

# **In Search of Organization Consulting's Other: Introducing Poststructural Organization Theory to Systemic Practices of Consulting**

*Prof. Dr. Dörte Resch\**

*Dr. Pascal Dey\*\**

*Florian Schulz\*\*\**

\*University of Applied Sciences Vorarlberg, Austria

\*\*University of Applied Sciences Northwestern Switzerland

\*\*\*University of St. Gallen, Switzerland

Contact Address: Prof. Dr. Dörte Resch  
University of St. Gallen  
Varnbühlstrasse 19  
9000 St. Gallen  
Switzerland  
Tel.: 0041-79-483-23-59  
Fax: 0041-71-224-70-43

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Abstract

The aim of the present contribution is two-fold: first, to critically reflect the prevailing management consulting literature against the backdrop of (poststructuralist) organization theory. The second and related objective is to find ways to render the respective insights amenable to practice. The argument will reveal along the following three steps. In the first step, the rationalistic heritage of consulting is brought to light, which holds, for instance, that consulting forms a linear process based on sound planning, implementation and monitoring. Second, in an attempt to transcend the individualist, realist and rationalist grounding of management consulting, reference will be made to poststructural organization theory which is supposed to decouple consulting from its rationalist, progressive presumption. The third part is devoted to reflect on the practical application of a non-realist approach. Systemic consulting approaches will therefore be summoned and blended with the tenets of poststructural thinking. Potential synergies between the two streams of thought will be discussed on the basis of a consulting project carried out in a large non-profit organization.

## Introduction

Consulting despite its popularity has so far been assessed concerning its root assumptions as well as in relation to the development or practices which implicitly challenge just those root assumptions on consultancy. This paper offers a first exploration into this field by investigating into three perspectives which are put into relation. We will go about this in three main steps. First the dominant rationale of management consulting will be explored so as to reveal its root assumption, e.g. rationalism, realism, individualism.

In a second step these 'paradigmatic choices' will be critically assessed against the background of organization theory. In so doing, particular emphasis will be put on poststructural organization theory, as it offers a route away from the afore mentioned root assumptions of rationalism and realism with traditional management consulting.

The third step will be to inquire practices of organizational consulting, naming the systemic perspective, which claim to consider the shortfalls of traditional modes of consulting. Again, these practices of systemic consulting will be analyzed in the light of poststructural organization theory. In concluding, the critique of management consulting as well as on the identified shortcoming of so called systemic consulting will be discussed in order to probe potential extensions of the given order of knowledge.

## Research on the practice of management consultancy

Research on management consulting can be roughly divided in two camps. First, there is a bulk of publications focusing on improvements of the consultancy business, predominantly published by practitioners (e.g. Collins, 2009; Markham, 2005; Wohlgemuth & Gfrörer, 2007 Of grammatology) yet not exclusively (e.g. Bamberger, 2005; Golembiewski, 1993; Niedereichholz, 2000; Niedereichholz, 2001).

The second stream of consultancy research can be called 'critical', which too is divided into a more practice-oriented camp (e.g. Malik, 2006; O'Shea & Madigan, 1998) and one with a more scholarly focus (e.g. Fincham & Clark, 2002; M. Kipping & Engwall, 2002; Meriläinen, Tienari, Thomas, & Davies, 2004). What connects the mainstream and the critical camp is that the latter focuses on its practical counter-part, thus investigating, for

instance, how consulting is constructed as a practical field, which functions consulting or roles gets to fulfill in the 'corporate reality', which consequences of the given practices are implied for organizations and consultancy firms. The difference vis-à-vis the above mentioned mainstream literature on consultancy practice is that it fundamentally questions those practices. The first named literature on the application of consulting becomes the focus of research from the critical perspective - though not only the literature but also displayed practices of consultancy.

This article starts its argument on the basis of the critical camp as this employs both the practical and the (critical) reflection upon these practices, thus making a first step in comprehending the sensemaking of today's consulting business.

