by a collaborative director in the theatre. Thence replays take place in order to practice the feedback notes that have been given. This mirrors standard rehearsal process. Moreover, many of the feedback notes given by the actors are about performance and presentational behaviour, or in simple terms – technical aspects of acting.

Actors tend to diagnose participants’ needs on the basis of first impressions of participants’ behaviours that are ‘given off’, to use Goffman’s expression (1959). It is the ‘given off’ behaviours that actors use both to construct the characters of the difficult others as well as feedback about how participants might change behaviour, the assumption being that this will improve dealings with difficult others.

There are a number of agendas in the process that might be thought to cohere in the same objective, which is to improve communication in the workplace. However, actors may see this as being about individual performance whilst participants look for ways to defuse the impact of difficult others and organisations may seek to standardise behaviour.

The process entails a rapid construction of characters that participants recognise as being like the difficult others they describe. Actors achieve this initially by taking a short briefing about the actual difficult others and then combining this information with gut
feel and their experience of similar, possibly stereotypical, characters. Thereafter actors build character by virtue of the interaction with the participant. It is the participant’s behaviour that informs the construction of the character.

The construction depends on the participant’s contribution to the problem they are experiencing. In other words in co-constructing the character they are co-constructing the problem. Thus any feedback must maximise the participants’ role in the problem. This is made even more emphatic by virtue of much of the actors’ feedback arising from their subjective feelings about the participant’s behaviour. The implication is that it is the participants who must improve their performance and this might be seen to marry with a commissioning organisation’s agenda.

What is the impact of FCs?

Actors have little idea of the impact FCs has on participants once back in the workplace. Some actors say they might meet a participant by chance some time later and their stories indicate that the impact is positive and also that the Forum Conversation experience is memorable. However, those who commission the work generally do not give actors formal evaluations.

However, because the FCs involve replays of the conversations after feedback actors can see the immediate impact of behavioural changes, often corroborated by feedback from the watching group of participants. Actors can also see when participants who may have been resistant to the process of Forum Conversation, become more compliant having seen the positive changes for others within the session.

Why do FCs have an impact?

Actors think there are a number of aspects of this experiential process that cause what they believe is a high impact outcome. These are outlined in section 8.3.5.3 above. Essentially the process presents an opportunity to do something safely that participants may have qualms about doing in the work environment. The action therefore constitutes a learning process combined with feedback from the point of view of the character of the difficult other as played by the actor. This direct feedback of the subjective experience of the other is generally not available in normal social relations. At the same time, according to some actors, the embodiment of the process, no matter that it is in a learning context, can often give rise to the kinds of emotions that participants associate with the actual difficult communication.

In sum, FCs constitutes an action learning process though there is a degree of ambiguity around a number of elements of the process. It is action learning that enables
individuals to grasp new understanding about themselves and others, albeit this is filtered through the singular experience of the actor. The question remains as to whether learning becomes what Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) call a sustained, concretised realisation in their continuing working lives. This question constitutes the main focus of the next chapter, which is a discussion of the integrated findings of the three research studies.
CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

9.1 Introduction

The research has been spread across three studies and has yielded an interpretive view of the nature and impact of FCs. The discussion contrasts findings of this research with previous studies and also provides a view of how FCs reflect the aims and practices of theatre in organisations. Appendix 9.1 is a summary table of the contrast between the findings of this research and other empirical work on theatre and role-play in organisations. Findings are discussed here from a number of different perspectives including the idea of FCs as rehearsal. Findings are also discussed in the light of Burke’s pentadic ratios. By looking at findings in terms of the relations between Scene, Act, Agency, Agent and Purpose it is hoped to integrate different elements of the analysis and determine consistencies and contradictions in the findings. As Mangham and Overington suggest, “the conventions of social life and of drama expect some kind of consistency between say, the nature of agents and the acts they perform, or between the acts and the scene against which they take place” (Mangham and Overington, 1987, pp.70-2).

The discussion is organised into four parts. Each of the first three parts addresses one of the three main research questions about the nature, impact and reasons for the impact of FCs. A fourth part takes a pentadic ratio perspective on the findings.

9.2 Research question 1: What is the nature of Forum Conversations?

The discussion opens with consideration of FCs as a form of TIO that offers active participation which is directed more towards problem solving (Schreyögg, 1999) than open exploration, even though this latter is encouraged within the process. The concept of ‘rehearsal’ is discussed as a general frame for the nature of FCs. In this context the discussion looks at specific elements of rehearsal including the realistic nature of FCs, emotional and cathartic effects, safety aspects and ‘in the moment’ interaction.

9.2.1 Active involvement and problem solving

This investigation of FCs indicates that an assessment of the extent of participant activity and control within an organisational theatre process is insufficient to grasp the degree of ownership by participants of the overall process. In FCs participants are given free rein to select and explore the issues that arise from their dealing with difficult others. Each participant is active both in enacting their difficult conversation and in commenting on those of others. Yet it seems that the process follows a regimen that
cannot be altered or adapted by the participants. They are obliged to enact a difficult conversation in front of the audience and there is an instituted process of feedback that follows each enactment. This is interesting in view of Clark’s typology (2008) that emphasises the extent to which participants can adapt a method both before and during its process. It further inflects Darsø et al’s (2007) understanding of OT as akin to action research. Darsø et al consider that the aim for both action research and organisational theatre is to achieve collective learning and change through involvement and reflection. Yet their view that organisational theatre, like action research, leads to enrichment and adaptation of the research process itself is not borne out in this research on FCs.

Darsø et al (2007) also note that unlike action research organisational theatre tends to be short-term and solution-focused. Given that individual participants come into FCs looking for agency solutions to difficult communication issues, time constraints tend to drive the actors towards solution finding rather than more open-ended exploration. Thus both time constraints and preoccupation with finding solutions might tend against any examination and adaptation by participants of the process itself. In consequence the process becomes instituted in a standard format and actors become adept at operating within the given constraints. Such constraints may have arisen both from limited organisational understanding of theatre in an organisational context and from a wish to control corporate agendas within the theatre processes (Rae, 2013). In consequence forms of TIO such as corporate forum theatre and FCs would seem to have evolved from operational and organisational expedient rather than from an understanding of their effects.

Time constraint is also a factor in rehearsal of plays in conventional theatre and it is to an examination of FCs as a rehearsal process that the discussion now turns.

**9.2.2 Rehearsal as act**

FCs can be thought of as a rehearsal process for preparing participants for the ‘performance’ in which they confront their difficult others in the workplace. This thinking also seems to apply to other forms of organisational theatre. For instance, corporate forum theatre is either rehearsal in preparation for change (Clark and Mangham, 2004b; Meisiek, 2004) or rehearsal for required corporate performances (Pollitt, 2010; Bunt, 2011).

The impact on participants of rehearsing their difficult conversations and the part that enactment and embodied practice plays in learning is discussed in Part 2 of this chapter. A number of findings demonstrate specific elements of the rehearsal process including the realistic and rapid nature of enactment, emotional and cathartic effects, the sense of
psychological safety in the process and the improvisational nature of the process as ‘in the moment’.

9.2.3 Realistic and rapid

Most participants in FCs comment (a) on the high degree of verisimilitude brought to the roles of the difficult others by the actors and (b) on the rapidity with which the participants find themselves immersed in these conversations, even to the extent that they lose awareness of the audience and awareness that the actor in front of them is merely representing the difficult other. This exemplifies Clark’s observation that actors “establish the ‘authenticity’ of the performances and thereby succeed in making the ‘imaginative truth’ the audiences’ ‘present truth’ for the duration of the event” (Clark, 2008).

Realistic portrayal by actors of audience’s realities is a typical observation of organisational theatre (e.g. Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004; Meisiek and Barry, 2007; Galland et al, 2008; Pollitt, 2010; Bunt, 2011; Rae, 2011), and this study adds to the weight of observation on this. However, organisational theatre practitioners and their commissioners often invest in research and development so as to create realistic scripts and dramas (Galland et al, 2008; Pollitt, 2010; Bunt, 2011). Similarly the attempt to create a realistic model for non-professional role-players in conventional role play often entails a great deal of resource being used in planning and preparation (Craig and Amerinic, 1994; Chen, 2003). Even so, non-professional role-play may be subject to a range of disadvantages including personal agendas, exaggeration, frivolity and lack of consistency and credibility (van Ments, 1989). Such disadvantages may well attend to the use of professional actors but most participants in this research emphasised the professionalism of the actors in their approach, their management of the process and commitment to achieving credible representations of the difficult others.

What is new here is the finding that FCs have little or no development or preparation cost. Experienced practitioner actors claim to do little preparation work beyond referring to client websites. Scripts and action are provided ‘in the moment’ during the FCs process by participants. Actors may use templates for initial character building but rapidly mirror the participants in enacting difficult others such that participants perceive high degree of verisimilitude. Thus in contrast to methods like corporate forum theatre, FCs would appear to be a much more rapid and cost-effective process whilst still providing realistic and credible performances. Against this, FCs is an individual focused method and does not seem to be applied to groups larger than about six people at a time. An organisational theatre drama can be presented to many hundreds of people in
one performance (e.g. Meisiek and Barry, 2007), but the same cannot be said for FCs. There are resource implications for this, which perhaps explains why the method seems to be used mainly at management level.

9.2.4 Emotion and catharsis

Participants in FCs act out their own difficult conversations and this may entail negative emotions like frustration and resentment or even rage. For many individuals FCs evoke the emotions that they experience with the actual difficult other and for some this may give rise to catharsis or release of emotion. Studies of organisational theatre often include commentary on the emotional and cathartic nature of theatre (Mangham, 1986; Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004) and this seems unsurprising given the historic focus on such effects (Meisiek, 2004). What is not apparent in such studies is a demonstration of what the experience of emotion and catharsis in organisational theatre might lead to after the event. This research provides new insight into the emotional effects on the outcomes of FCs and this is again discussed in Part 2 on the impact of FCs.

9.2.5 Safety

Conducive to the experience of emotion in FCs is what many of the participants in this study say is a safe and supportive environment, one in which they felt they could take risks and be open to the experience (Lemons, 2010). Both Taylor (2008) and Rae (2011) refer to the necessary sense of psychological safety if participants are to engage effectively with organisational theatre activities. However, the little reference there is in the literature to the safety aspect of theatre-based learning either makes incidental claims that theatre and role play provide a safe or non-threatening distance from actual experience (Boje and Larsen, 2007; Craig and Amernic, 1994), or in contrast points out tensions between safety, risk and challenge (Gibb, 2004; Rae, 2011). Thus it cannot be assumed that organisational theatre and role-play automatically provide psychological safety.

The research reported here adds significantly to an understanding of what constitutes a sense of safety for participants in organisational theatre. Participants in FCs considered safety to be a key feature of the process and they themselves produced a number of elements of the process that gave rise to an overall sense of psychological safety. These are listed in section 6.4.3.2 of chapter 6. For the most part the participants interviewed in this study feel safe to explore actual and personal, rather than analogic or representative, difficulties. Thus in FCs there is no safe, theatrical distance where action in parallel realities is deemed to give rise to second order learning effects (Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004), but direct encounter in the rehearsal of actual experience. It would
appear that principal aspects of this sense of safety are participants’ awareness of common experience of difficulty and of shared participation in the disclosure of, and engagement with, those difficulties. It would seem therefore that safety emerges from the rehearsal of actual rather than analogic experience.

9.2.6 In the moment

Playing the action ‘in the moment’ is a truism of acting (Harrop, 1992) and is associated as much with organisational theatre performance as with conventional theatre (Boje, 1995; Darsø, 2007; Taylor, 2008). Thus it is unsurprising that findings show ‘in the moment’ action to be a key aspect of FCs. Yet ‘in the moment’ in FCs has a somewhat different connotation to acting that has been intensively prepared in rehearsal and then re-presented as if newly minted in the moment of performance. In FCs, ‘in the moment’ means the moment of ‘becoming’ in the co-construction between actor and participant of the character and performance of the difficult other. This has complex dialogistic and ontological implications that are discussed in more detail later.

9.2.7 Conclusions: The nature of Forum Conversations

Liminality, the transition state of betwixt and between, arguably applies to rehearsal in the theatre and in answering the first main research question the FCs method has been characterised predominantly as a rehearsal process. Participants are drawn into the process as dramaturges and actors in their own organisational dramas. This suggests FCs as a site where the two different cultures of theatre and organisations merge, reflecting Pavis’s hourglass model of the integration of artefacts from one culture into another (Pavis, 1992). However, the direction of this integration is not clear – is theatre being drawn into organisations or organisations into theatre? This latter direction perhaps supports the thought that increasingly Life is theatre.

In exploring the nature of FCs this research supports other empirical studies on a number of counts adding to commentary on the constraints imposed by organisational control of theatre processes but also to the effectiveness of theatre methods in realistically modelling organisational life. The research builds on understanding of the requirements for psychological safety in organisational theatre. This research breaks new ground in organisational theatre studies in a number of ways including an empirical demonstration of the participant as agent rather than as recipient in the process. It also for the first time presents the perspective of the professional actor as intuitive expert within the process.
The second part of this chapter is a discussion of the impact of FCs on participants. This is both in the context of their experience of the method and in its effects upon them once back in the workplace.

