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Induction Practice - a Generative Dance Between Newcomers and Organizations.[2]

A German and Danish Case Study of induction practice.

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Abstract

Research on induction of newcomers is primarily focused on individual processes, such as acquisition of knowledge and socialization in order to create a smooth and frictionless entry period. The interest of our research, however, is the processes that happen on the organizational level. We claim that induction potentially triggers both individual *and* organizational learning and by drawing on practice-based theory we discuss how the interplay between individual and the organization, what we call a *generative dance*, ignites both kinds of learning. We focus on and describe the interplay that takes place in particular induction events and analyze the "dance" through the lens of learning. The paper concludes with a brief discussion about the implications for practitioners and the challenges and future research prospects we have encountered. We draw on an empirical enquiry in two organizational settings, a Danish management consulting company and a German retail bank.

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[1] Working paper. Not to be cited without the authors' permission.

[2] The title paraphrases the seminal article of Scott D.N. Cook and John Seely Brown (1999): "Bridging epistemologies: The generative dance between organizational knowledge and organizational knowing."

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1 Introduction

Induction is commonly referred to as a socialization process in which a newcomer is expected to learn "the ropes" of an organization; e.g. learn the basic values, culture, formal and informal procedures as well as the basic practicalities in order to adapt to and function in a new job (Maanen & Schein 1979; Chao et al. 1994).When newcomers enter an organization they must learn certain skills in order to perform adequately in their new job environment, e.g. computer programs, how to approach customers and whom to sit by at lunch time. This acquisition is fostered through a variety of means, some formal like training sessions, orientations, introductory courses etc. and through informal means like participating in every day life in the organization. The individual's ability to learn these new skills seems to be the crux for potential success in the organization.

However, in a global and increasingly competitive world, knowledge intensive firms (Alvesson 2004) select and recruit people in order for them to enter the firm and make a difference by integrating their competencies and the specialized knowledge they possess into the organization. In other words, the organization can be assumed to see the induction of a newcomer as an opportunity to learn. Thus, the potential to learn from newcomers seems to be equally important for organizations.

This paper follows up on the latter assumption, and we argue that the interplay between individual and organization, what we call *generative dance* in induction practice, yields both individual and organizational learning.

We focus on induction as it appears in two different industries, retail banking and management consulting, in two different countries. In this paper we describe how induction practice is generative in relation to individual as well as organizational learning.

We begin by framing our paper theoretically, drawing on learning theory and social practice theory. Then we continue by presenting the empirical base of our research: induction of newcomers in a Danish management consultancy company and a German retail bank. In the third part we describe induction as it appears in our two case companies. We emphasize the social interaction in induction practice between newcomer and organization (*generative dance*). We follow up with a discussion of how

this interplay can be seen in relation to learning, both individually and organizationally, and conclude the paper by outlining what implications it might have for practitioners, how this research has been generative to us, and what prospects for further research that might be prompted.

This empirically driven research draws on data generated under the auspices of the Advanced Institute of Management Research, within the project 'The Evolution of Practising: A Comparison across Organizations, Industries and Countries', which is a comparative study conducted in seven countries by researchers from an interdisciplinary background.[4]

2 The Theoretical Outset

2.1 Induction as unit of analysis

To try to engage in practice-based research is a perilous endeavor. Not only is there no consensus as to what practice-based research entails, let alone a general consensus about how to interpret the term practice (Nicolini et al. 2003, Schatzki 2001, Gherardi 2006). In addition different definitions display a great deal of similarities, but take different epistemological and ontological stances in their understanding of practice (Antonacopoulou forthcoming). In other words, it is an incoherent and disparate theoretical field that is deceptive due to a somewhat consistent conceptual vocabulary.

The understanding of induction as a practice that guides this paper is that induction is made up of a number of repeated acts and interactions (Yanow 2000) carried out by human agents (Orlikowski 2002). We find that this understanding of practice is congruent with the understanding of organizational routines proposed by Feldman (2000) and Feldman and Pentland (2003). In their understanding organizational routines are defined as "repetitive, recognizable patterns of interdependent actions, carried out by multiple actors" (Feldman & Pentland 2003:95).