#### Consulting as 'rational business'

Armbruester (2004) argues that in traditional large management consultancy firms the rationale of 'good consultancy' delineates a linear process which imparts objective and rational solutions. His article proceeds by way of investigating the hiring process of consultants and in particular the case study approach used during this occasion. As he convincingly argues: "*This holds up the image that the consultant is an objective arbiter who only deals with the objective information and eventually arrives at rational, unequivocal, neutral solutions.*" (Armbruester, 2004, p. 1255).

Arguably, there has been much discussion on these assumptions by critical scholars who challenge the claim that consulting is amenable to a rational and linear process (e.g. Clark & Fincham, 2002). Critical scholars have identified processes relevant in consultancy that are far from being rational, e.g. analyses on gurus of management applauding individualistic heroism (Clark, 1996).

What needs to be mentioned in particular are studies on the fads and fashions in the consultancy sector (A. Kieser, 2002a). These studies brought to light that fashions form a necessary ingredient of the consulting sector, in that they demonstrate that firms, since they use consultancy services, are en vogue or even ahead of the time, which legitimate them in selling their own products and services.

In a similar vein Fincham & Clark (2002, p. 6) argue that the critical perspective is based on the assumption that the starting point for consultants is to convince their potential client that their service is useful. Many practices and discourses of the consultancy sector are thus directed towards legitimizing consultancy as useful service for organizations.

Most importantly, positioning consultancy as 'good' is mainly achieved through the repertoires of rationality and progress. They "*convince fashion followers that a management technique is both rational and at the forefront of managerial progress.*" (Abrahamson, 1996, p. 267). According to Fincham and Clark (2002, p. 8), the basic question from a critical perspective is "*how consulting is achieved*". They answer along similar lines as Abrahamson (1996) and Armbruester (2004), claiming that the offered solutions of consultancies appear to follow a linear process, assuming a progress applied by superior methods and services. The simplicity of this assumption is critiqued by just those critical scholars (Fincham, 2002).

When comparing these conclusions on consulting to the ones drawn in poststructural organization theory, one can be surprised in that they run along similar lines - these being the assumption of processes running on a rational and linear logic. This sensemaking of the modern organization is depicted very convincingly by Gareth Morgan (1997) in his description of the organization as a 'simple machine'. As Morgan so plausibly describes in the chapter on "organizations as machines" the logic of organizations is that of a simple input-output machine, any non-linear process being an aberration: "*We talk about organizations as if they were machines, and as consequence we tend to expect them to operate like machines: in a routinized, efficient, reliable, and predictable way.*" (Morgan, 1997, p. 13). The idea of 'simple machines' is borrowed from Frederic Taylor's conviction that the ideal organization always seeks ways for improvements and elimination of wasteful processes (e.g. Alfred Kieser, 2002; Ortmann, Sydow, & Türk, 2000; Walter-Busch, 1996).

Incidentally the initiation of consultancy to organizations also goes back to Taylor (M. Kipping & Engwall, 2002). Taylor is described as one of the pioneers not only of modern organizations but also on the idea of improving those very organizations with experts from

outside the organization (Clark & Fincham, 2002). As a matter of fact Taylor can not only be seen as a founding father of the construction of the modern organization, but also as founding father of organization consultancy. One could argue that the idea of 'process optimization' with the help of people or institutions from outside the organization has the same roots as the idea of how a modern organization should be designed. *"The whole thrust of classical management theory and its modern application is to suggest that organizations can or should be rational systems that operate in as efficient manner as possible."* (Morgan, 1997, p. 21). Consequently one can assume that the signaling of rationality in consultancy processes (Armbruester, 2004) mirrors the modern organization which is still predominantly constructed along the rationale of a simple machine, as described in early Tayloristic conceptions (Walter-Busch, 1996).

As discussed above, it is due to the rationalistic paradigm that underlies many models of change being applied in classic consultancies that the assumption of linearity gets reified time and time again. If difficulties occur in organization of the modern variety, the concept of the organization is not questioned, rather the search for optimization and improvement starts. The same goes for processes of consulting. If difficulties start arising the assumptions themselves are not questioned, rather the methods and practices are called in for improvement. If the improvement and training still doesn't work one would look further in the practices of those trainings, trying to improve for example the transfer to the organization - again not questioning the assumptions of linearity of the process itself. So in conclusion one could say that the assumptions on organization itself or the logic of change processes are not challenged neither in classic management theory nor in traditional consulting.