9.3 Research question 2: What is the impact of Forum Conversations?

9.3.1 Introduction

The discussion turns to the second main research question, which is about the impact of Forum Conversations. FCs are intended to help participants deal with difficult communication in the workplace. This can be viewed as skills training, or as support for more general organisational initiatives such as team building and leadership development, which is as much about awareness as skills per se. In both cases the impact of the method is associated with direct experience as well as with the learning that comes from it. The impact of FCs includes improvement in performance skills and confidence, personal transformation and wider team effects.

9.3.2 FCs as training

There is ample evidence from the interviews in Studies 1 and 2 that participants found their FC experience memorable, enjoyable and relevant, though this is a typical finding in other studies (Monks, 2001; Stevenson, 1996; Salgado, 2008; Galland, 2009; Rae 2011). This research adds to the weight of evidence on this. Yet most of these other empirical studies either make few or no definitive claims for the impact of organisational theatre (e.g. Meisiek and Barry, 2007) or offer organisational level outcomes such as lower employee turnover that may not reflect individual experience (e.g. Pollitt, 2010; Bunt, 2011). However, this research demonstrates specific evidence for the direct impact on individual participants. This includes:

- Evidence of sustained transfer of learning
- Improved performance skills
- Improved confidence and self-awareness
- Personal transformation
- Team effects

9.3.3 Transfer of learning

Several studies note that participants find theatre based training ‘positive’, ‘enjoyable’ and ‘relevant’ (e.g. Salgado, 2008; Rae, 2011). Rae’s doctoral study of corporate forum theatre (2011) showed the theatre experience to be memorable for its novelty and enjoyment value. However, she found limited evidence that learning from the
experience had transferred into practice. In contrast, evidence from Studies 1 and 2 shows that many participants continued to apply their learning in practice. Indeed, the fact that their applied learning was relevant as a matter of continuous practice meant that despite being interviewed over a year after the event in Study 1 and about three months after the event in Study 2, participants readily identified the impact of the process.

Many participants come into FCs with difficult communication issues that may have become entrenched over time. For some this manifested as what Rogers (2008) calls a constant ‘dance’ between individual behaviours and systematic patterns of communication that can trap people into negative interdependence. Nevertheless, Rogers claims that it only takes one individual member to change his or her behaviour in order to change the pattern of the relationship (Rogers, 2008, p.344). It would appear that many of the participants do change their behaviour after FCs and in consequence do experience improvements in their relations with others at work.

Participants report a range of learning outcomes that range from new performance skills, increased confidence, improved self-awareness, team-bonding effects, and personal transformation. The attributional analysis in Study 2 supports these findings and the analytic induction of attributions indicates distinct patterns of change in participants’ behaviour. Thus this research demonstrates effective and sustained skills transfer that might be thought of as consistent with a view of FCs both as technology, where discrete skills are learned and transferred into practice, and also as resource where there would appear to be organisational gains beyond the inculcation of skills such as more general development effects, including team cohesion.

9.3.4 Learning

Other empirical studies of role-play tend to report positive though diffuse learning outcomes (Craig and Amernic, 1994; Salgado, 2008; Lesevre, 2012). In a study that seems closest to this current research Galland et al (2008) used Forum Theatre and ‘courageous’ conversations with professional actors in an extensive communication skills programme for early research scientists. They report positive outcomes in the way participants apply their learning in the workplace but provide little detail. The emphasis in the Galland et al study was on teaching a range of interpersonal communication skills. The approach was more general than FCs in that participants were being prepared for the kind of communication problems that might occur in their work rather than addressing participants’ own current difficulties. Further, Galland et als’ study does not explore the nature of the engagement with the actors. By contrast, this report shows
specific changes in a number of aspects of participants’ communication with others at work. It is the first study to provide detailed evidence of the positive effects on individuals of FCs as an organisational theatre method. It is also the first study to explore individuals’ own specific difficult communication predicaments and finally, this study is the first in organisational theatre studies to attempt a comparison between before and after organisational theatre experience.

9.3.5 Performance skills

A number of the communication skills taught in the Galland et al study coincide with skills used by actors such as tone, voice speed, turn-taking, eye contact, open body posture, active listening, positioning and so on. This is unsurprising given that actors were also used in the learning programme. Similarly, the actors who facilitate FCs tend to think in terms of precise performance skills rather than of the negotiation and dialectics of relational communication (Fisher and Ury, 1982; Baxter and Montgomery, 1996). Thus actors in FCs tend to make participants aware of signs like gesture and tone, performance energy and spatial awareness and other skills such as those listed above, rather than of dialectics. Further, the validity of such observations is based primarily upon how the participants make the actors in character ‘feel’, which Harrop (1992) suggests is how professional actors tend to gauge the level of development of their characters in rehearsals for conventional plays. Thus the impact of the participants’ behaviour on the actors in role provides the basis for suggestions about performance skills that might support behaviour change.

A number of participants report positive outcomes in practice from the use of particular skills including management of both the physical and conversational space in which they meet their difficult others, eye contact and performance energy. Thus performance skills clearly effect positive communication.

9.3.6 Confidence and self-awareness

From interviews in Studies 1 and 2 and from the attributions extracted from the interviews from Study 2 it seems that although a few participants (characterised here as theorists) seem to change little in their dealings with difficult others, many participants (dialogists) gain a new sense of control and confidence in their dealings with others in the workplace. For some this arises from a new awareness of self that impacts all their relations both at work and at home. For others it comes from a new perspective on their communication difficulties such that these become minimised in relation to the bigger picture (strategists). For yet others it is a matter of new agency to deal with difficult communication through awareness of, and access to, new tools and resources.
highlighted in the FCs process (Instrumentalists). These different approaches emerged from the analytic induction exercise in Study 2 and reflect different ways participants deal with difficult communication.

9.3.7 Personal transformation

Six participants talked about personal transformation both in their communication style and in their personal relations with family.

Such transformations may be more about the release of constraints than transformations of ‘Being’. For example, one female senior manager had felt it important not to show emotion at work. In her FC the actor reported that he was unclear about her difficult ‘message’ to him in role as difficult other because she seemed so unemotional. The manager reported in her post FC interview that she now felt more able to express her emotion and this had led to transformed relationships both at work and home.

9.3.8 Team effects

Some participants observed that participation in FCs had also had an impact on their teams. This was clearly the case where a team of twenty-five people undertook FCs around difficult issues they had all been experiencing with difficult customers. It was later reported that team members had become more cohesive as a team, were less defensive about the difficult issue with customers and were working more closely to support each other. Other positive team effects were noted for other participants post FCs. For example, some participants reported their teams had more cohesion and better internal communication because they themselves had changed.

Positive team and group effects are not an uncommon report in the literature as in Ferris’s (2001) report of a team-building exercise using theatre or in positive organisational outcomes from corporate forum theatre (Pollitt, 2010; Bunt, 2011). A methodological problem with FCs and teams is that it is a method for dealing with actual difficult situations and these are often between team members and colleagues. Thus the method might be confrontational and unsafe if applied to internal team problems. Nevertheless, as noted above where a team has to deal with a common external problem, there may be benefits from using FCs for the whole team.

9.3.9 Conclusions for Part 2

FCs have a powerful impact on participants leading to a variety of changes and learning that include improved communication skills, increase in confidence and self-awareness
and wider effects such as team cohesion. The explanation for these effects is taken up in parts three and four of this chapter. The embodied, interactive experience also impacts many participants emotionally and this can lead to embodied memory effects. It can also lead to transformational changes in participants’ ways of working and relating with others. Such specificity in outcome has not been observed before in studies of organisational theatre.

The research on the impact of FCs adds weight to other findings about the novelty, memorability, enjoyment and relevance of organisational theatre. It also adds to the argument that such methods can lead to positive team effects. This research adds nuance to an understanding of theatre as technology and resource. It builds on the empirical base of organisational theatre by providing greater specificity in outcomes than is generally the case. It also adds empirically to thinking about the effects of embodied learning. This research shows that sustained learning ensues from FCs whereas other studies have shown ambiguities and limitations in transfer of learning.

The study has made novel contributions to knowledge about the impact of organisational theatre in a number of ways. For the first time it has shown the specific impact of an organisational theatre process by comparing the attributions made by participants before and after the event. Further, it hints at how a theatre method might lead to a rebalancing of Affect and Interest as participants regain control in difficult communication. Finally, it is the first study of participants’ individual communication predicaments and in so doing has shown how FCs can lead to personal transformation.

The third part of this chapter considers why it might be that FCs achieve the effects that have been outlined.

9.4 Research question 3: Why do Forum Conversations have impact?

9.4.1 Introduction

Participants’ responses in Study 1 indicate that learning comes from at least five sources:

- Self-awareness gained from embodied experience rehearsing the difficult conversation
- Group feedback and discussion
- Actor feedback about what they felt and experienced in role as difficult other
- Vicarious experience as audience for other participants’ conversations

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• Discrete performance skills

Thus there are a number of possible explanations for the impact of FCs that seem to derive from the active rehearsal of participants’ own difficult conversations. These different potential sources for the impact of FCs are examined and discussed in this third part of the chapter. The discussion of the sources of impact begins with a view of rehearsals, followed by a discussion on embodied experience.

9.4.2 Rehearsal as agency

As in conventional rehearsals, actors in FCs tend to produce an affective interpretation of participants’ behaviour. The actors’ amalgam of skills and capabilities means that participants are likely to encounter not merely representations of the mundane actuality of their difficult others but intensely theatricalised versions. This does not mean theatrical in the sense of overt demonstration such as might be found in organisational plays and corporate forum theatre (e.g. Clark and Mangham, 2004a) but theatrical in the sense of a reflective consciousness that enables “the transformation of ritual action into theatrical awareness” (Mangham and Overington, 1987, p.50). Thus it is possible to create a level of challenge that is experienced by participants as real yet remains safe. Both the actors and participants know that there is a necessary suspension of disbelief. However, the actors are adept at transforming the staged space, the dynamics of interaction and the necessary level of mimesis into a heightened theatrical moment in which participants experience the emotional ‘aliveness’ (Clough, 2007) of themselves as characters in their own stories.

A number of other studies also highlight the theatricality that effectively recreates corporate worlds in corporate forum theatre (Gibb, 2004; Larsen, 2005; Meisek and Barry, 2007; Rae, 2013). This study therefore adds to the volume of evidence of actors’ capacity for realistic simulation.

9.4.3 Embodied experience

Desmond and Jowitt (2012) suggest the embodied nature of experiential learning is an opportunity for learners to connect internal and external experiences. Ann and Carr (2011), citing transitional-object theory, contextualise theatre as a ‘transitional object’ wherein objective and subjective worlds combine. The FC process might be regarded as an embodied, transitional space where subjective experience ‘dances in the moment’ with the objective. This is conceivably the site of catharsis, which classically is the notion that theatre induced release from negative emotion, something that according to Meisiek (2004) the theatre ‘theorist/practitioners’ Stanislavsky and Moreno regard as
especially accentuated in active re-enactment of experience that draws upon emotional memory.

The impact of this embodiment is to create both emotional and behavioural memory of the FCs experience that may be drawn upon when encountering similar situations in the workplace. As one participant said when confronting an employee over a disciplinary situation, “It’s almost as if I suddenly saw the actor sitting there - I realised I knew exactly what to do.” This is resonant with Kolb’s (1984) view that knowledge results from a combination of grasping and transforming experience. Thus FCs may be regarded as potent source of embodied learning, something that is hinted at through much writing on organisational theatre, but barely demonstrated empirically.

9.4.4 Feedback

There are multiple sources of feedback in FCs including feedback from the actors, from peers and from the embodied self-experience. Although feedback is a feature both of theatre-based and conventional role-play (e.g. van Ments, 1989) there appears to be no investigation of the nature of its impact in the literature. Thus this research adds to an understanding of the layered nature of feedback between actor and participant in organisational theatre.

After the Forum Conversation the actors feedback what they ‘felt’ because that is their agency. But this is in response to the impact upon them of the tension of the participant’s dialectical crisis with the difficult other. When the actor says to the participant, “When you did that, I felt this” or “When you said that, I wanted to do this” the participant hears not simply a cause and effect sequence but understands that he has a part in authoring both his own actions and the other’s as well.

The feedback of the participant’s impact upon the actor in role is expressed in terms of how the actor felt and also in terms of what the actor did in response to those feelings – “You came over to me like a victim, so I pushed you around”. The expression of feeling gives a view of how the actor in role sees the participant and thus the participant learns how he or she is ‘seen’ by the actor. Yet in a sense, because the actor functions as a mirror, the participant is the author of that ‘seeing.’ The actor’s view of the participant may be supplemented or supported by the audience of peers, potentially leading to heightened awareness of self in interaction with others. Negt (cited in Illeris, 1999, p.128) describes this as ‘mastering reality’.

Thus the participant may receive multiple perspectives of how they are seen ‘in reality’ but they may also gain understanding of how they are the authors of that seeing. Many
of the participants in Studies 1 and 2 acknowledged some responsibility for the creation of the difficulties they had experienced. Through feedback they gain a mirrored view of themselves as ‘other’, but they also learn about themselves as authors of ‘other’. This will be examined further in the pentadic ratios analysis in the final part of this chapter.