Just as Gherardi's morning ritual of teeth-cleaning is a practice that is situated in a broader field of practices from buying toothpaste to regular check-ups by the dentist

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(Gherardi 2006: xvii), we see the induction practice as embedded in a broader organizational practice (e.g. banking practice or consultancy practice), which itself comprises a number of interconnected practices, such as bonus systems, knowledge sharing, addressing customers etc.. Drawing on the work of Gherardi (2006) we thus see induction as embedded in a "…field of practices [which] arises in the interwoven texture that connects practices to each other, and that this texture is held together by a certain number of practices which provide anchorage for others" (Gherardi 2006:47). Despite this apparent texture of interrelatedness, our informants could identify, describe and summarize aspects of induction when asked during the interviews, pointing to the "repetitive patterns of interdependent actions", as described above. Although they play different roles for different people, these aspects were all seen as part of the induction practice, pointing to a shared understanding of the content, processes, and involved aspects of induction. Wenger (1998) ties practice to the coherence of a community (of bankers or consultants) through the mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertories of participants (Wenger 1998: 73). We thus understand induction as part of a "constellation of interconnected practices" (Gherardi & Nicolini 2002) "carried out by knowledgeable individuals" (Berends et al. 2003:1042, Giddens 1984). Engaging in the multiple layers of practice (Antonacopoulou forthcoming) we have to start by cutting out a piece of the texture. We try to describe specific "blocks" (Reckwitz 2002:250) of social activities, or what Gherardi call "heterogeneous items" (Gherardi 2006:34) of induction practice, in order for us to address how the interplay between newcomers and organization is generative in relation to learning.

2.2   Learning and learning-in-practice

No less problematic is the notion of learning. The understanding of learning in organizations has predominantly been understood in terms of individuals' acquisition of information and organizational knowledge (Huber 1991, Mumford 1991, Hager 2004) for a discussion. However, recent research does not see learning as confined to individuals' acquisition and processing of information, but see learning as participation patterns in organizational life and communities of practices (e.g. Easterby-Smith et al. 1998, Gherardi 2006, Nicolini et al. 2003, Scarbrough & Swan 2003, Wenger 1998).

The discussion concerning these two dominant strands on learning dates more than 20 years back, and can be summarized blatantly to a learning approach from a cognitive perspective or from a situated and socio-cultural perspective (Lave 1988, Tanggaard & Nielsen 2006:154). The principal question is whether to understand learning metaphorically in terms of acquisition or participation in everyday practice (Sfard 1998, Elmholdt 2003).

In accordance with a practice-based understanding, learning is regarded as an omnipresent part of human activity – learning is everywhere, and thus cannot be avoided. Gherardi understands learning "as an inseparable and integral part of social practices" (2000: 1060), and Wenger (1998) states: "Even failing to learn what is expected in a given situation usually involves learning something else instead" (Wenger 1998:8).

Learning is fundamentally a social activity, and besides an integrated part of the organizational practice (for an overview see Nicolini et al. 2003, Gherardi et al. 1998). Learning is about the construction of communities of practice and becoming competent practitioners; going from legitimate peripheral participation to full member by moving along personal trajectories. This movement along personal trajectories involves some acquisition. But the understanding of learning that guides us in this paper is that learning is not only a cognitive process described by an acquisition metaphor, but also a practical process, described by a participation metaphor.

As we see induction practice as a *generative dance* between several partners, we need to look at both newcomers *and* organizations when we try to understand their interplay as an opportunity for learning. However, we try to avoid falling into the conceptual fallacy of opposing individual and organizational learning and afterwards bringing them together as a coherent whole (Berends et al. 2003: 1037). The dance, or the interplay, is acted out by individuals in and through a specific organizational setting. For analytic reasons we separate individual and organization in order to understand *how* this dance can be understood as generative in relation to learning. We use the work by Berends et al. (2003) and their definition on organizational learning as a conceptual starting point. They define organizational learning as: "…the development of knowledge held by organizational members, that is being accepted as knowledge and is applicable in

organizational activities, therewith implying a (potential) change in those activities" (Berends et al. 2003:1042). The definition provides us with an understanding of learning as development of knowledge (see Schreyögg & Geiger 2007 for a conceptualization of knowledge) that potentially changes organizational activities. The development of knowledge does not only reside inside peoples heads, but is applicable in organizational settings, and as a consequence thereof potentially changes the recurrent practices. We find this work useful because it has as its fundamental core in the relationship between individual and organization. Also, their definition addresses the potentiality of change and thus distances themselves from a behaviorist notion of learning as observable behavior. In addition, emphasis is laid on the knowledgeable actor, but without focusing solely on cognitive learning processes.