Scholars adopting a neo-institutionalist perspective go for a less critical analysis. They chiefly seek to grasp the shortcomings of the rational perspective while trying not to fall into the trap of hot critique as in done in some critical studies (e.g. Armbruester, 2006; Matthias Kipping, 1997). Both perspectives, the critical and the neo-institutional, seek to make sense of consulting without buying into the rationalistic model. However, what mostly doesn't happen within these two perspectives and which often is the case within the

rationalistic model<sup>1</sup>, is a reflection and proposition how a practical 'doing' of consultancy changes once one dismisses the assumption of full, instrumental rationality.

We suggest to tackle this from two ends. We have started to do so in the above section by discussing the logics of the rationalistic model in relation to poststructural organization theory. In the following section we will look at an approach to consultancy practices that claims to overcome mainstream's rationalist groundings. Again it will be discussed in the light of its paradigmatic groundings and poststructural organization theory. Finally, we will state our conclusions based on the implications of both sides, the organization theoretical grounding in both, theory and practices of consultancy.

### Consulting as 'relational business': systemic approaches

In the last 20 years an alternative, relational practice of consultancy, has been established in the German speaking market, so-called systemic consulting (e.g. Roswita Königswieser & Hillebrand, 2004; Wimmer, 2004). Systemic consulting is said to be non-rationalist and grounded in relational ideas on processes of consulting. Its historical development and the implications for a relational practice of consultancy will be first explored in depth in this section<sup>2</sup> and in a second step its relations to organization theory will be analyzed.

The beginnings of systemic consultancy lie within systemic therapy and counseling which has again feature in diverse and variegated roots and groundings. Paradigmatically, constructivism and radical constructivism as developed by Maturana and Varela (1987)<sup>3</sup> and Glasersfeld (1995), being grounded biology and retaining the assumption of individuality are mostly mentioned as roots (e.g. Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2002). First and second order cybernetics based on the ideas of Heinz von Förster (1985, 1995) had an

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<sup>1</sup> Taking a look at the literature on consulting, much of its publications goes along on how consulting is best to be done or to be improved (e.g. Collins, 2009; Law, 2009; Markham, 2005), this also marked by the rise of the consultancy business up from the 80ies (e.g. Fincham & Clark, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Due to line of following our main line of argument we leave out the discussion on relational practices of consulting as first developed in the sixties by authors such as Schein (1969) or Argyris (1971), called organizational development, as those rely on a Human Relations paradigm which - as argued before - also implicitly favours a rationalist model of the human being in organizations. For critique and further elaboration see for example (Legge, 1999; O'Connor, 1999; Resch, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Some authors put systemic approaches of consultancy in the same category as OD, as both offer - in contrast to the linear models of traditional consulting - a process approach (e.g. Kühl, 2005). We here refrain from doing so as we do focus in this paper very much on the roots and epistemological groundings of approaches and from such OD point of view OD approaches differ very much from systemic ones.

influence on how to construct solutions, simply put as to how think 'out of the box'. Family therapy (Satir & Baldwin, 1988) as to have a look on the interrelations of the family system, as well as the influential so called Milano-group around Selvini Pallazoli and Boscolo taking interventions on family systems a radical step further by focusing on processes rather than on individuals (Selvini Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin, & Prata, 1977, 1981). The influential Palo-Alto group which concentrated on constructivism as well as on interactions and communication, Paul Watzlawick (e.g. 1976; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967) and Gregory Bateson (1981) are to be named as prominent exponents. Narrative approaches have in recent years more and more influenced systemic approaches (Anderson & Goolishian, 1990), taking up some notions of the constructions of realities through language. The orientation on resources came again into the foreground with growing influence of solution focused therapy (Shazer, 1989). Processes of de- and re-focusing perception got along with a revival on Milton Erickson in hypnotherapeutic concepts, also brought forward from the so called 'Heidelberg group' on systemic therapy (Schmidt, 2008). There are many more roots and variations of concepts under the umbrella of systemic therapy and counseling. The listing at this point is illustrate the plethora of groundings of a practice that is so easily summed up as 'systemic'.