9.4.5 Conclusions: Explaining the impact of Forum Conversations

It is suggested that the reasons for the impact of FCs derive mainly from a mirroring experience. In co-constructing the difficult other with the actor the participant is in effect constructing him/herself in interaction and the actor mirrors this. The feedback process, which privileges affect and performance, emphasises the contribution that the participant has made to influence the other’s behaviour. Feedback after the conversation comes from a range of perspectives and this in combination with the embodied experience make for powerful learning that enables a concrete grasp of change that is evidenced in practice.

The research adds to other empirical findings about actors’ capacity to recreate realistic scenarios. It builds on suggestions that organisational theatre is a site for the creation of new visions of reality by demonstrating the impact of FCs in creating new visions of an individual reality and providing evidence of how the embodied learning experience assists in this. Moreover, FCs can be seen as a collaborative process to find solutions to individual communication problems in the workplace. This study articulates the nature of interaction between participants and actors as a complex mirroring exercise. This can lead to a range of learning outcomes for participants including heightened self-awareness and a recognition of their contribution to the authoring of their difficult relations.

A pentadic ratios exercise now follows in light of this understanding of FCs as a resource for the investigation of the social drama of participants’ communication with difficult others. By looking at findings in terms of the relations between Scene, Act, Agency, Agent and Purpose it is hoped to determine consistencies and contradictions in the process and space that FCs provides for a meeting between organisational participants and professional actors. It enables a view to be taken of the seeming contradictions of actors in the role of communication consultants and participants in the role of actors. As Mangham and Overington point out, “the conventions of social life and of drama expect some kind of consistency between say, the nature of agents and the acts they perform, or between the acts and the scene against which they take place” (Mangham and Overington, 1987, pp.70-2).
The pentadic ratios exercise will also be useful in the articulation of a conceptual contribution to the field of organisational theatre, one that accentuates a differentiation between reflective and refractive theatre.

9.5 Pentadic ratios and Forum Conversations

9.5.1 The scene

It is considered that the Scene of FCs is constituted by actors acting out a drama in a separate space in front of an audience. But this is not any drama. It is a re-creation of the personal social dramas of difficult conversations that participants experience in the workplace.

In Turner’s social drama (1980) the first stage is described as breach of norm-governed social relations. This is possibly the site of the difficulties presented by participants in FCs. It is the site of instability that potentially prompts change - “a liminal space between more or less stable social processes” (Boje, 2003).

The liminal space is also arguably the optimal site for the actors’ agency. Courtney (1988, p. 154) has described actors as being in a liminal state – ‘betwixt and between’ - they move into a fictional world to perform and yet they come from and return to non-fictional life”. Winnicott (1974) talks of actors inhabiting a transitional space “a realm which occurs between subjective and objective worlds”.

Actors reproduce the breach in participants’ norm-governed relations with others at work. They focus intensely on the breach and bring it rapidly to life. Further, this is enacted for a small audience and participants are caught up into performance before they know it. In effect in FCs a spotlight is shone on the breach equivalent to the second crisis stage of Turner’s social drama where:

“there is a tendency for the breach to widen and in public forums, representatives of order are dared to grapple with it” (Boje, 2003)

In FCs participants are invited, dared, to grapple with the breach in their relations with a difficult other in front of a public forum, an audience of peers. Liminality has most potential in this performance space for here is the site for action and for the potential construction of new realities. Notwithstanding this potential there are a number of constraints upon exploration in the liminal space. Not all participants will be ready to engage with the experience and not all difficult conversations are about breach in normative relations. Further, as with other organisational theatre methods, there may be a tension between prescription and exploration in the process where, for example,
the actor’s intention to ‘mend’ participant behaviour may interfere with the power of the mirroring process in FCs that enables participants to ‘see themselves seeing’.

**9.5.2 Pentadic ratios**

There are ten possible pentadic ratios (Burke, 1969a, p.15) that can be used. However, this analysis will be restricted to only five: Scene-Purpose, Scene-Agent, Scene-Act, Agent-Act and Agent-Agency. In considering the other five ratios the purpose of the actors as agents having certain agency in performing certain acts is regarded here as explored within the ratio of Scene-Purpose. Thus it is considered that Agent-Purpose, Agency-Purpose and Act-Purpose ratios are contained within the Scene-Purpose ratio discussion - the actors and their acts constitute elements of the Scene of FCs. The actors’ agency is regarded as closely connected to their acts – actors have the agency to act. Thus for the purpose of discussion, the Agency-Act ratio is considered to be contained within the Agent-Act and Agent-Agency ratios. Finally, it is considered that Scene-Agency is reflected through the Agency of actors as constituting elements of the FCs as Scene.

The discussion follows the sequence Scene-Purpose, Scene-Agent, Scene-Act, Agent-Act and Agent-Agency ratios.

**9.5.2.1 Scene-Purpose**

The implication of the Scene-Purpose ratio is that a particular ‘Purpose’ emerges as a likely expectation from a particular ‘Scene’. The descriptive language in play leads to symbolic associations (Overington, 1977) such that a particular word gives rise to an expectation of other associated words. Moreover, Mead (1934, p.60) suggests that initiating language sets us on a particular path of understanding from the outset. The use of the terms ‘difficult conversations’ and ‘difficult others’ in Forum Conversations implies non-normative social relations, and perhaps even ‘breach’ in relations.

Commissioners of the FCs studied here saw the method as relevant to their needs in that the process reproduced participants’ own actual difficult experience whilst cushioning them from adverse effects of that actuality. In this sense it is opposite if not contradictory to Schreyögg and Höpfl’s (2004) description of organisational theatre as providing new visions of reality, or of providing a different perspective on current reality. In FCs it is the accurate reconstruction of the breach in relations with ‘difficult others’ - a breach that constitutes participants’ current reality - that is instrumental to the purpose. This purpose, in terms of Turner’s social drama, is redressive action (Turner, 1982).
Yet in FCs the actual, perceived perpetrators of breaches in social relations, the difficult others, are not part of that redressive action. Instead, the focus is upon the participants themselves to be made more aware and effective, or even to be ‘fixed’. The assumption is that participants will learn ‘something’ from participating in the theatre of FCs that will enable them to effect their own redress and thereafter, again using Turner’s term, instigate the ‘reintegration’ of normative relations with their difficult others.

9.5.2.2 FCs as dialogue

Participation in FCs is not set up as a deliberate process of dialogue (e.g. Gustavsen, 2001). Nor are precepts of dialogue inculcated within the process so as to induce a state of open-minded inquiry and attention to what is being said (e.g. Isaacs, 2000). Instead the actors use their personal rapport to build a relaxed and open atmosphere and invite everyone to feedback on what they have seen. The process is inclusive, as in dialogue, but actors limit the amount of time for feedback and tend to discourage discussion, preferring to maximise the time for the enactment of the conversations. Thus the focus is on the performative experience rather than dialogue around the experience.

The emphasis on experience rather than talk about the experience further constrains the collaborative nature of the process. Whilst all participants comment and feedback on what they have seen, there is little space given for wider reflection or for collaborative thinking that might stem from the experience. FCs as a theatrical process focuses principally on the performance of participants’ difficult conversations.

9.5.2.3 FCs as radical theatre

FCs as theatre may not be regarded as radical in the sense suggested by Coopey (1998) where theatre, particularly forum theatre, is advocated as a space for critical examination and conceivably disruption of normative practices within organisations. Nor are FCs designed as safe ‘arenas’ wherein organisational actors might observe and challenge each other’s thinking and process (Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000; Fulop and Rifkin, 1997; Burgoyne and Jackson, 1997). Nevertheless, participants are fully active in the FCs process. They determine the scripts and action and are free to explore the space that is offered with the purpose of confronting difficulties with others in the workplace. Some participants report that they do make significant changes in their behaviour after their Forum Conversation. However, the method is not set up to address organisational level problems nor is it geared to experimentation beyond issues of personal communication difficulty. FCs is a theatrical means of exploring personal struggles of individual participants but is not offered as a way of addressing the collective dialectic. Thus one hesitates to characterise FCs as radical theatre.
9.5.2.4 Scene-Agent and Scene-Act

Professional actors convene for rehearsal knowing that they share common struggles and common cultural background (Harrop, 1992). The participants in FCs also see commonality in the struggle with difficult others as contributing to a sense of a safe place wherein to expose and explore their difficult situations. In this sense there is similarity to actors coming together to rehearse. This research views organisational participants in FCs as actors and thus for the first time in studies of organisational theatre the research looks at participants inside the process as agents rather than as mere recipients.

As both Posner (2008) and Harrop (1992) observe, theatre rehearsals entail a safe environment wherein actors grope for authentic realisation of their characters in order to perfect performance of the play. In FCs the ‘play’ may be thought of as the communicative relationship between participants and their difficult others in the workplace. This reflects Pine and Gilmore’s view that ‘work is theatre’ (1992). Actors assume that improvement of the performance skills of the participants via rehearsal will lead to improved performance in ‘the play’ that is constituted by participants’ actual encounters in the workplace. Such an assumption neglects the political realities of organisational life where personal change has to be negotiated within the interplay of power relations (Mangham, 1986, p.29). Against this, one notes the participant from Study 1 who decided to behave towards an extremely difficult customer as if the customer were merely another actor in rehearsal, and therefore ‘safe’. The participant explained in his post FC interview that an outcome of his new approach was a considerable increase in business with the customer.

Although FCs may be viewed as rehearsal where performances are ‘improved’, it seems that the space and time given to exploration and testing of performances is limited. Most participants merely receive feedback on their initial performance and a brief opportunity to replay parts of the conversation, whilst some participants receive only feedback without further replay. In my experience as a professional actor this limited exploration and replay is not untypical of rehearsal in the professional theatre, particularly in television, where budgets are tight. Preparation for the actual performance may be restricted to adjustments of a single, practice performance, and this also seems the case in FCs where participants practice their performance of a meeting with their difficult other.
9.5.2.5 Scene-Act - Mirror

In these meetings between actors and participants the actors reflect back what they receive from participants about ‘difficult others’. In this sense the Scene of FCs may be thought of as a mirror. Coherence in Scene-Agent and Scene-Act ratios implies that ‘mirroring’ requires verisimilitude and instantaneous response from the actors, and this is indeed what many participants report. It is crucial to an understanding of FCs as a liminal exploration to know how verisimilitude and instantaneous achievement are achieved and in this context the examination moves to the Agent-Act and Agent-Agency ratios.

9.5.2.6 Agent-Act

The actors say that the process ‘just happens’. Yet their background of professional acting rests on an extended history of acting that over time has melded a number of influences that emphasise both emotion and ‘being in the moment’ as bases of the acting craft. Most notable of these influences include Stanislavski and ‘life in the moment’, Meisner and his emphasis on being ‘in the moment’ and Lee Strasbourg’s Method with its central concept of ‘emotional memory’ (Harrop, 1992).

9.5.2.6.1 Actors as intuitive experts

Although the actors can barely articulate what their practice entails they are nevertheless assured in their assessment of what is required in interaction with participants. Much of this seems to be based on intuition and emotional reaction and the actors as Agents may be thought to function in FCs as intuitive experts (Sadler-Smith, 2010) in FCs. This expertise includes a capacity instantaneously to transform themselves (Höpfl, 2001), the ability to engage their emotional life to create character (Denzin, 2002) and capacity to ‘be’ in the moment (Harrop, 1992). It also includes an empathic intelligence in the detection and response to cues given off by the other (Goffman, 1959, p.18).

Sadler-Smith and Shefy (2004, p.81) suggest that, “Intuition relies on both expertise (manifested as subconscious decision heuristics) and feelings (manifested as the affect associated with a particular stimulus)”. They also note that intuitive types tend to feel self-sufficient and trusting of their own judgment, able to live with ambiguities and uncertainties.

The need for rapid processing of information in order to create a credible portrayal within very short time frames may mean that instead of a rigorous exploration of all available options the actor, as intuitive expert, depends on only those cues that relate to their previous experience (Sinclair and Ashkanasy, 2005). This coincides with the actors’
feedback based on a preferred set of performance skills. As Pavis (1992) points out, actors tend to be so immersed in the normative cultural practices of their professional world that these appear to them as models of authentic social behaviour. This also makes questionable actors’ suitability as communication consultants in an organisational context, however much the workplace might be characterised as theatre (e.g. Pine and Gilmour, 1997).

In Study 3 some of the actors said they referred initially to a template of ‘types’ during the pre-FC briefing by participants, so as to step quickly into their roles as difficult others. But most of the actors said that during the conversations they fleshed out the details of the character merely by reacting to what the participants were saying and doing. One actor said it ought to be possible to create the character without any briefing at all, simply by reacting in the moment to the participant’s behaviour and language and this best expresses the sense of mirroring. The co-construction of the character of the difficult other by actor and participant is thus about ‘becoming in the moment’, something that Darsø and Meisiek (2007, p.13) note as potential in organisational theatre.