As pointed out by several authors, learning and organizational learning can be conceptualized as metaphors for the complex processes that take place in individuals or organizations (or both) (Elkjaer 2004, Antonacopoulou 2006a, Gherardi 2000, Elmholdt 2003). It is important to stress that the kinds of learning are not necessarily similar; e.g. there is no reason to believe that organizational learning bears the same characteristics as individual learning (Berends et al. 2003). We looked for instances in our data that we label as learning, and could identify learning individuals (as acquisition and participation) and learning organizations (as the development of organizational knowledge) in our cases.

3   Empirical background

3.1   The Companies

Our empirical base is formed by case studies in a Danish management consultancy company and a German retail bank. As our research is part of a much larger project, the case companies were chosen based on some pre-given guidelines. Besides using practices in complex task environments, the companies met the following criteria: a) the company had some amount of accumulated history b) we were granted access to both employees and management and c) the company was willing to provide interview, observation and archival access.

Consul A/S[5] is a management consulting company that was founded in 2000 with three employees and grew to approximately 72 employees today. It is specialized in business development, supply change management and especially lean manufacturing, and lean administration and service where they have gained country-wide reputation in the last years. Prices as well as articles about the successes of the company are framed and displayed alongside modern art of various kinds throughout the buildings. The organizational structure of Consul A/S is changing from being flat, to one with middle managerial levels and senior consultant positions.

Induction has gone from being an unstructured process, consisting primarily of issuing computer hardware to the new consultant and then providing a few general remarks about the company to be a more structured process with certain required steps, such as an introduction day with specific content and a two-day seminar with other newcomers. The reason for these changes can be found in the growth of the company and growth in the management consultancy sector in general, which has caused a need to rethink recruitment policy and induction in order to keep up a competitive advantage through recruiting and keeping the right employees. Consul A/S faces the challenge of the wish to maintain a high quality standard and a strong focus on experienced executioners, e.g. very experienced consultants or experienced managers vs. the need for more consultants to live up to the increasing demand for consultancy, which has led to the recruitment of relatively young and inexperienced and even newly educated business graduates and engineers. In addition, Consul A/S only recruited people "they like", e.g. people recruited from within the consultant's networks.

The German Capital Bank[6] is a local operating cooperative bank with nearly 600,000 customers, mainly individual customers and small businesses. The bank has had a turbulent history: In the 1860ies, the first small cooperative banks were founded in the region, primarily by craftsmen. They mostly started out as small private savings clubs; most of them merged in the 1930s, and in 1946 they were renamed Capital Bank. In 1951 the bank was again split into an Eastern and a Western Capital Bank as a result of conflicts among the 2nd-World-War-winning allies. The two banks were independent of one another until German reunification in 1990, where the two separated banks merged

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[5] Fictive name
[6] Fictive name

again. Although weakened by low profitability, Capital Bank acquired and integrated two other financially stricken regional cooperative banks in 1999. A stringent turnaround program, which included collective efforts in terms of salary cuts across all levels, brought Capital Bank from near insolvency back to a strong position in 2005. Today the bank has 150 branches and about 3,000 employees.

Recruitment at Capital Bank can be differentiated into two tracks: On one side, there are the newcomers who enter the company as apprentices and go through a formal apprenticeship program. Their entry into the bank is also the very beginning of their careers in most cases. On the other side, there are the graduates and professionals who Capital Bank hires from outside. The first track covers – as it is the case with most other retail banks in Germany - more than 90% of all recruits. This is why we have focused on apprenticeships for studying the induction practices in our case research.

The apprentices, usually between 16 and 20 years old, start their vocational training right after they have finished their secondary school. During the apprenticeship, apprentices alternate every two weeks between attending the vocational school, where they acquire theoretical knowledge, and working within the company, where they receive on-the-job training. For most of the time spent in the company, the apprentices receive their training within the bank's branches, but training in central units (e.g. credit department and back office service center) is also part of the apprenticeship program. Additionally, Capital Bank provides internal theoretical training in order to teach the apprentices company-specific knowledge. After 2 to 3 years, depending on the level of the apprentice's school education, the Chamber of Commerce & Industry conducts written and oral examinations for all apprentices. Following successful examination, the newly qualified bankers are usually assigned to a bank branch.

A major difference in the two cases is that the newcomers in the consultancy company are primarily experienced professionals from either other consultancy companies or from line management in various industries, whereas the newcomers described in the bank are apprentices starting a two to three year training program.