We would like to point out that these different roots and developments in the context of psychotherapy are hardly mentioned in today's writings on systemic consultancy for organizations. If the theoretical grounding is revealed and elaborated on, it mostly happens in line with systems theory according to Luhmann (e.g. Dirk Baecker, David Seidl, Stefan Köhl). Though mostly deflecting its own historical grounding, the practice of systemic consultancy in organizations is still very much inspired by techniques and discourses stemming from psychotherapy and especially from family therapy<sup>4</sup>.

We found that systemic consulting hardly gets discussed in line with critical or poststructural organization theory, nor from a critical perspective on consultancy. This is by no means a shortfall, rather we think that the discussion on systemic consultancy can not only profit from sociological systems theory but also from poststructural organization

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<sup>4</sup> Köhl (2005) mentions as an exception the recent writings on family businesses, assuming that they derive from the 'family' aspect in systemic concepts rather than from a theoretical body on organizations.

theory. We think this might be due to different academic and cultural spheres of the approaches. Systemic consultancy, which is very popular in German speaking countries, has strong roots in clinical psychology (where some of its epistemological groundings were hotly discussed). The critical research on consultancy, on the other hand, exhibits a strong British tradition of critical and poststructural organization theory. That is, these studies are largely inspired by so-called postmodern philosophy, predominantly Foucault (2000), Lyotard (1984, *The Postmodern Condition*) or Derrida (1976, *Of Grammatology*), or poststructural approaches in organization theory (Hassard, 1993). What unites these poststructural approaches is that they are all based on a non-essentialist paradigm which focuses on how realities are linguistically produced.

The fundamental difference to constructivist epistemology is, that in constructionist notions reality is not just a product of individuals or between individuals and thus have to be dealt with. The works for example of Watzlawick very much rely on this idea, that individuals produce realities between them and those 'get real', thus one has to deal with them (Watzlawick, 1976). With the little change from the 'v' in constructivism to the 'n' in constructionism a fundamental epistemological change is done (Searle & Suhr, 1997). In structuralist ideas on the world is created through an the interplay of signifier and signified them mirroring reality as reality itself never gets accessible (Saussure, 1974). In poststructuralism this notion of rather consolidated interplay is dissolved to a moveable one, named as the linguistic turn. The 'turn' done is that from language as mirror of reality to language as creator of reality. The main point being in poststructuralist approaches is the interest on how realities are created through languages and how relations of power are established and sustained (Westwood & Linstead, 2001). For research this means one always investigates on how realities are created through language. For the field of organization theory the meaning is that one is interested in how organizations are constructed, which are the linguistic discourses through which structure and power are established and sustained (Westwood & Clegg, 2003). This is how the notion of the modern organization is very much challenged by poststructural organization theory, as it investigates into the linguistic resources that are instrumental for holding up that type of organization (Hosking & McNamee, 2006). An example of poststructuralist inspired research are analyses on the role of human resources in modern organizations,

highlighting how HR is legitimated along discourses of efficiency and progress that are so typical for the modern organization formed by the image of Taylorism (e.g. Legge, 1999; Townley, 2002).

This poses the fundamental paradigmatic difference to the prevailing approaches of systemic consultancy. Radical constructivism after the model of Maturana and Varela as well as constructivism advocated by the Palo Alto group still relies on an individualist and realist ontology of modernity (Knorr-Cetina, 1989). The mentioned narrative groundings for systemic techniques such as story telling have not 'taken' the linguistic turn, since they claim only to focus on different realities instead of 'producing' these realities as it would be claimed in a post-linguist turn approach (Westwood & Linstead, 2001). In conclusion one could say that systemic consulting very much rests in pre-linguistic, constructivist conceptions which are grounded in post-positivism. Poststructural and critical organization theory, in contrast, have moved to post-modern paradigmatic groundings (Deetz, 2003)<sup>5</sup>. As mentioned before, theoretical developments within systemic consultancy are predominantly done from sociologists with a Luhmanian background (e.g. Baecker, 2009; Kühl, 2005; Seidl & Van Aaken, 2007). Lyotard categorized the different forms of systems theory as resting in a modern, post-positivistic epistemology, thus not belonging to the poststructural realm (Lyotard, 1984, p. 11-12)<sup>6</sup>.