9.5.2.6.2 Participant as dramaturge

The participants are also pentadic Agents in FCs. Not only do participants determine the outline of the scenes to be played but as the conversations progress they strongly influence the emergent scripts. Moreover, by presenting their own difficulties in performance the participants dare to grapple with the breach that has been exposed in their normal relations with others, accepting the challenge to elevate the breach into a theatrical enactment of their particular crisis in front of an audience of peers.

9.5.2.6.3 Self as character

In FCs it is the self as character (Mangham, 1986) that is being performed. Banks (2006, p.190) is of the view that such performances can lead to the alteration of perceived identity and thus to a reimagining of the self and the emergence of the self’s essence. Similarly Weick (1995, p.23) suggests that one learns about one’s identity by projecting oneself into a situation and then observing the consequences. This is perhaps what is meant when the actors in Study 3 talk about ‘letting go’, allowing the improvising self to break free from what Borda terms “the reactionary traits and ideas implanted in our minds and behaviours” (Borda, 2006, p. 30).
9.5.2.6.4 Letting go

Berger (2006) says that we live in dramas written by others. It might be argued that in FCs we are playing a drama co-written by both others and ourselves. The actors mirror back the dialectical tension of the drama between participants and their difficult others and participants hear back what they expect to hear. Participants often respond in ways that are familiar from encounters with the actual difficult others.

This seemingly contradicts the sense that participants are enabled to ‘let go’ in a liminal state where anything can happen. Participants experience the very things that make the conversations ‘difficult’ – emotion, confusion and lack of control. Thus ‘letting go’ in FCs is less about exploration than about ‘daring to grapple’ with the problem. The enactment of the breach reveals the potential consequences of that engagement. The experience itself and consequent feedback can result not only in potential insight into the inner worlds of difficult others, something that is rarely given directly in social relations (Malle, 2004) but also in heightened self-awareness of the participant’s own inner world.

9.5.2.7 Agent-Agency

9.5.2.7.1 Dialogism and voicing of the other

Desmond and Jowitt (2012) argue that in experiential practice the self emerges from relationship and that co-construction of selves arises from the interpenetration of inner and outer worlds. This describes the embodied experience in FCs, for the actor’s intention is to reveal the participant’s ‘self’ in relationship with the ‘difficult other’. In so doing the actors initiate a dialogue between themselves and the individual participants where each side senses and responds to the other in the moment, co-constructing ‘the difficult other’.

The actors’ process demonstrates the Bakhtinian notion that “an utterance is constructed while taking into account possible responsive reactions, for whose sake, in essence, it is actually created. The entire utterance is constructed, as it were, in encountering this response” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.94). This means the voice of ‘the other’ is present in any utterance made by ‘the self’. In FCs both actor and participant are constructing the conversation on the basis of what they expect to hear, but the actor as intuitive expert is both intuitively and deliberately operating this principle of anticipation of the other’s response in order to manifest the problematic that was described in the initial briefing. The actor seeks to evoke, if not provoke, the very interaction that the participant has described as a difficulty in order to disclose the participant’s performance as a basis for feedback and learning.
The exchange between actor and participant is ‘doubly voiced’ (Bakhtin, 1981). The participant voices the difficult other to the actor who in turn, representing the difficult other, voices the participant in the conversation, that is to say, the difficult other’s responses are called forth by the participant themselves. This means that the difficult other is already voiced in anticipation in the participant’s own utterances to the actor, and the actor’s responsive utterances in turn voice the participant’s contribution to the construction of the difficult other. This is at the core of the dialogic co-construction of the relationship between participant and difficult other as hosted by the actor. Weick (1995, p. 33) cites Follett (1924) on interpersonal exchange as “I plus you reacting to you plus me”. For the enacted exchange in FCs this becomes, “I plus my difficult other reacting to the difficult other, mirrored by you, plus me”.

Thus it is argued that Bakhtin’s dialogism explicates the process of mirroring within the liminal space created in FCs.

9.5.2.7.2 Catharsis, embodiment and Illud tempus

Although FCs are a simulation of a difficult conversation they are also a theatrical event in which participants perform in front of an audience. Thus FCs also have an agency as theatre.

Several participants described the experience as cathartic in that it released pent up emotions enabling greater objectivity to bear on their predicament. Others commented that the experience engendered the same emotions they had experienced with the actual ‘difficult other’. The theatre of FCs as an embodied process also seems to have served as a powerful memory prompt for some participants. Thus when confronted by difficult others at work they remembered not only discrete performance skills but also the emotional impact of their FC experience and this gave them confidence to behave differently with these difficult others.

A discussion on the effects of embodied learning on memory is not new in the literature on theatre and business (Lesevre, 2012). Desmond and Jowitt (2012) also note the combined learning effects of physical action, emotion and cognition in an activity. However, there would appear to be little empirical work on the effects of embodied learning in organisational theatre. This research reports participants’ accounts of embodied learning and provides empirical support for Desmond and Jowitt’s holistic and dialogic approach to experiential learning (2012).

Many participants report profound emotional memory and embodied effects that they derive from FCs as theatre. Cole (1975) argues that in theatre the actor is like a shaman
in that he or she makes a journey to the *illud tempus* - the time of origins when Gods walked on the earth and men visited the sky - in order to bring back to the audience crucial lessons from what the illud tempus analogically expresses about the core of our inner being. Cole suggests that at some level the illud tempus remains within us. He further suggests that participatory theatre diminishes the power of theatre in that, as temporarily conscripted participants, the audience fails to make the equivalent of the shamanic journey to the illud tempus. Nevertheless, it is arguable that in FCs, which impel participants to face the breach they experience with their difficult others, that some participants might sense something of a journey to the place of ‘being in the moment’, a journey to a personal illud tempus.

Another way of expressing this is that in the liminal state induced by the interaction with the actor, participants are able to perceive, not so much the possibility of a new self, as the possibility of an old self, the self of ‘before’, less constrained by certain normative expectations and habits. FCs are then not so much about exploration but about ‘seeing’; seeing themselves as authors of their relations and in consequence perceiving that they can author anew. And from that implicit theatrical moment in which they ‘see themselves seeing’ (Boal, 1995), participants re-author and transform their relationships both at work and at home.

However, what has been observed after the event, as shown by the analytic induction exercise in Study 2, is a range of different outcomes from FCs, only a proportion of which have been transformational. The Agency-Act analysis that follows looks at how different elements of the FC process, or diverse agencies, give rise to different outcomes.

### 9.5.2.8 Agency-Act

FCs simulate confrontation with a difficult other, but also provide the basis for feedback and recommendations for behavioural change and performance skills. This constitutes a refractive element in the process where actors draw from a repository of presentation and performance skills they have gained from their experience as professional actors. Thus there are reflective and refractive aspects to the FCs experience that seem to have differential effects as implied by the findings of the analytic induction exercise.

The actor reports on their experience in role as difficult other and the participant learns how they have influenced the other’s experience. Tsoukas (2008, p.161) suggests that a heightened sensitivity to ‘otherness’ is the essence of dialogue. It tells against the monologic separation of self from ‘other as object’. According to Tsoukas (ibid, p.163) such sensitivity helps with imagining others in situations that have not yet arisen, and
thus to a generalised sense of other beyond the specific ‘difficult other’. This suggests that increased awareness in FCs of the part one plays in the construction of social relations might prompt a general dialogic stance in dealings with others. This seems to have been the response of a number of participants, particularly those characterised as ‘Dialogists’ in Study 2.

However, an enhanced dialogic understanding was not the only outcome. Reported outcomes included cathartic effects, but not for all. It included new confidence and empowerment that has been articulated as either a dialogic or instrumental approach, yet not every participant was prepared to take action. Participants also seemed in general to have a more balanced relation between their goals and their relationships, but again this was expressed in different types of action – dialogic, instrumental, strategic or theoretical. Outcomes also included an increased sense of belonging to the team, a sense of a shared leadership vision, a sense of a more ‘whole’ self in relationship and a sense that we are all actors in social interactions and therefore might seek to improvise our relationships without fear or constraint.

The empirical research presented here also indicates how the rehearsal of participants’ own difficult communication leads to sustained transfer of learning to the workplace. This contrasts with the report of the decomposition in the workplace of learning from an analogic theatre experience (Meisiek and Barry, 2007), or of the limited transfer of learning from corporate forum theatre noted by Rae (2011). Yet what is learned and what transferred is various and diverse both in content and implementation. The FCs process addresses different problematic situations and contingencies, underlying only some of which is a breach in normative relations. The FCs process offers active participation, feedback from various perspectives and recommendation of performance skills, but which aspect of learning participants will take up in practice cannot be determined. Nor can the process determine how participants will apply their learning. Some will seek consensus with difficult others by taking a dialogic approach, whilst other participants use new tools and skills to manipulate others. Yet other participants seem to have changed little in their way of dealing with difficult relations.

It was argued in Study 2 that people with different strengths of attributional style respond differently to learning. Thus participants with stronger attributional style may be less responsive to learning - the way they make sense of things is relatively intractable and may need powerful, disconfirming experience to change such fixity.

The differences in the application of learning might be thought to indicate the tension between centripetal and centrifugal dynamics in human relations. As such FCs is a
resource for both the monologist – using techniques to control others and the dialogist –
seeking consensus. The majority of the participants studied here seemed to have
preferred a dialogic approach in practice and many participants commented on the
powerful impact of their FCs experience on both positive team dynamics and on their
personal relations with others.

9.6 Summary conclusion

The pentadic analysis has helped to clarify that the actors manage events in FCs so as
to emphasise communication as performance. This means that participants are, as it
were, drawn into the actors’ domain of expertise. Actors say they seek to serve the
participants but this is nevertheless on the actors’ terms. Actors may well have business
or coaching experience but their role in FCs is as performance experts rather than as
organisational communication consultants, even though the two roles may be conflated.
On the opposite side of the coin, the participants are positioned as actors in FCs. They
script and perform their difficult conversations in front of an audience, a situation that is
dissimilar to their real world experience but again, heightening the perception of
communication as performance. Nevertheless, despite the ambiguities attached to the
roles of the actors and participants and the questionable conflation of roles, where
actors are positioned as organisational consultants and participants as performers, it
may be that is in this very ambiguity that the potency of the process lays.

FCs is a theatre method that enables organisational participants to dramatise their lived
experience without being theatrical. In other words participants are not presented with
theatrical visions of reality nor are they required overtly to enact a part or role as in
many organisational theatre practices or in conventional role-play. Instead, participants
author and enact themselves in their own problematic stories. In FCs participants learn
performance skills that help them in their dealings with others. FCs can also help
participants to become aware of their role in authoring the very difficulties they may be
experiencing. On occasion the method gives rise to significant personal change. FCs is a
powerful experiential learning method that enables participants to grasp learning and
apply it in practice with consequent positive impact on those with whom they work.

It is argued that the effectiveness of the method comes from FCS as a profound
mirroring experience that has a partial dialogism at its core. The word ‘partial’ has two
meanings in this context. Firstly, ‘partial’ is in the sense of ‘incomplete,’ in that the
actor does not have access to the ‘difficult other’s’ life-world in enacting the difficult
other’s character. Secondly, ‘partial’ can be thought of as ‘in favour of’, in that the actor
intends all the dialogue of the interaction towards positive learning outcomes for the
participant. Indeed, several participants recognised that the process is ‘for’ them. This is an important recognition for it represents a key facet of the difference between organisational theatre characterised as ‘reflective’ or ‘refractive’.

FCs is reflective rather than refractive theatre in that it offers no alternative vision of how the world might be, or ought to be, and works primarily to mirror the difficulties participants perceive in their dealings with others. The transformational power of the process derives from the realistic re-creation of breach in normative relations, from the creation of a reflexive, liminal space wherein the exercise is conducted and from the mirroring of the participant’s perception of their ‘difficult other’.

The accurate mirroring of ‘breach’ constitutes a portal into the liminal space, but it is important that participants perceive the difficulties they have experienced, or have yet to experience, as breach in normative relations. This is because in the enactment of breach the actors can lead participants into the crisis phase of the social drama, which is the active site of liminal experience wherein participants are ‘dared to grapple’ with the problem (Boje, 2003).

In FCs, liminality as a ‘betwixt and between’ state (Turner, 1982) has a subtly reflexive nature. Participants often experience the very things they anticipate will make their difficult conversation ‘difficult’ – for example, feeling emotional or out of control. It is arguable that from this consequence of performing difficult conversations in front of other participants, some if not all participants, experience the meeting of imaginative truth (what they fear) with present truth (what they enact), which according to Cole (1975) is the essence of theatre. But theatre is also a ‘mirror up to nature’ and in the moment of interaction between participant and actor, participants often feel that the mirrored ‘difficult other’ is palpably present, causing the participants to fall into patterns of behaviour and response that are all too familiar, yet unwanted. Participants become aware, if only dimly, that somehow they must be part of the conditioning or authoring of the pattern of interaction that they are experiencing; that they contribute to the negative dance of their difficult relations (Rogers, 2008).