3.2   Methods of Data Gathering

The empirical work includes literature reviews and document analysis that encompasses available internal records, training documents, corporate websites, business reports etc. provided by the informants during the interview process, in order to situate the businesses and their practices in a historical and social context. Data on how the practices are performed, and how they have changed was collected through a total of 29 semi-structured interviews with core employees and managers involved in the respective processes. We followed an interview guide based on the projects' overall research questions and themes, but amended to fit national and business specific contexts. All interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed using extensive notes. In addition, we conducted several hours of direct observation in the case companies to capture the subtleties of the induction practices. The quotes from interviews and other material used in this paper are all translated from Danish or German by the authors.

3.3   Analytic Strategies

Following the grounded theory approach according to Glaser & Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1998), we did not formulate any hypotheses about learning prior to data collection. But due to the involvement in a larger study, the pre-given interview guide served as a basis for gathering data about induction practices in the respective companies. Despite this apparent clash with grounded theory, we never start as researchers with a clean slate, and the preconceived notions of practice, practising, induction, etc. given by the overall research project have served as "sensitizing devices", and were used as initial coding categories (Vaughan 1992: 195) Through careful reading and re-reading, the data was then thematically analyzed (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006; Braun & Clarke 2006), based on emerging themes around learning and change. This process enabled us to collect information about the kinds of learning emanating from the practices under study. We scrutinized the interplay between newcomer and organization described by informants and observed in order to tease out the different kinds of learning triggered by this interplay. Through multiple

iterations between emerging theory and data, we developed the framework presented in this paper.

3.4   Focal Practices

As already outlined in 2.1, we understand induction as a practice "made up" of a whole range of sub-practices. When asking the informants to describe induction practice, no uniform and consensual picture of the boundaries of induction emerged, but a lot of interconnected activities and aspects that all were generally perceived as "belonging" to induction. The informants described and emphasized different aspects of induction, and pointed to several sub-practices contained within the induction practice.

The following contains a brief description of selected elements of induction practice in the two companies. The chapter is called "The generative dance of induction" as it is aimed to give a comprehensive description of the interplay between organization and individual as it appears in practice, e.g. a detailed account for the ways organization and newcomer interact in induction; e.g. how they practise their practice (Antonacopoulou 2006b). In the subsequent chapter we analyze and discuss the generativeness of this interplay through the lens of learning.

4   The generative dance of induction

We use the term *generative dance* as a way of describing how the social interaction (the "dance") leads to something else (is generative), in our case learning. Copeland and Cohen (1983) define dance as "any patterned rhythmic movement in space and time", what points to the repetitive and recognizable nature of dancing. Likewise our informants readily described induction as series of actions somehow staged in specific and recognizable sequences, but with some variation from iteration to iteration. Further the American philosopher Langer (1957:5) understands dance as "interacting forces" or "active powers" that create a "dynamic image". The dance metaphor seems appropriate as it emphasizes activity and social interaction (Spencer 1985), elements that are constitutive for (learning in) practice as well (Nicolini et al. 2003:8, Gherardi 2000, 2006, Brown & Duguid 2001). The dance is embedded in a historical and cultural

context that guides the way the dance is carried out, but is not limited to one specific way of performance (Spencer 1985). Using the example of ballroom dancing, the dance is influenced by the history and culture around this particular way of dancing. Certain conventions and rules around this art form make it possible to recognize and delineate from other types of dancing (freestyle dance, latin dance, formation dance etc.), and the dance is made up of certain steps and movements. However, the dance is not static as the dancers and their performance need to adapt to a specific context as it is influenced by music, other couples on the dance floor, the size and composition of the floor, the dancers' experience, whether the partners know one another etc. (Feldman & Rafaeli 2002). Similarly induction practice in the two companies is embedded in a historical and cultural context; it is guided by certain structures that in turn are sustained or reproduced. Induction "consists" of different steps and movements, and "comes about" through the performances of these movements by multiple agents, human and well as non-human (Pentland & Feldman forthcoming, Gherardi & Nicolini 2000, Pentland & Feldman 2005).

Thus, in induction the newcomers and the organization are repeatedly interacting and bringing about something generative itself, namely learning, understood as both product and process. In the following we will describe the movements as social interactions performed in induction. It is not possible to describe induction in either of the companies as a coherent whole, e.g. as a uniform process taking the same road every time. Rather we try to describe different elements contained within induction as they are identified by the informants, to give a sense of how newcomers and organization interacts in a variety of different ways.