So why bother with systemic consultancy when it has different epistemological groundings to poststructural organization theory? We care about systemic forms of consultancy as they do offer non-linear and non-rationalistic approaches and forms of consulting, as demanded by the poststructural and critical camp in consultancy.

The common ground between poststructural approaches and systemic interventions is that they both de-focus from the individual and concentrate on the interrelations, contingencies and functions of social realities. Instead of providing pre-ordained solutions to organizations they do not follow the route of simple linear logic but rather look for

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<sup>5</sup> On the face of it, this fundamental paradigmatic difference doesn't seem to be discussed within the debates on systemic approaches on therapy, counseling or consulting. Most of the time constructionist approaches (which form a variation of the post-linguistic turn) are discussed as just a variation of constructivist approaches, not addressing the fundamental epistemological difference in them (e.g. Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2002, p. 78).

<sup>6</sup> Lyotard (1984, p. 11-12) also criticized the inherent logic of performativity, especially in contemporary German 'Systemtheorie' which in his assessment was overtly rooted in a technocratic understanding of the social world.

interrelations and constructions of realities. Gergen (1999), one of the legends of social constructionism and as such poststructuralism, claimed that systemic approaches represent one of the few accounts that translate the reflections of poststructural theory to the realm of practice.

### Poststructural organization theory and systemic practices informing each other on the shortfalls of business consulting

As it should be obvious by now, each of the approaches named before (that is critical research on consultancy, poststructural organization theory and systemic consulting) rest on an extensive body of theoretical and empirical research. Provided that it is literally impossible to 'merge' or bring together this rich body of literature in a single paper, we would nevertheless like to tentatively discuss how poststructural organization theory and practices of systemic consulting could inform each other, thus making a first step from translating some of the critique on traditional consulting into first practical steps. On the other side, we would like to connect systemic consulting to poststructural organization theory, which to our knowledge has not yet been done. There have been pleas (e.g. Boos, Heitger, & Hummer, 2005; Kühl, 2005; Seidl & Van Aaken, 2007) in the 'systemic camp', to connect the practice of systemic consulting more to theories of organizations.

Within practitioners writing the plea for more integration of organization theory sometimes 'hides' itself in a plea for more expertise on the actual business of organizations, e.g. more knowledge about management practices, information technology, etc. (R. Königswieser, Sonuc, Gebhard, & Hillebrand, 2008). We think that this plea for the integration of 'specialist knowledge'<sup>7</sup> into systemic consulting stems from the afore mentioned roots of systemic consulting from psychotherapy.

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<sup>7</sup> The term 'specialist knowledge' is not an apt translation of the German word 'Fachwissen'. In the German language knowledge is constructed as basically falling into two camps, one being on 'hard facts' about the world, this being the specialist knowledge addressed in 'Fachwissen', it is about the subject itself and not its 'surroundings'. The other side is the so called 'soft facts' are less tangible and are of called so as one can supposedly not pin them down. Of course this distinction is rooted in a realist epistemology which isn't reflected as much in the use of the English wording. Often though in German speaking discourses on knowledge processes, there is the legitimization of 'specialist knowledge' as hard facts and thus as the type of knowledge that is 'really' valid and, for example, knowledge on social processes gets positioned as 'soft facts'. Thus it deems hardly surprising that systemic consulting rooting in the 'soft' realm now positions itself within the realm of hard facts.

In systemic therapy and counseling there has of course been a plethora of 'specialist knowledge' on families and psychic diseases. Yet, when the theories and practices of systemic counseling were applied to organizations, the knowledge on organizations and business systems seems to be underdeveloped<sup>8</sup>. Kühl (2005) has been instrumental in this condition by stating that families or groups are by no means the same type of systems as organizations. For example, in organizations processes of power or hierarchy do play a very different role than they do in families.