Liminality in FCs is less about exploration of the ambiguity of the betwixt and between state and more about the experience of ‘seeing themselves seeing’ (Boal, 1995). It is a reflexive liminality where, to paraphrase Turner (1982, p.44), ‘past seeing’ is suspended, but ‘future seeing’ has not yet begun. Dare one suggest that this future seeing might actually reflect the seeing of ‘before’, which is about perception of self in relation with others that is less constrained by rigid normative expectation, particularly the constraints of the workplace. In this regard examples of participants come to mind.
like the female manager who thought she could not express emotion at work and the project manager who followed the rule that the customer is always right but who in so doing became a victim of bullying.

In sum, FCs is reflective theatre through which participants may learn about themselves in relation with their difficult others. The process works by drawing participants into facing the crisis of the breach with their difficult others. The mirror of their experience is constituted by a partial dialogism that is driven by the participants’ authoring of the difficult other played by the actor. This bestows a reflexive liminality on the encounter wherein the meeting between imaginative and present truth enables the participants to ‘see themselves seeing’. This can lead to transformational changes in participants’ relations with others.

However, the process has a transformational impact on only some of the participants, as the analytic induction exercise in Chapter 7 indicates. This is for a number of reasons, which include the fact that participants do not always perceive the difficult conversation that they bring into the process as breach or crisis. Further, they may regard the difficulty as a problem of control rather than of relation. Or they may have such strongly fixed attributions for explaining others’ behaviour that the FCs experience cannot weaken or change their attributions. Transformation can only happen when participants experience the theatrical moment of seeing themselves seeing. This does not mean to say that participants do not learn new skills or gain understanding from of the experience, as the analytic induction exercise indicates.

Generalising from this research it is argued that transformational change using TIO is likely to come only from exploration, within a state of liminality, of a sense of a breach that has particular meaning and relevance to participants. This implies that TIO interventions that seek transformational change should reflect the participants themselves in predicaments that they recognise as their own. This is the principle that underlies Boal’s Forum Theatre where protagonists representing the audience struggle with predicaments familiar to the audience. However, research into corporate forum theatre (e.g. Clark and Mangham, 2004, Gibb, 2004; Meisiek and Barry, 2007; Rae, 2011, 2013) indicates that there is little transfer of learning from the process, let alone transformational change. Arguably this is because corporate forum theatre tends to be refractive theatre. In other words corporate forum theatre presents issues that have been determined as relevant to organisational aims. Although these may have recognisable relevance to audiences, they are unlikely to be regarded as breach in normative relations, and thus as representing crisis. Further, it appears that much corporate forum theatre avoids underlying issues and challenges that have a more
particular relevance to the audience and thus is unlikely to establish a state of liminality regarded here as essential for transformational enquiry.

This does not mean to say that there are no learning outcomes from TIO and corporate forum theatre, for there are a number of reports of the positive achievement of organisational aims using various theatre processes (e.g. Ferris, 2002; Meisiek and Barry, 2007; Galland et al, 2008; Pollitt, 2010; Bunt, 2011). In these cases TIO would appear to be used predominantly as training and development. However, using theatre simply in the context of training and development is to underplay the reflective, dialogic capacity of TIO to release the full potential of individuals, and perhaps entire organisations, through bringing imaginative truth into play with present truth in the theatre space. As Boal claims, “theatre is born when the human being discovers it can observe itself; when it discovers that, in this act of seeing, it can see itself – see itself in situ: see itself seeing” (Boal, 1995, p. 13).

This profound sense of ‘self-seeing’ is ultimately a reflective experience made possible through theatre. A conceptual contribution in this research is to distinguish between TIO as refraction where audiences are influenced, and even required, to see organisational perspectives - and TIO as reflection where audiences are enabled to ‘see themselves seeing’ within the liminal space that theatre potentially makes available.
CHAPTER 10 – CONCLUSIONS

10.1 Summary of the research

This is a study of Forum Conversations, an organisational theatre method where professional actors and organisational actors role-play the actual difficult communication that organisational actors have at work. The research investigates the nature of the process, its impact and reasons for that impact. It is an inductive inquiry that accesses the views of the participants in the process, including both the professional actors and the organisational participants.

The inquiry was undertaken via three different studies. The first looked at the long-term impact of Forum Conversations on individual participants, using template analysis to produce a number of consistent themes that traced across participants’ responses. The second study looked for explicit changes in participants’ behaviour that they themselves associated with their Forum Conversation experience. This entailed a comparison of attributions that participants made about their communication with others before and after Forum Conversations. The third study returned to a template analysis of the views of a number of professional actors who practice Forum Conversations. The data collection, analysis and findings have been largely interpretive, though this has not obviated the evolution of descriptive statistics in one of the three studies that comprise this research.

The study used pentadic ratio analysis and social drama to highlight the theatrical nature of Forum Conversations and its emphasis on both mirroring and performance skills as instrumental in the resolution process of the social drama. It thus contributes to the notion that Life is Theatre.

10.2 Contribution

The research has made a number of contributions to knowledge. These may be grouped in three different contexts, empirical, conceptual and methodological.

A contribution has been made to the empirical base for understanding organisational theatre in practice. The study has introduced Forum Conversations as an organisational theatre method and through an examination of its process and effects shown empirically how the power of the embodied theatre experience leads to sustained and sometimes transformational changes in behaviour and confidence.
Theoretically the analysis has made a conceptual contribution to the field by posing a conceptual axis between the notions of refractive and reflective theatre to explain how ‘scripts’ may attempt to impose a dominant view or expose the current view through reflection. Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism is used to explicate the effects of embodied action between actor and participant as a mirroring process. In so doing this thesis has introduced new reflexive knowledge about how actors build character ‘in the moment’ with organisational participants. Further, the research has added to work on the application of dramatistic methods of analysis, particularly of pentadic ratio analysis, but also of how Turner’s social drama explicates the processual nature of organisational theatre method. It is considered that TIO maximises its potential when Turner’s thinking about breach, liminality and redress is applied in practice. The research has also contributed to understanding of organisational theatre as a forum for dialogue or radical exploration by scrutinising Forum Conversations as a potential site for these. Finally, in the context of theoretical contribution, an analytic induction exercise has initiated new thinking on how patterns of personal agency might be linked to attributional style.

Contribution has been made to methodology by showing how attributions can be used as a basis of comparison on either side of an event. Further, it was shown how an analytic induction exercise might be prompted from the observation of patterns of change in descriptive statistics.

10.3 Summary of conclusions about Forum Conversations and its impact

This summary addresses the three main research questions

10.3.1 The nature of Forum Conversations

FCs is a rehearsal process that involves all participants in discussion and action around difficult interpersonal communication. Each participant presents and enacts by turn his or her own scenario of difficult communication in the workplace. Many participants perceive the action as intensely realistic and this sense comes from the realistic nature of their own playing in the scene, which the actor as their difficult other absorbs and mirrors back to them.

The process has characteristics of a forum for dialogue and also has potential as an exploratory learning space or radical organisational theatre. FCs has an organisational rather than theatrical feel in that it inhabits and reproduces the organisational world of the participants both in and on their terms. However, it cannot currently be described as a forum for dialogue or a radical organisational theatre learning space. Rather it is currently a site for the learning of performance skills through embodied interaction that
has similarities to rehearsal in conventional theatre but where performance and critique of performance tend to be privileged over open and creative exploration.

In some ways this echoes commentary and findings about Forum Theatre as practiced in an organisational context where it is seen as merely addressing communication skills (Clark and Mangham, 2004b) and bounded by organisational agendas that restrain deeper exploration (Rae, 2013). What is different here is the demonstration of the level of impact of the method on organisational participants.

10.3.2 The Impact of Forum Conversations

The evidence is that Forum Conversations have a powerful impact helping participants to feel and be more in control of their dealings with difficult others once back in the workplace. This is achieved through the application of performance and other interpersonal communication skills and through improved self-awareness and confidence. But this is not the case for all participants, particularly those that have been described as ‘strategists’ and ‘theorists’ in Study 2. Here the impact of Forum Conversations is more muted, contributing perhaps to changes in attention and reflection, but not action. In contrast, for some participants the process may contribute to transformation in their social relations at work and at home. FCs can also have wider effects such as team cohesion. In the context of increasing cost and waste of resource in dealing with conflict generally in the workplace, as noted in Chapter 1, it might be that this method has a wider part to play in addressing such a problematic.

The interactive experience also impacts many participants emotionally, occasionally leading to catharsis and change. The emotional experience can lead to embodied memory effects and sustained learning. It can also lead to transformational changes in participants’ ways of working and relating with others. Such outcomes have been claimed but not demonstrated empirically before in studies of organisational theatre.

10.3.3 Explanation for the impact of Forum Conversations

The impact of FCs seems to derive from the combined effects of a profound mirroring experience within the interaction, from the subsequent multi-perspective feedback process that emphasises the contribution that the participant has made to influence the other’s behaviour and from the embodied learning experience.

The mirroring by the actor of the participant arguably comes from a co-construction of the difficult other where the participant’s attitude and behaviour are reflected through
the actor’s characterisation. This ‘in the moment’ mirroring process can be regarded as a partial dialogism in that both sides are voicing each other in a Bakhtinian sense during the process. This is seen as being core to the interaction.

Feedback after the enacted conversation comes from a range of perspectives including participants’ own perceptions of their embodied authorial experience of the Forum Conversation, feedback from the ‘difficult other’ voiced by the actor and feedback from the audience.

Mirroring and feedback in combination with the embodied experience make for powerful learning that enables a concrete grasp of change that is evidenced in the participants’ individual practice.

**10.4 Limitations**

Limitations in this research are largely methodological and may have arisen from the evolution of my understanding both of how different ontologies are reflected in practice, and the development of my own ontological anchorage. For example, the mixed quantitative/qualitative design that emerged during the attributional analysis meant that quantitative-type limitations became apparent and ‘quantitative’ attempts were made to address such limitations in order to assure the quality of the research.

Hence, because I was the actor/facilitator as well as the researcher in Study 2, I attempted to compensate for this by employing a second, female actor who undertook facilitation though not research of a third of the FCs. In a sense I saw her facilitation as a control though this was not an experiment.

I applied a more quantitative approach to the comparison of attributions simply because the volume of coded data lent itself to statistical analysis. This led to observed patterns of change in the descriptive statistics that prompted me to go back to the qualitative nature of the data via an analytic induction. However, despite comments by Tesch (1990) about numerical data being used to support qualitative analysis this is an unusual approach and is a potential source of limitation.

My practitioner background gave me access to the field in terms of people I knew, both participants and actors, but may have barred me from access to other practitioners and their clients because of competition. Ultimately, all participants came from networking with people I had worked with, and hence all were managers. My background also enabled me to participate in the researched Forum Conversations but I took a non-participatory approach to the analysis. Thus I might have taken a more auto-
ethnographic approach or a more participatory analysis, seeking to share the development of the analysis with participants.

There were a number of methodological consequences of my access to a practitioner network. Firstly, it gave me an opportunity to interview a number of participants in various FCs projects I had been involved in about a year before I began the research. These were the participants in Study 1. This was a convenient way of accessing a research population but it raised concerns about the length of time after Forum Conversations – 1 year - that participants were interviewed. There was also a gap of three months before participants of FCs in Study 2 were re-interviewed. The concern about these time gaps is because periods of 3 months to a year are long enough for memory of particular one-off events like FCs to erode, but also for other intervening events to be responsible for changes that might be wrongly attributed to FCs.

However, an assumption was made that FCs might be sufficiently impactful and novel to be especially memorable. Moreover, it was assumed that they are also more likely to be memorable because FCs deal with personal and difficult situations that draw more attention than ordinary, routine situations and events. A further consequence of such exacerbated attention might be that participants reflect for longer on their difficult experience, especially if their FC learning seems to have had positive results. As one participant put it, “the true learning comes months after the event”. Again, this might make it likely that the FC would be memorable over an extended period.

It was also the case that only a few participants from Study 1 were hesitant when asked to recall events of up to a year earlier, saying that their memory of FCs might be faulty. Most participants readily and confidently supplied detailed memories and there was little sense that they were manufacturing these details. Nevertheless, despite this rationale that the experience of FCs stands out in the memory because of the likelihood of especial attention given to difficult situations, the time gap before participants were interviewed about their FC experience, especially in Study 1, remains as a limitation on the findings of this research.

A limitation arises from my own facilitation of the FCs in Study 2. Because of my research interest it could be argued that these FCs were unrepresentative of how they might be conducted in practice by other actors. I tried to mitigate this by using another actor for some of the researched FCs. I also found that when acting as ‘difficult others’ in the FCs that my ‘flow’ experience tended to be ‘in the moment’ such that my attention was fully taken up with the conversation rather than with research.
Also in Study 2 I decided that the briefing within the Forum Conversation was a useful data source that I could collect whilst facilitating the process as normal practice. This did mean however, that there was an asymmetry between the pre and post FC interviews on a number of counts including the difference in the length of time of the pre and post FC interviews, differences in the context in that one interview was in front of an audience and the other only between researcher and interviewee. There were also differences in the nature of the information required from each interview in that the pre-FC interview sought information so as to play a character whilst the post-FC interview sought information about the participants’ experience. These asymmetries arguably impose limitations on the comparison of attributions between the two interviews.