4.1 Consul A/S

The first day of the newcomer is started by an informal breakfast. The newcomers' arrival is announced in advanced through the intranet, but is not prioritized neither by the other consultants, nor the immediate manager or business area colleagues. Due to increase in the amount of newcomers over the last year, it is possible to assemble 3-5 newcomers on the first day for a joint introduction. A tentative schedule over the content of the day is sent out in advance, and the day, which runs from 8.30 am to

approximately 5 pm is planned and executed primarily by a senior consultant, who states the goal of the day as the following: "We firmly believe that consultants in Consul irrespective of background etc. must help initiate sales of new tasks [consultancy services], and this can you only do if you in one way or another have an understanding of what happens in the rest of the shop. Therefore, the program is staged so we definitely create an overview for people in the beginning, because they have a tendency to go into depths if we don't do anything." (Old-timer with induction responsibility, Consul A/S, December 12th, 2005). The newcomers are introduced to the internal databases (the project database and the document database), how to create new projects in the database, how to invoice and make a travel documentation sheet and other practical registration tips. Other colleagues are brought in to give brief presentations about the back office/secretariat, culture and the quality management procedures. The day takes place in a minor meeting room, and follows a common setup with PowerPoint presentations, some of which are up to two years old, with basic questions from whether to fly or drive to meet with customers to how to spell "Lean" on external correspondence. Coffee and tea is provided, as well as chocolates and cookies, which are always available in the meeting rooms.

The new consultants in Consul A/S are immediately assigned to one or more projects from the very beginning. The immediate assignment on a project has become an issue to consider in relation to induction only in recent years. As the newcomers in previous times were primarily experienced consultants they often arrived with a running project of their own, and just continued to work on that, but adjusting to a Consul framework by using Consul lay-out, guidelines and methods. Being on projects was thus not formerly considered an important part of the formal induction, but as the natural first step after receiving a computer and a mobile telephone. But due to the changing recruitment patterns, newcomers with little or no consultancy experience are assigned immediately to projects. Without having their time invoiced, they take on minor analytical tasks, presentations and workshop facilitations, but very rarely on top management and board levels. The immediate assignment on projects is now regarded as a important element of the induction process: "It is crucial that people get started. The worst that can happen is that people end up sitting two or three months without being out on a task" (Manager, Consul A/S, December 20th, 2005).

A few months after their entry, a comprehensive presentation of the different business areas, the company as such, consultancy skills and ethics, is given to the newcomers on an external two-day seminar, the so-called Concademy - Introdays. This seminar is obligatory for all newcomers and up to 15 newcomers are gathered at every event. The company goal is that the newcomers learn about the other business areas and the specific processes and methods used in those areas, in order for the newcomers to learn the company standards (the "Consul-way"), and be able of cross-selling and re-selling. Previously the newcomers had to book appointments with business area managers and other centrally placed employees, but due to the rapid growth and the relative inaccessibility of very busy consultants, this practice was changed, and nowadays the business area managers are scheduled to come to the newcomers and not vice versa. The "Rector of Concademy", a senior consultant with special responsibility for training and education, is the organizer and executer of the seminar. The seminar consists of formal presentations by different business area managers and introduction to Consul's core services. Also the newcomers' are required to provide input to the CRM database (the customer relations management-database) by typing in all the contacts and relations the consultants are able to muster, and correct the database where existing knowledge seem to be outdated. The seminar also contains a presentation of the history and culture of the company and its placement in the market, as well as informal networking during breaks, lunches and dinner. A representative from the management group of four is available for informal discussions and Q & A sessions about business areas as well as strategic dispositions. The purpose in the company's perception is to "dress the newcomer" sufficiently in order to be able to perform as a Consul consultant as fast as possible.

The different part of induction gives opportunities for newcomers and organization to interact, both formally and informally. The newcomer is introduced to several colleagues, works directly with some on projects, use the database to upload and download information, and is generally expected to provide input where appropriate in terms of knowledge, skills and competencies. As will be described below, these interactions all yield to learning on various levels. However, newcomers and organization have several further chances to interact and "dance" during the first months. Regular company meetings, general training sessions and company parties are all events where the newcomer and organization interacts, and where learning takes

place. But these events were not reported explicitly to be part of the induction process, why we have not included them in our study. As we draw on social learning theoretical and practice-based frameworks, we recognize the difficulties of differentiating those parts in our analysis. However, as the purpose of this paper is to look at a specific organizational practice, namely induction, we have looked at instances which are commonly referred to as induction by our informants.