Our argument is not rooted in systems theory but rather in poststructural organization theory itself. In our opinion poststructural organization theory's academic tradition is much overlooked in the practice and writing on systemic consultancy<sup>9</sup>. There has been some speculation on why academics and practitioners concerned with the subject of consultancy hardly interact, the accusations being that academics sitting in an ivory tower and not wanting to decent, academic knowledge not being applicable to practice or practice - especially large consultancy firms - having its own research departments developing 'on hand' knowledge needed by customers (T. Clark, R. Fincham & A. Sturdy in an interview with Mohe, 2007). Others would argue that the audience for practitioners is significantly a different one than for academics, meaning that academics are rather interested in being inspired for more research whereas practitioners very much would like to get hints how they could alter their doings. At this point we refrain from extending this stream of thought and rather follow the Alfred Kieser (2002b) who makes a plea for opening up both fields for insights from the other<sup>10</sup>.

As explored at the beginning of this paper critical scholars challenge traditional consultancy's reliance on the linear in- and output mode on realist ontology that entertains

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<sup>8</sup> This doesn't mean that people engaging in trainings on systemic consultancy do not know about organizations, quite the contrary as often people having had their first education for example in business studies take up trainings in systemic consultancy. Rather we think in the theoretical body of systemic consultancy the knowledge on organizations is hardly considered.

<sup>9</sup> Mohe and Birkner (2008) reckon this is due to different academic traditions in the German speaking versus the English speaking academia.

<sup>10</sup> Also we would like to mention that by no means the divide between 'practice' and 'theory' is as easy as sometime depicted by both scholars and practitioners. From a constructionist point of view there is no practice without a theory that informs just those actions called practice, as only with - mostly not explicit theoretical groundings and interdependencies - the actions of practice acquire sense (Burr, 1995). As well as representations of 'theory' and 'practice' of academia representing theory and consultants representing practice are not explored at this point, for further exploration on this see Czarniawska (2002).

a progress-logic<sup>11</sup>, which promotes the quest for even superior methods and methodology. Furthermore poststructural organization theory introduces images of organizations that do not follow the linear in- and output logic of the simple machine. Rather it investigates logics and rationalities of organizations in its interrelated processes and variations. We think similarities can be drawn to practices of systemic consultancy as this also denies the rationalistic in- and output model of processes. Although poststructural organization theory and systemic consulting rely on different epistemological groundings, we think that the practices of systemic consulting many of the central assumptions of poststructural organization theory. Therefore, introducing poststructural organization theory to systemic consultancy might help to overcome the shortfall of organization theory in systemic consultancy. As this paper is a first exploration into this field, it is up to future research to look into more elaborate reflection of all the various techniques of systemic consultancy as well as poststructural organization theory.

What we would like to offer though are some first insight regarding the possibilities of mutual learning. We will go about this in discussing the groundings of each approach first and reflect it with a vignette of a consultancy of a nonprofit organization. A two year consultancy processes on the culture of a large non-profit organization was done, informed by poststructural theory as well as systemic techniques.

*Critical studies on consultancy* shed light on the assumptions being at work in traditional consultancy. Many highly informative studies have been carried out investigating into the logic of consultancy as a form of service to organizations. Thanks to critical studies on consultancy attention was drawn to functions rationality and performativity as signaling devices. Within these critical studies notions were deeply analyzed beyond offering just another tool for improvement of consultancy. The other side of the coin, in relation of exploring 'consultancies other' is, that most studies do neither go beyond this critical stance nor do they overly discuss the object of consultancy, naming the organizations themselves.

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<sup>11</sup> Though also we won't deny that also writers from systemic consultancy are convinced of the superiority of their approach, claiming to have 'the better' one, deeming managers and traditional consultancy as stupid (e.g. Simon, 2006) - from our point of view the interest in one perspective learning from the other is not helped by such positioning.