10.5 Future research

This inductive study has produced a number of leads for future research where a deductive approach might be taken to the study of theatre-based methods. For example, there is a range of outcomes from participation in FCs that might be studied more specifically. These include hypothesis-led inquiry into the particular conditions where interactive theatre might be likely to lead to personal transformational effects, to sustained transfer of learning and to embodied emotional memory. Further research might also include an inquiry into the impact of specific performance skills, as opposed to generic communication skills, on interpersonal communication in the workplace.

Future research might also examine and test the predictive capability of the four patterns of response noted in the analytic induction exercise. Johnson (2004) has shown that one test of theory arising from analytic induction is its predictive capacity. For instance, it might be possible to predict ‘strategist’, ‘instrumentalist’, ‘theorist’ and ‘dialogist’ preferences and in consequence to help different individuals deal with difficult communication in different ways.

Clark (2008) suggests that studies of organisational theatre be used to link to a broader contribution to debates within management and organisations. Future research might also consider the role of methods like Forum Conversations in the development of a radical theatre that presents opportunities for a critical dialogue in organisations.

10.6 Recommendations to practitioners

It would appear that benefits of FCs accrue from the embodied action in the conversation and from the subsequent feedback. Distinction must be made between elements derived from the embodied experience and general performance skills. In this
it must be recognised that performance skills per se are not necessarily the solutions to the presented problems.

Understanding of the co-constructed, dialogic basis of FCs means that actors might become aware that the process is less an improvisation than a mirroring. Training might be given to practitioners to help them professionalise their contribution, which also means establishing standards of practice that all practitioners can enact. It is further recommended that non-actor facilitators might be trained to work with the actors so as to remove the facilitation load that actors carry. It might also reduce confusion about the role of the actor - as actor or consultant. This would be to increase the impact of the experience rather than dilute it or minimise the actor contribution.

The 45-50 minute ‘therapeutic hour’ for each participant seems to have become normalised by virtue of time constraints. In order to maximise the benefits of exploration in rehearsal it might be of value to allow more time for the process.

Forum Conversations is a powerful learning technology/resource that as yet lacks definition as a method. By positioning it as method that arguably provides transformational improvements in management competence it may find a wider uptake in organisational learning and development.

10.7 Concluding reflexive statement

I engaged in this research at the outset because as a practitioner with experience of a number of different organisational theatre methods I had become aware, from casual conversations with organisational participants, that the method that seemed to produce the greatest sense of impact was Forum Conversations. However, I knew little about its effects and understood less about why it seemed to work so well.

Furthermore, I thought that if I researched organisational theatre and Forum Conversations I would somehow gain intellectual mastery of my practice such that my status as trainer would transcend my status as actor.

I have found some unexpected and paradoxical outcomes. I have become aware that an intuitive expert may seek to increase their cognitive knowledge but their strength remains their intuition. I have found that practitioner actors have a bigger impact on participants through their acting than through any communication models they might use. Instead of assuming that my new knowledge would enable me and other actors to dispense with non-actor facilitators, I find myself recommending that actors concentrate on their acting and leave someone else to do the facilitating.
I also find that having assumed that the actors’ strength is to create realistic characters for difficult others, I now think that the actors are realistic because it is the participants who make them so, and that the actors are mirrors rather than creators. At the same time I have also become aware of the consummate skill levels of the actors as they negotiate the intricate subtleties and layers of reflexivity in the co-construction of the characters of the participants’ difficult others. And finally, I have become aware that Forum Conversations can effect profound personal transformation because it helps people ‘to see themselves seeing.’ (Boal, 1995)

10.8 Final conclusion

In conclusion, a contribution has been made to an empirical understanding of how and why Forum Conversations as an organisational theatre intervention supports individual change in an organisational context. The method has been observed to have a powerful impact on most participants, though not all, and this may be contingent on personal and situational characteristics. Differential impact of FCs was noted in an analytic induction exercise that presents fertile ground for further study. The research for the first time directly explores the nature of the engagement between organisational and professional actors. It also adds to the concerned discussion that organisational theatre may be exploited to enforce dominant scripts (Nissley et al, 2004; Rae, 2013). This is inflected in a conceptual contribution that distinguishes between refractive and reflective theatre processes, where refractive theatre presents alternative scripts and reflective theatre exposes current reality.

The potential for using Forum Conversations as a more radical approach, or as a way of instigating dialogue seems not to have been recognised by practitioners and commissioners alike and it has become standardised and routine in practice. Whilst it has powerful impact on individual participants the process would appear to remain under-developed and under-optimised as a site for collaborative thinking and exploration and hence as a site that might contribute more broadly to ‘human flourishing’ (Reason and Bradbury, 2006).
APPENDICES

Chapter 6: - Study 1

Appendix 6.1 - Invitation to take part in Forum Conversations.
Introductory letter and Information sheet.

Dear X

I am writing to you because you participated in a Difficult Conversations coaching event over a year ago. It is quite a long time since the event but I am particularly interested in your perspective as to whether this event leads to more open communication. It seemed to me that you would have an especially interesting view about such things in the context of your work.

In my capacity as academic researcher I would like to ask about such things as:

- Your expectations of the process and its impact at the time
- Any longer term contributions it might have made to the quality of communication in work relationships and meetings
- What it was about the process that you think engaged people

I am sure things have moved on since you did this coaching but I would be very much appreciate an opportunity to interview you about it. I enclose an information sheet about the research and the proposed interview. Please let me know if you would like more information about this. I would be very grateful for your help with my research

Best wishes

Peter Birch
Peter Birch – Doctoral Research: Participant Information Sheet

You are invited to take part in a research study as part of a student project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?
Peter Birch, member of doctoral programme, Manchester Business School, The University of Manchester, Booth Street West, Manchester M15 6PB UK.

Title of the Research
A study of the impact of a theatre-based training intervention used in organizational training and development.

What is the aim of the research?
To gain understanding about the impact of this training on interpersonal communication within organizations.

Why have I been chosen?
You have been chosen because you were a participant on a training programme, which included the practice of difficult conversations with professional actors. The researcher, Peter Birch was involved as an actor on the training programme.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?
The research aspect of this activity asks you to report on your experience of the training both as participant and observer. This entails an interview with the researcher some time after the training activity. Under the guidance of the interviewer you may also be asked to make simple maps of communication relationships that were considered in the context of the original training. All interviews are likely to be audio recorded.

What happens to the data collected?
Recorded Interviews will be transcribed into text and analysed for themes of interest to the researcher. Any maps will be photographed.

How is confidentiality maintained?
No data that is collected will include your name or the names of any other individuals referred to. All data will be kept on DVD or other memory device in a securely locked place. No data kept on computer or on DVD will be identifiable as relating to any individual.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?
It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?
Your voluntary participation would be gratefully appreciated.

What is the duration of the research?
The interview should last for no longer than an hour. This interview will be entirely voluntary and will not be part of your organization’s training. Ordinarily the researcher seeks a face to face interview but where this is impractical or inconvenient will ask for a telephone interview.

Where will the research be conducted?
At a convenient location for you or by telephone.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?
This research is part of a PhD study that when completed will be accessible in the University of Manchester library. If desired a summary of the outcomes of the research will be made available to all participants and sponsors of the research. The researcher will hope to publish some aspect, if not all, of this research. In this case he will ask consent of all participants in the research project.

Contact for further information: Peter.Birch@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk Tel: 07810 104099
Appendix 6.2 - Details of Participants

Participants in Study 1: Anonymised names and roles

- Sarah – Manager in NHS Learning and Development
- Philip – Internal coach NHS
- Jim - Internal coach NHS
- Judith - Internal coach NHS
- Andrew - Internal coach NHS
- June - Internal coach NHS
- Julian – Senior official in government department
- Peter – Head of a project management team
- Rory – Head of Training at a corporate Law firm
- Beryl - Internal coach NHS
- Francis – Head of training of a project management company
- Mary - Internal coach NHS
- Sharon - Internal coach NHS
- Leslie – Head of DBA programme at a Business school
- Brian - Project manager

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Team/Non-team</th>
<th>Sponsor of training</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NHS</td>
<td>Non-team</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law Firm</td>
<td>Team</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Management company</td>
<td>Team</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government department</td>
<td>Non-team</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business School</td>
<td>Non-team</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants and their organisations. Some participants undertook FCs as individuals while others were in their work teams. Four people interviewed were also sponsors of the training.
Appendix 6.3 – Interview Guide

A. What is the background need that you wanted to do something about?

B. Expectations about the use of Actors and Theatre Methods in Organizational Learning

1. What were you thinking to achieve in relation to that need by using actors?
2. Had you any prior experience of using actors?
3. Did you have any reservations? What were they?

C. The Impact of the event(s) (a) on you personally; (b) on the team

1. Did you find it easy to engage/connect to the methods? What helped you engage/connect?
2. Did you feel challenged at all? What by?
3. Did you enjoy the creativity?
4. Did you think the event achieved what you had wanted?
5. How about all the above for the team(s)
6. Any surprises?
7. Was anything missing?
8. What things seemed to have had the most impact?

D. The longer term or sustained impact on communication and relationships

1. What about this work seems to have been sustained amongst the team?
2. Is any of the work still referred to?
3. What do you think particularly helped?
4. Would positive change happened without these interventions?
5. Were there any negative reactions amongst the team?
6. Was it relevant? And what did you feel about the mix of fun and gravitas
Appendix 6.4 - Template Analysis: First cycle Template – template deduced from literature and previous knowledge and experience.

### Experience of Forum Conversations during the Event

#### Participation in Process
1. Engagement
   a. Rapport
   b. Readiness
   c. Trust
   d. Confidence
   e. Confidentiality
2. Experience of Actor as difficult ‘other’
   a. Realism
   b. Replay
   c. Emotion
   d. Safety
   e. Feedback of ‘other’s’ internal experience
3. Experience of Actor as Facilitator
   a. Containment
   b. Group Dynamic
4. Experience as Participant/Observer
   a. Realism
   b. Challenge
   c. Emotion
   d. Safety
   e. Group effects

### Learning
1. Skills
   a. Behavioural
   b. Tools
2. Awareness
   a. Emotional level
   b. Behavioural level
   c. Impact on others

### Post Event Learning Transfer

#### Performance
1. Specific (engagement with a difficult ‘other’)
   a. Use of new skills
   b. Use of new tools
   c. Confidence
   d. Tactical changes
2. General (all conversations)
   a. Confidence
   b. Attributional changes
   c. Self – awareness

#### Developmental Changes (Personal Effects)
1. Psychological (e.g. locus of control)
2. Behavioural
3. Emotional
4. Intersubjective contracting

#### Corporate Changes (Group Effects)
1. Team Effects
2. Leadership
## Appendix 6.5 – 4th Cycle Template – Study 1

### STUDY 1 TEMPLATE ANALYSIS 3rd CYCLE – FORUM CONVERSATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE</th>
<th>2. SAFETY</th>
<th>3. LEARNING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Participant (Self-experience)</td>
<td>1. Participant experience of Actor</td>
<td>1. Detachment from actual experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Engagement</td>
<td>1. As ‘Difficult other’</td>
<td>1. Safe location/environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Attraction</td>
<td>1. Real portrayal</td>
<td>1. Away from team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Fresh/interesting/exciting</td>
<td>1. Demeanour NVB, script</td>
<td>2. Real experience without risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Learning opportunity</td>
<td>2. Investment in ‘reality’ of performance</td>
<td>2. Knowing what the deal is (contracting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Relevance</td>
<td>2. Dealing with what is there.</td>
<td>1. Supportive environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rehearsal</td>
<td>3. Physical differences are not distracting</td>
<td>2. It’s ‘for’ the participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Relevant</td>
<td>1. Real experience without risk</td>
<td>1. Everyone will be exposed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Credibility (Trust)</td>
<td>3. Real experience without risk</td>
<td>2. Quality of feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Previous experience of actors</td>
<td>4. Credibility of all involved</td>
<td>5. Openness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Set up of intervention</td>
<td>5. Openness</td>
<td>1. Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Absorption in scenarios</td>
<td>4. Speed</td>
<td>1. Learning by doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Participants’ own scripts</td>
<td>1. Speed of transformation</td>
<td>1. Pace of action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Suspension of disbelief</td>
<td>1. Speed of adaptation to org culture</td>
<td>2. Relevance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Real behaviour – not acting</td>
<td>5. Depth of emotion in performance</td>
<td>2. Saying the words; seeing the action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Replication of actual ‘felt’ experience</td>
<td>5. Feedback</td>
<td>2. Learning by witnessing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Real challenge</td>
<td>1. Feedback as ‘other’</td>
<td>1. Three way (actor, observer, participant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Emotion</td>
<td>2. feedback as ‘self’</td>
<td>2. Focused awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Emotion key to actual experience</td>
<td>1. Hard hitting and honest</td>
<td>1. Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Preparation/ contracting</td>
<td>3. Relevance</td>
<td>2. Different perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Turntaking (aspects of politics)</td>
<td>3. Feedback</td>
<td>2. Reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Realistic</td>
<td>2. Outcomes</td>
<td>1. Enduring impact on individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Replication of actual ‘felt’ experience</td>
<td>2. feedback as ‘self’</td>
<td>2. Awareness of self and other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Real challenge</td>
<td>3. As facilitator</td>
<td>3. New behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Performance anxiety – exposure</td>
<td>1. Role</td>
<td>2. Wider impact on team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Emotion key to actual experience</td>
<td>2. Time management</td>
<td>3. General perception of learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Preparation/ contracting</td>
<td>1. Separation between acting and facilitating</td>
<td>2. Impactful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dynamic</td>
<td>2. Preparation</td>
<td>3. Clarity of process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Membership</td>
<td>3. Clarity of process</td>
<td>4. Engaging participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Connection to process</td>
<td>4. Engagement in scenarios</td>
<td>5. Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Turntaking (aspects of politics)</td>
<td>1. As ‘other’</td>
<td>1. Enduring impact on individual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4th Cycle Template – Study 1**
Chapter 7 Study 2 – Attribution Analysis

Appendix 7.1 - The rubric for representing Attributions in text is as follows.