4.2   Capital Bank

The induction of new apprentices starts with an introduction seminar during the very first days in their bank. At Capital Bank, we focused on that on boarding seminar as a key element in the induction process. The particular characteristic of the so-called "First days" is the peer-to-peer induction, which is a team of second year apprentices who entirely organize and conduct the event for the newcomers. As vocational schools run one-year-curricula, their schedule means that the apprenticeship programs can only start one time a year. One cohort contains approximately 60-100 newcomers that get supervised by around 15 experienced apprentices in the seminar.

The impetus to establish this practice came from a new enactment governing the apprenticeship for bankers, which was released in 1998 by the government[7]. Part of that enactment requires, beyond theoretical knowledge and practical skills, cultivating the social competence of the apprentices. In reaction to this, Capital Bank integrated project work into its training program, which was designed to develop social competence. Since then, organizing the "First days" event is offered as one competence-building project among others to second-year apprentices. As each apprentice has already experienced the "First days" themselves at the beginning of their own apprenticeship, the "First days" project is very popular. Therefore, the number of prospects exceeds the number of possible participants by far and the apprentices have to apply for participation. Selection criteria are a creative application and proof of actual creativity at a particular selection event: Apprentices can perform anything they want, i.e. no guidelines are given at all. Past examples are singing, dancing, acting and giving a speech. Further they must

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[7] http://www.sparkasse-lev.de/leverkusen/static/Ausbildungsordnung_Bankkaufmann.pdf

accomplish a task, displaying a good sense of creativity, for example wrap a raw egg with material provided so that it will survive being dropped from the second floor. Preparation begins no later than six months before the actual event. In the first few months, the apprentices meet weekly for a few hours, but the frequency of the meetings gradually increases. The preparation period is finalized with a week of intensive full-time work. The project members are responsible for the whole planning (organization and decoration of rooms, catering, teaching content, conceiving a theme, the time schedule etc.), but are supported by the trainers from the apprenticeship department. The actual event is conducted at Capital Bank's headquarters and lasts four days with formal presentations in the morning and group work in the afternoon. On the fifth day, the newcomers go to the bank branches they are assigned to, and start with the first practical part of the apprenticeship.

The time schedule for each day of the seminar is divided into formal presentations that are held for all participants in the morning and group work in the afternoon. The formal presentations comprise information about the bank's history, the company's mission statement and operational creed, the products, safety regulations, compliance guidelines, legal requirements etc. Depending on the sensitivity of the information, the presentations are conducted by apprentices or in-house experts (e.g. one member of the legal department elucidates about the money laundering law). In addition, each apprentice gets a 60 page document file with a detailed summary of the contents taught.

After lunch, the apprentices continue to work in groups. Every group consists of about 10 newcomers and gets supervised by 2-3 experienced apprentices. In contrast to the presentations, the group work is largely interactive: Q&A games and group discussions about the presentations but also about behavior in the branches and the apprenticeship in general are conducted.

In the project member's perception, the whole event is designed and organized completely by themselves. Actually, the trainers subtly set the frame and ensure that all necessary elements are included. The "dance" between the trainers, who represent the organization, and the newcomers works very well and is perceived from both sides as agreeable and productive.

Besides, the project members "dance" with the newcomers during the actual seminar. As the project members have gathered banking experience for over one year and have been acculturated into the organization to a large extend, they can be seen as representatives for the organization in the *generative dance*. Especially in the afternoon sessions, the work within small groups allows being highly interactive and the newcomers are actively encouraged to participate.

Newcomers are asked to get in contact with their future branch managers during the "First days" seminar. They arrange a meeting (mostly also during the time of the introduction seminar, in the late afternoon), get to know each other and discuss first peculiarities of the branch. The first day after the introduction seminar, the apprentices show up at the branch in the morning. They get introduced to everybody by the branch manager, who also shows them the premises and security facilities.

The apprentices have already basic knowledge about products, forms and behavior from the "First days" seminar; nevertheless they start with just observing how the experienced colleagues work. "…the first week, I think, I wasn't allowed to do anything by myself." (former apprentice, Capital Bank, August, 25th 2006). After a short while, the colleagues expand the "dance" by assigning simple tasks to the apprentices, who are always invited to ask questions. With the progress of their apprenticeship, they get more knowledge about products (from vocational school, observation and from "…simply learning by doing." (former apprentice, July, 19th 2006). As a consequence thereof, the apprentices get more experienced and self-confident.

The apprentices work about one year in that branch and then get assigned to another one afterwards, in order to gather broad experience.