Focusing again on the potential of critical studies for consultancy's other, insights from a consultancy project are reflected in light of potential pitfalls if we would have gone about without being informed by critical studies of consultancy:

One of the main traps we would have found ourselves in was, that we would not have been able to answer demands of the organization on 'clear facts'. More than once we were asked by members of the process steering team from within the organization to tell them in 'clear words' how to go about the process. Without being informed by critical studies on consultancy we might have taken this as some kind of affront, the client not taking our approach seriously. With being informed on the signaling effects of novel results and progress we were able to do some of this 'signaling' to our client, indeed even actively integrating some methods which would help positioning us as offering useful service.

*Poststructural organization theory* offers a solid body of literature on the construction of organizations themselves. By analyzing organizations from a poststructural perspective, the interrelation of services to organizations such as consultancy can be much inspired. Poststructural theory does offer many analytical tools as well as an epistemological stance that allows for in depth insights on the construction of organizations. For example analyses were done on how traditional management theory is still very much inspired by Taylor's ideas on rationality and performativity stemming from the beginning of the last century. However, very little was done to translate these insights to practice, naming how organizations can be informed by these insights. Also underdeveloped from our point of view is how methods and tools could be designed to put these insight into work with and for organizations.

Though again, taking a look at potential pitfalls if we would have gone about without being informed by poststructural organization theory, some of its usefulness can be illustrated:

When we were first contacted by the organization we heard elaborate stories on how the organization was not what it was like in former years, how it had changed when new managers were hired, looking for the cause mainly in the person of those new managers. Without organization theory we possibly would have focused on interaction and different values as the key difficulties to be addressed in the organization. Since departing from a poststructural organization point of view we

focused very much on different realities of the organization, namely the recently introduced business logic as opposed to a logic of the social realm. Within the business logic it was important that processes were defined and the numbers were right. From the social logic it was important than one talked to each other, gave each other appreciation and direction. Just having done this analysis though wouldn't have helped us to go about the change process within the organization. Here the techniques and instruments of systemic consultancy came in handy.

*Systemic consultancy* is very strong in its translation of non-linear and non-rational concepts of reality into a mindset and methods on doing consultancy. There is a very rich body of writings and reflections on how to go about when applying a consultancy process that denies the shortfalls of traditional consulting. However very little literature exists in (critical) assessment of this approach. When discussed critically the absence of reflections on the reality and theory of organizations is much asked for. Also when discussed in relation to organizations it is mainly done from a sociological systems theory approach, partly ignoring the roots in psychotherapy and thus not contrasting its basic assumptions. Again, taking a look at potential pitfalls if we would have not been informed by systemic concepts, some of its strengths are highlighted:

Without being informed by systemic techniques we possibly wouldn't have known how to go about balancing the mentioned realities or how those different realities could be taken up in a dialogue without attaching it to stakeholders and thus individuals, the danger being just going on about blaming each other without ever taking into considerations and reflecting the different logic. Besides techniques such as circular questions, mostly the groundings of systemic consulting helped us to position ourselves to the client:

Modesty => Relativity of one's own construction of reality, farewell to omnipotent fantasies, relativity of one's own authority, focus on resources rather than deficits

Controlledness => distance to client, no 'revealing' interventions, starting with actions not with individuals, no pedagogic/educational involvement, translation of immediate thoughts to interventions

Accuracy => Construction of assignment, building of hypothesis, borders of the system, reflection on the relation. (R. Königswieser & Pelikan, 2006, p. 49)

If in doubt how to answer demands from clients, when being put on the spot about taking sides, when being taken as confidant from people within the organization and on many other incidents so typical for processes of consultancy, these practical groundings of systemic consultancy gave us the guideline on how to proceed.

All in all we can say that this process was very much helped by the interaction of those perspective as well - we will not hide this - by some very classic interventions very much stemming from a linear logic. As we would like to clarify at the end of this illustration, we are keen to learn from different perspectives as well as to elaborate on the differences on epistemological groundings of the applied approaches. We think only if groundings are carefully worked out (and we gave a glimpse on different groundings in this paper), one can truly begin to learn from each other.

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