The Cause is underlined. The Cause has a forward slash behind it in order to contain the Cause/Outcome sequence. An arrow is placed within the text pointing from the Cause to the Outcome. The number of the attribution in the sequence precedes the underlined Cause. This is done here in bold so as to pull it out of the text. The general template is –

1. **Cause** > Outcome /

This order is reversed where Outcome precedes Cause in the text

/Outcome < 1. **Cause**

Thus the example sentence:

“I was tired so I went to bed early” becomes 1. **I was tired** so > I went to bed early./

The same sentence reversing the Cause/Outcome sequence would be notified as

/I went to bed early < 1. because **I was tired**

In the extended sentence

“I was tired so I went to bed early and consequently missed the film”

the middle phrase needs to be represented as both Cause and Outcome. This is done by underlining the phrase with dots. Thus this sentence is notified as:

1. **I was tired** so > 2. **I went to bed early/** > and consequently missed the film /

The rearranged sentence “I went to bed early because I was tired and consequently missed the film” becomes

/ 1. **I went to bed early** [< 2. because **I was tired** ] > and consequently missed the film./
Note that a forward slash precedes ‘I went to bed early’ because it denotes the beginning of an Outcome. Also the 2nd attribution in the notated sequence “because I was tired” is separated out from the Cause/Outcome sequence of attribution 1. “I went to bed early… and consequently missed the film”, by bracketing it as shown.

Where there is extraneous material in the text that is not directly read as Cause or Outcome this is put within parentheses. Thus the sentence:

“There had been glorious sunshine all day but I went to bed early after a warm mug of tea because I was tired and consequently missed the film”

becomes –

(There had been glorious sunshine all day but) / 1. I went to bed early (after a warm mug of tea) [< 2. because I was tired ] > and consequently missed the film./

Attribution Lists

Once the text has been annotated in this way an attribution list can be made as:

1. I went to bed early>and consequently missed the film/

2. I was tired>so went to bed early/

This arrangement facilitates later coding against attributional dimensions

It may sometimes happen that one cause may have several outcomes. In this case each cause and effect sequence is separated out and the attribution listed numerically as for example 1, 1a, 1b and so on.

1. I went to bed early > and missed the film/
   1a. > and felt really good the next day/

Occasionally Attributions emerge from the conversation between interviewer and interviewee. It is then noted where the participant’s response to a question gives an attribution.

**Speaker - Target - Agent**

Attributions may be ascribed to three different people who are in relation to each other in the attributional sequence. These are the person making the attributions, the Speaker (‘because I was tired’), the Target of the cause (‘sitting in the sun all day made Roger tired’), and the Agent of the cause (‘Peter obliged Roger to sit all
day in the sunshine’). Clearly the Speaker could also be Agent and Target (‘I chose to sit in the sunshine all day which made me feel tired’). According to Munton et al this three-fold distinction enables the analyst to distinguish to what degree the Speaker is the Agent or Target of the attributions. Furthermore it enables the analyst to discern how much the Speaker nominates some another Agent as the Cause. Clearly this provides some evidence about locus of control for example. Speaker(s), Agent(s) and Target(s) can be coded numerically for computer manipulations.

At this stage it is intended to use the 5 dimensions of the LACS plus a further dimension Interest/Affect. The coding of these 6 dimensions is to be as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stable (1)</th>
<th>Unstable (0)</th>
<th>Ambiguous (2)</th>
<th>Not Relevant NR (3)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific (1)</td>
<td>Global (0)</td>
<td>Ambiguous (2)</td>
<td>NR (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal (1)</td>
<td>External (0)</td>
<td>Ambiguous (2)</td>
<td>NR (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal (1)</td>
<td>Universal (0)</td>
<td>Ambiguous (2)</td>
<td>NR (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controllable (1)</td>
<td>Uncontrollable (0)</td>
<td>Ambiguous (2)</td>
<td>NR (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest (1)</td>
<td>Affect (0)</td>
<td>Ambiguous (2)</td>
<td>NR (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By combining Speaker, Agent and Target with these dimensional codings one can construct a table as below. The sentence ‘I obliged Roger to sit in the sun all day which made him tired so he went to bed early and consequently missed the film’ is coded in the table. ‘I’ as Speaker is coded (1) and Roger as Agent and Target is coded (0) while any other Agent is coded (2) First of all the text is analysed and annotated for attributions as:

1. I obliged Roger > 2. to sit in the sun all day/ > 3. which made him tired > 4. so he went to bed early/ >, and consequently missed the film/

Attribution List
1. I obliged Roger > to sit in the sun all day /
2. Sit(ting) in the sun all day > made him tired /
3. (Roger) tired > went to bed early /
4. Went to bed early > missed the film /
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Attribution Number</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Speaker</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Agent</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Target</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Stable (1) Unstable (0) Amb (2)</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Global (1) Specific (0) Amb (2)</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>7.</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>8.</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Personal (1) Universal (0) Amb (2) [Target]</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Cont (1) Uncont (0) Amb (2) [Speaker]</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Cont (1) Uncont (0) Amb (2) [Agent]</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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Appendix 7.2 - MBS11 PRE-FC ATTRIBUTION LIST

1. I work in an industry that is basically component and electronic distribution, and he has come from the drinks industry. > So he knows absolutely nothing about our market./

2. He has no idea how much he doesn’t understand the market. > The problem that we are having with him/

3. He used to work at Y. And it’s just so completely different - the business model. > and he seems to think that you can apply just the same simple model that Y have to our industry./

4. He just doesn’t get it. > and I am like, ”what do you mean?”/

5. There is always is one.” So he says there must be (a killer question). > And I says, ”seriously there isn’t one. I have been doing it for 20 years and I have never found one. I would love to find one”/

6. He’s a fairly humourless, serious character. > He’s made it very clear to everyone that he doesn’t socialise./

7. He’s coming in to a big role. > He might be doing it on purpose/

8. He might be coming in doing the leadership thing > and one of the methods might be starting off and stamping his authority as a leader in the first place – purposely distancing himself./

9. He seems to be like that (purposely distant) with virtually everybody, yeah, to the point of annoyance. > He’s been with the company about four weeks now and he’s managed to upset more people than I have seen in my life before./

10. I guess I am a bit like that myself. (aggressive) > I don’t actually mind that too much/

11. This isn’t one industry.> there is no killer question/

12. He just hasn’t got a handle on the company at all at the moment. > And then he’s coming to us thinking we are the same as them and telling us that these are all the things we should be doing and we are not doing a very good job. /

12a. > He’s telling them the things they should be doing which is all the things we ‘ve been doing for years. /

13. He doesn’t really know me > it’s a personal review meeting? MBS11: yes. Well, not really on me personally/

14. It’s going to be a very difficult meeting. > I have got to work out how to play this guy./

15. He is quite an unusual character. > I have got to work out how to play this guy/

16. He’s a strange character. > there’s no general relaxed rapport building or anything like that. Straight to business./

17. it’s like, “oh right, right”, and the next time you see him you have exactly the same conversation. > Doesn’t seem to be listening. I’ve said a few things but…/

18. Making everyone feel uncomfortable and then starting to bring everyone back into the fold. > he might be doing it all on purpose and he might turn out to be a brilliant leader and he is done a fantastic job of distancing himself to begin with/

19. He’s taken on a job that’s beyond him at the moment. > he doesn’t quite know what he is doing/

20. When I have said a couple of things he has kind of been “oh right right, yeah, yeah”I have seen a nervousness in him a couple of times when I have challenged him. Not challenged hard but/

21. He kind of gets a bit nervous and goes off the conversation and takes it somewhere else. > I have seen nervousness in him a couple of times when I have challenged him. Not challenged hard but/
22. I do actually feel that he’s taken on a job that’s a lot bigger – I almost feel that he’s blagged his way in. As soon as you get close to actually making a point that he can’t back away from he’ll try and steer the conversation somewhere else.

23. He’s been a sales director but he might have been a sales director of 20 people in a mature industry where he knows what he is doing being using a similar business model for years, but he’s come in to us – totally different business model. > I do feel that he’s probably out of his depth at the moment and he’s struggling a bit.

24. There’s a standing head of sales there, who’s going to stay in place a few months – > so he could actually stand back and just learn.

25. He’s the new big thing and he’s got great ideas. > it’s kind of like he’s come in and telling everyone what to do.

26. He hasn’t understood the difference between the business units at all. > P: So he has just assumed that one size fits all really. MBS11: yeah/

27. We should have done some big changes to the main sales force years ago. > the sales have been pretty bad and the sales force have been struggling for a number of years.

28. So my area has actually been performing very well, but I don’t think he understands that yet. > So he is kind of tarring us with the same brush.

29. He just doesn’t want to know. > You see him see you coming and it’s head down.

30. I’m really struggling as to how to handle this guy because humour doesn’t seem to work, rapport doesn’t seem to work, and he doesn’t understand the business. > So kind of gives you nowhere to go with the conversation.

MBS11 POST-FC ATTRIBUTION LIST

1. the approach that you coached me on to take seemed to work very well. > And instead of it becoming a confrontational conversation it ended with, “it looks like you are on the right track, do a bit a more work on it and that’s great”.

2. Rather than trying to go head first > It’s a much easier approach.

2a. > It’s less stressful

3. And I think it’s having greater influence on him. > he’s really kind of leaving me to it and letting me get on with it.

3a. > And also the leadership team was taken down from seven people to five. And I am one of the five, and the two guys that went were very experienced and had been in the job a long time. I have been in the job about nine months.

3b. > And he’s also increased the size of my team as well.

4. There is a caveat on it at the moment though > I’ve not got the job long term. /

5. He’s basically said, he wants me to do another 6 months as an interim. > and if that goes well the job’s mine.

6. I’m not sure I trust the guy and > I still have a few concerns that he’s just doing a bit of manoeuvring at the moment to move someone else in.

7. There’s not a lot I can do with that > I’ve just got to go with it.

8. He claims to come from a background of coaching consultancy but I have not seen any coaching from him yet. > He doesn’t do the soft, fluffy stuff at all. He’s just very direct, very directive as well.

9. He’s only ever worked in one organisation selling beers and spirits. > and its pretty obvious he doesn’t understand some of the differences in our market and the way it works.
10. And what’s transpired through conversation is his sales guys used to do 6 calls a day, but they never made appointments – they could just walk into the club or whatever > he wants to increase the number of customers my sales guys are seeing from 4 a day to 6 a day/

11. Whereas with our market it’s a professional business to business arena, with professional buyers; > you can’t get to see them without making an appointment./

12. So the thing that he’s not factored in > is that to do 6 calls a day you have got to get 24 appointments for the following week which can take you all day easily./

13. And he doesn’t get that at the moment. > And that is the next hard conversation I am going to have with him./

14. you have had some success by taking a different approach, MBS11: Yes > P: and that makes you feel more comfortable – feels like you have got more space as well? MBS11: yeah, a little bit./

15. P: do you think that is down to working with him in a slightly different way? MBS11:Yeah > he’s given you a bit more of your team and a bit more time to do stuff./

16. And I think what we went through helped me find a different way to communicate with him, > I was struggling to find the right way to communicate with him. which seems to be working, so far/

17. He is a very strong-willed person. Basically ‘his way is right’, > which makes it very, very difficult when you are trying to disagree with him./

18. When he is plainly wrong and coming from a different environment > that isn’t as easy...it’s like a knowledge transfer that can’t be transferred./

19. you have got is this a guy whose very strong willed who believes he’s right, or hoping his way is right, > and you find yourself in a position where either you have got to do something that you know is fundamentally wrong and won’t work/,

19a. > or you have got to find a way of influencing and just kind of curve him away from that/ and

20. by talking that approach that we went through > that is helping me to find a way to influence him without becoming confrontational./

21. the best part about it that you did, was conveying the emotional state he would be in, in the way I had the conversation in the first place. > That really is the key thing that made the difference./

22. I’ve not had that kind of feedback (emotional state). What no one has ever done before is what you did, which is: the way that made me feel in that part is like this. > that is what was so powerful about it./

23. So that meant it reproduced for you how that was and that actually happened for you again when you talked to him again? MBS11: Yes > that is what was so powerful about it./

24. I went in with a much clearer view on how I was going to handle it right from the start. And I stuck to that way > and it was very obvious how very quickly he was, if you want a better description, he was buying into communicating with me in the way I was talking./

25. Whereas if I had taken my original approach > it wouldn’t have gone well./

26. the type of products are too diverse to find a killer question. > And in my original approach I was trying to tell him that there isn’t one because of the customer base/

27. I took an approach of saying "I can understand where you are coming from, and yes, it would be very valuable to find information that would signify the potential of the customer, and I believe its pretty difficult but I have got a few ideas that I can try. And I outlined what those ideas were. > And as I say he ended the conversation with, "It sounds like you are on the right track, not exactly what I am looking for, but you are on the right track, so do some more work on it./

28. Whereas in the past if I’d used my approach I’d have dug my heels in, he’d have dug his heels in, > and then he’d have forced me./

28a > ' I would have become the problem that was in the way'./
29. I am also taking the approach of deductive reasoning with him. > What I am going to do is try several different methods to try and find this killer question, that he’s aware of and understands and agrees with what I am trying to do.