4.3   Characteristics of the Generative Dance

After having presented the different interactions between newcomers and the organization at Consul A/S and Capital Bank, we aim to highlight some general characteristics of these "dances", which will be elaborated and exemplified below:

Firstly, there is always social interaction in the fore. Examples we have drawn on are how the experienced apprentices actively interact with trainers and other experienced

apprentices prior to the "First days", and also interact with the newcomers at the "First days" seminar. We also showed examples on how newcomers interact with other newcomers, colleagues and managers during Concademy – Introdays.

Secondly, the interaction involves human actors, but is not limited to that as also technology, artifacts, buildings etc. have a role to play in how the interaction takes place. The use of technological artifacts (projectors, videos, databases etc.) is an important part of induction in both cases.

Thirdly, the interaction is embedded in a broader structure. It is on the one hand the "texture that connects practices" (Gherardi 2006:47) on the organizational level, and on the other hand on the industrial and societal level. One example for this is the interaction between newcomers and trainers during the preparation that is imprinted from the banking practice, e.g. how the content to be presented in the seminar is controlled by the trainers in order to secure that it meets legislative requirements. In Consul A/S the format of the Concademy – Introdays is reportedly designed to resemble a typical working day of a consultant: Long hours, few breaks, and preparation at night before yet another day.

Finally, we perceive the *generative dance* as history dependent, clearly seen with the interaction between newcomers and project members that is guided through the experiences they have made in their own "First days" seminar. Despite the much shorter history of Consul A/S and the very recent changes of induction practice, history of the company is constantly referred to through different media such as articles, songs, and anecdotes.

5   Individual and Organizational Learning in Induction

Our study shows that the interplay between newcomer and organization in induction is generative in that it yields to both individual and organizational learning. First, the interplay results in newcomers learning through organizational socialization processes (Wanous 1992, Maanen & Schein 1979); in other words: The newcomer learns basic skills as well as "the ropes" of the organization both through formal presentation, self study and through participation. Second, the interplay between newcomer and organization yields to learning, understood as the development of organizational

knowledge, either through the constant reconfiguration of the practice or by bringing in new competencies and skills from newcomers that are applicable and useable for the organization. The former is extensively covered in the literature about induction (e.g. Ardts et al. 2001; Coleman & Kleiner 2001; Saks & Ashforth 1997; Ostroff & Kozlowski 1992; Maanen & Schein 1979), while the latter is still underdeveloped in the literature about induction.

5.1 The generative dance and individual learning

In Consul A/S several instances of individual learning can be teased out of the data. The newcomers interact with other consultants, other newcomers, seniors and managers and use the databases and written materials about successful cases provided and exposed at the offices. Through reading the many articles about the successes of the firm and seeing consultancy awards being on display, newcomers are introduced to the company, to its internal structure, the culture, goals and strategies. During the different events organized as part of the induction process, different cultural aspects are introduced along with basic introductions to the most important tools for registering billable hours, travel expenses, the core company values etc. These factual pieces of information are acquired through brief presentations delivered by more senior consultants or through self study of the many unstructured documents in the various databases.

On a more subtle level the different aspects of induction also contribute to acculturation of the newcomer into a company with certain cultural characteristics. From the very beginning newcomers use and interact with the different databases as a means of gathering and sharing knowledge. However, vast amounts of outdated data and a general lack of comprehensive structure signals a lack of interest in commonly shared knowledge, promoting a "Lonely Rider spirit" mentioned by several informants, where information and knowledge are highly individualized and resides inside the consultants' heads. The ways of presenting seemingly important information emphasizes a tendency towards presenting information in brief and precise ways (preferably using PowerPoint presentation tools) – an ability that is highly valued among the consultants. During the Concademy – Introdays, songs about the glory of the company are sung under a great deal of laughter and comments, as the words do not always follow the tune. The lyrics

of the songs are reportedly written by the founders under heavy influence of red wine at one of the first founding meetings. The last verse in one of the songs read: "Money, we will like to make / For the client of course. / But the client, he must also know / That Consul gold has its price" (PowerPoint slides, Concademy, March 6th – 8th 2006). Not only does the newcomer learn about the objective of the company (making money) by singing, but the laughter and light-headed atmosphere created by singing the song reflects the core value of happiness. Other "war-stories" and anecdotes of successes and spectacular solutions by named consultants not only provide suggestions for practical solutions, but contribute to illustrate a competitive house with high standards, professionalism, competence and integrity.