30. I will find a killer question and > I will have been proved wrong.

31. he will realise that all I am doing is trying to get around a continuous circle > trying to find the answer to something that can’t be answered. 

32. at which point I am hoping the guy is bright enough to say, > “OK I get it now, there is no easy answer to this. You may have part of the answer which gives us some kind if indication of the size of the potential but its not as simple as I thought it was”.

33. I think again the work that we did in understanding the emotional side – not just of me but of the person I am talking to > that helped me understand the coaching course more.

34. And actually another thing I am looking at doing based on that experience of talking to you is, > we’ve got a sales conference coming up where part of the retraining of the sales force to be more commercial is they want to do a thing of how you handle negotiations. And I am involved with putting that together.

35. that they need to put something in about the emotional state of the buyer when he goes into that meeting > that has a big impact on the kind of outcome you are going to get.

36. But really most of what happens in business, whether people agree with it or not, between individuals a lot of it is emotionally driven. > And that is probably something I wouldn’t have thought of before.

37. if you don’t get the emotional part right in the roleplay > you end up with a pointless roleplay.

38. that you took on the role, obviously emotionally as well, is that you were able to give feedback on how it made the person I was going to have conversation with, how it would make them feel. > I think standing out, absolutely unequivocally, the big difference with what we did compared to some of the things I’ve done before. That was the big thing. That stands out above anything else.

39. that’s a feedback I have never had before. > And it was very, very powerful.

40. when you say ‘powerful’, it opened your eyes? MBS11: yes. > It got me to think about the conversation in a different way. About the emotional state of the person I was talking to and how it made them feel.

40a. > And it also reminded me that the bossman on the other side of the table was actually a human being.

41. what I am saying is affecting him emotionally > and will affect the judgements that he makes about me.

42. And that’s the thing above all else that I need to get control over – how I make people feel. > So it constructs the conversation in a different way.

43. people remain in an almost childlike emotional state that > the entire world is run by 10-yr olds! It scared me a bit when I thought that – we’re run by a bunch of kids.

44. If it doesn’t continue to work then from what I have seen of the way the guy operates > I basically need to look for another job.

45. Over a period of time he’ll get to know me better and > will get more comfortable communicating and basically get past this stage.

46. Because he’s new into the company, doesn’t know me very well, doesn’t know what my abilities are and what have you. > It’s like working through a process to get to know him in a way, and for him to get to know where I am coming from.

47. And I am hoping that over a period of time my own successes and abilities will start to speak for themselves and > we can relax a little bit away from that approach and probably get more direct with each other.
48. But if that doesn’t happen > that is going to be tough. /

49. I do think there is a danger that if I overdo this > he will get to a point where he thinks I am just agreeing with him all the time, rather than challenging. /

49a. > So I have got to try and find the happy medium between those two as I go forward. /

50. So I have got to try and find the happy medium between those two as I go forward. > Because as I get to know him more I have probably got to challenge more and start to be a little bit more direct and try and judge what kind of emotional state that has created in him as I go forward, which isn’t going to be easy. /

51. When he came in and met my sales force properly for the first time he came and did an hour presentation on Tuesday morning last week. We had a two day sales meeting and > I then spent the rest of Tuesday and Wednesday trying to pick up them all back up off the floor. /

52. His answer was very interesting, “Ah, there’s a culture we need to break”, > which I thought straightaway as him not recognising that he had caused the issue and was blaming something else for it straightaway. /

53. “Well, its only to be expected because you have come in new, you have reorganised everything, you have just fired a load of people, so of course it’s is going to take a while to build trust up again, because they just don’t know where you are coming from at the moment. > And he said, > “Yeah, yeah, that makes sense”. /

54. Because my team are terrified of him at the moment. > So I didn’t want to give him the impression that everything was rosy. He needed to hear that feedback./
### Appendix 7.3 - Attributional Coding Pre and Post FC

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# Attributional Coding Post-FC (cont.)

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<th>Contingent/Uncontingent</th>
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### Frequencies and % of coded dimensions

1. Number of 
   
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3. Number of participants as Agent
   
|   | 29 | 47 |

3. Number of other as Agent
   
|   | 25 | 41 |

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<td>13. Cont (1) Uncod (0) Amb (2) [Speaker]</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

f = raw number of coded attributions
% = % of attributions from total for each dimension
Chapter 8: Template Analysis of Actors

Appendix 8.1 – Interview Guide Organisational Theatre Professionals

A. Experience and Expectations about the use of Actors and Theatre Methods in Organizational Learning

1) What, if any, are the main differences between conventional theatre work and corporate theatre?
2) What do you think are the key competences for this work?
3) What training have you had for this work?
4) How do you prepare?
5) What business/developmental models and frameworks, if any, do you use?
6) What do you think such methods achieve?
7) Do you have any reservations about this work?
   What are they?

B. The Impact of the event(s) (a) on you personally; (b) on the participant

8) What is the process of X Conversations?
9) Did you find it easy to engage/connect with the participants?
   What helps you engage/connect?
10) What is going on for you in the process?
    How do you separate yourself from the character?
    Do you change character as the session goes on?
11) How does feedback work?
    Do you prefer to feedback in role or as yourself?
    What are the benefits of feedback in role or as yourself
12) What's in it for you?
13) Did you feel challenged at all?
14) What by?
15) Did you feel safe?
   What made you feel safe?
16) Do you enjoy this work?
17) Did you think the event achieves what is intended?
18) What difficulties do you encounter?
19) How does it leave you in the end?
20) Any surprises?
21) Is there anything missing from the whole process?
22) What things seemed to have had the most impact?

C. The longer term or sustained impact on communication and relationships

23) Do you know if the impact of this work is sustained for participants?
24) Do you feel this work has helped you in your own work life?
25) What do you think particularly helps participants?
26) Would positive change happen without these interventions?
27) Is it relevant? What did you feel about a mix of fun and gravitas
### Appendix 8.2 - Initial a priori Template – Study 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. ACTORS’ EXPERIENCE</th>
<th>2. NATURE OF PROCESS</th>
<th>3. HELPING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Self experience</td>
<td>1. Preparation</td>
<td>1. Client Focus</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. In the moment</td>
<td>1. Ability</td>
<td>1. Address needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Instinct</td>
<td>1. Intelligence</td>
<td>1. speed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Flow</td>
<td>2. good actor</td>
<td>2. Role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Character formation</td>
<td>3. instinctive</td>
<td>3. performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Multi-level</td>
<td>4. ‘reading’ people</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. sequence</td>
<td>5. good improviser</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. development</td>
<td>6. quick thinking</td>
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<td>3. physicality</td>
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<td>4. Enjoyment</td>
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<td>1. know client background</td>
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<td>7. Effort</td>
<td>2. understand their world</td>
<td>1. openness</td>
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<td>1. difficulties if not</td>
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<td>6. Knowledge of org. models</td>
<td>3. lack of confidence in</td>
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## Appendix 8.3 – 3rd cycle Template - Study 3

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<td>1. Preparation</td>
<td>1. Facilitation</td>
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<td>1. Flow effects</td>
<td>1. Ability</td>
<td>2. Service</td>
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<td>1. In the moment</td>
<td>1. Interpersonal skills</td>
<td>1. Client needs</td>
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<td>2. internal players</td>
<td>2. Quick thinking</td>
<td>1. Sponsor determined</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Focus</td>
<td>2. Analytical skills</td>
<td>2. Work bounded</td>
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<td>4. It just happens</td>
<td>2. Short term memory</td>
<td>3. Understand client brief</td>
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<td>8. Energising</td>
<td>3. Good improviser</td>
<td>1. In coaching role</td>
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<td>2. Effort</td>
<td>4. Spontaneity</td>
<td>1. Professionalism</td>
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<td>1. Intensity</td>
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<td>2. Sensitivity</td>
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<td>2. Stress of improvisation</td>
<td>1. Client context</td>
<td>3. Acting knowledge</td>
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<td>3. Demand of facilitation</td>
<td>1. client background</td>
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<td>3. Nature of client</td>
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<td>3. understand client world</td>
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<td>4. Feel exposed</td>
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<td>2. Timings</td>
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<td>5. Just let it happen</td>
<td>3. Feedback</td>
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<td>7. Challenge actors’ competence</td>
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<td>7. Adapt to client need</td>
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## Appendix 9.1 Comparison of research findings with other empirical studies in relation to the three research questions

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<th>FCs study</th>
<th>Organisational Theatre studies</th>
<th>Conventional role play studies</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What is the nature of the FCs process?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Immersive participation</td>
<td>Accounted for in various typologies (e.g. Nissley et al, 2004; Clark, 2008; Rae, 2011)</td>
<td>Some evidence of immersive action research programmes (Pollitt, 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehearsal of presented performance</td>
<td>Forum Theatre as investigation of effective behaviour (e.g. Rae, 2011)</td>
<td>Training of performance at customer interface (Daly et al, 2009; Pollitt, 2010; Bunt, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic</td>
<td>Alternative realities (Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004)</td>
<td>Reproduced realities (Galland et al, 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapid, unprepared briefing</td>
<td>Lengthy preparation and scripted theatre (Clark and Mangham, 2004b; Meisiek and Barry, 2007)</td>
<td>Lengthy preparation (Craig and Amernic, 1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional effects from embodied experience can lead to catharsis and emotional memory</td>
<td>Catharsis effects are ambiguous (Meisiek, 2004)</td>
<td>No evidence found</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety to 'perform' is a key feature</td>
<td>Safety is questionable (Rae, 2011; Gibb, 2004)</td>
<td>Questionable: role play may involve personal agendas and confrontation (van Ment, 1989; Craig and Amernic, 1994; Pollitt, 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the moment</td>
<td>Theatre as embodied 'in the moment' experience (Darsø et al, 2007)</td>
<td>Training of improvisation skills (Daly et al, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCs study</td>
<td>Organisational Theatre studies</td>
<td>Conventional role play studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is the impact of FCs?</strong></td>
<td>Inconclusive (e.g. Meisiek and Barry, 2007; Rae, 2011)</td>
<td>Positive organisational effects (e.g. Pollitt, 2010; Bunt, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustained – training transfer</td>
<td>Some evidence (Galland et al, 2008). Claims for organisational theatre</td>
<td>(Craig and Amernic, 1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>Inconclusive in empirical studies but many claims by practitioners</td>
<td>Emotional labour outcomes (Bunt, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident levels are greatly</td>
<td>Issues of emotional labour (Höpfl and Linstead, 1993)</td>
<td>Bus drivers in Ulster (Pollitt, 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>raised</td>
<td></td>
<td>Improvisation skills for Cabin crew (Daly et al, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance skills</td>
<td>Leadership training (Olivier, 2001)</td>
<td>Taught Improvisational skills (Daly et al, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal transformation</td>
<td>No direct evidence</td>
<td>No direct evidence within claims for positive organisational outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team effects such as greater</td>
<td>Ambiguous (Meisiek and Barry, 2007)</td>
<td>Positive organisational outcomes (e.g. Pollitt, 2010; Bunt, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in attributional style</td>
<td>Some changes measured on attribution style questionnaires (Proudfoot, 2001)</td>
<td>No evidence found</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why do FCs have an impact?</strong></td>
<td>Mixed outcomes (Meisiek and Barry, 2007) Study of positive relevance for managers (Salgado, 2008)</td>
<td>Creation of realistic worlds-mixed reaction (Craig and Amernic, 1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant to organisational</td>
<td>Inconclusive in a gender study- women more positive than men (Monks, 2001)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>context</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Safe challenge</td>
<td>casual claims for safe environment (Galland et al, 2008)</td>
<td>Various immersive role play programmes (e.g. Craig and Amernic, 1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback from number of sources</td>
<td>Immersive learning programme for scientists (Galland et al, 2008)</td>
<td>No specific evidence</td>
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<td>– hearing from ‘the other’</td>
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<td>Embodied Experience:</td>
<td>Claims from practitioners (e.g. Darsø et al, 2007)</td>
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<td>The opportunity to have the</td>
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<td>Participants as authors. In</td>
<td>Indirect evidence in study of Forum Theatre (Meisiek and Barry, 2007)</td>
<td>No specific evidence</td>
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REFERENCES


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