Also at Capital Bank several instances for individual learning are found in the data:

During the "First days", newcomers become effectively integrated into the Capital Bank system. They learn what it means to be an apprentice in Capital Bank, how to behave, how to dress and in general how to survive in the banking business. They learn the basis of the retail business, what encompasses for example knowledge about safety regulations, legal requirements, and computer systems, and also simple things like how to fill out some basic forms, etc. These issues are predominantly communicated in the working groups and in informal one-to-one talks. Besides this, the newcomers get a feeling of the "Capital Bank culture", which is well represented by the experienced apprentices of the project team facilitating a fast acculturation into the bank. The learning set-up in the seminar is precisely described by the following quote: "Make it [the seminar] nice, make it enjoyable, they should feel comfortable and learn something about the company as well." (Former apprentice of Capital Bank, who organized the First days himself, citing a trainer at the initial briefing, July 19th 2006).

Some vivid examples that illustrate the informal procedures are as follows: 1) Every year a few newcomers show up at the seminar dressed in a manner not conforming to the bank's dress code of business suit with tie or business dress, trouser suit or something similar. They turn up in jeans, baseball caps and some men show up wearing earrings, which stands them in sharp contrast to the other smartly-dressed newcomers proudly showing off their new wardrobes (something they are apparently not used to wearing). Although a proper bank dress-code is nowhere specified, it is

guided by an implicit understanding of the Capital Bank's corporate culture. The young men and women, who have deviated from the required dress, generally notice their misdemeanor themselves and feel embarrassed as a result. In addition to this, the experienced apprentices in the respective groups ask their participants to appear properly dressed in future, without addressing the deviants directly. This always has the effect of everybody being dressed according to the bank's standards the following day. 2) As Capital Bank has the reputation of a bank for "the ordinary people", they also attract apprentices from the lower middle class, especially from the eastern part of Germany (former GDR). They are used to talking in a broad accent, which is not considered appropriate for a reliable business, which is how banks have to appear. If newcomers have succeeded in hiding their accent during their interviews, but then reveal a broad accent during the "First days" event, project team members usually give them a gentle hint. If the newcomer is then still unable to suppress their accent, project members will practice speaking properly in individual "training sessions" (sometimes lasting a whole afternoon).

From the Capital Bank point of view it has turned out that peer-to-peer socialization (or actually apprentice-to-apprentice) is very effective. The new apprentices are predominantly shy and are in most cases grateful to learn the basics from project members in order to overcome their initial feeling of helplessness. Particularly in awkward situations, the input from a peer is often perceived as friendly advice. Although the project members represent the organization during the "First days" seminar as explained above, the "peer dance" proved to be very effective.

The learning is supported by a specific artifact, viz. a film containing short and usually humorous scenes covering the dos and don'ts of the retail banking business (e.g. proper language, how to dress, how to behave, how to handle customers, how to handle colleagues, safety regulations). The film is produced entirely by the project team, i.e. the screenplay, acting, camera, music and editing. Newcomers see short sequences where some misconduct is displayed and have to reveal and interpret the misbehavior. As the scenes are overly exaggerated and include humorous elements, the messages tend to be easily deciphered and kept in the newcomers' minds.

But not only the newcomers learn from the "First days" seminar, also the project members acquire social competence as originally stipulated in the enactment by self organizing the team and handling the newcomers.

In the branches, individual learning proceeds for the newcomers. Thus, the newcomers interact with the experienced bankers, observe and participate in all the processes of the colleagues. They learn how to handle customers, how to conduct sales talks and how to deal with administrative issues. Also the specificities of the branches the newcomers eventually end up working in are triggers that promote learning.

5.2 The generative dance and organizational learning

The interplay between individual and organization also yields to learning on an organizational level. Following Berends et al.'s (2003) definition on organizational learning sketched out above, we find different examples of development of organizational knowledge that becomes accepted and becomes integrated in the organizational practice, and thus potentially change those practices. Similarly, Feldman (2000) has discussed the dynamic nature of organizational routines in terms of learning and states that people "will tend to breathe life into the routines they engage in because of their behavior and plans and ideals" (Feldman 2000: 627). Practices are carried out by knowledgeable actors, and are thus subject to change as a consequence of different enactments of the practice. Using this vocabulary to analyze processes also found in the induction practices in our cases enables us to see the constant reconfiguration of practice as a result of the interplay between newcomers and organizations in induction.

The case that Consul A/S primarily recruits highly experienced consultants, or people previously working within management in specific areas, is regarded as one way of extending the knowledge base of the company. Different attempts were found to turn the individual knowledge of the newcomers into organizational knowledge with the potential to change the organizational practices. The immediate assignment on projects has a twofold learning potential in relation to the organization. Typically, the way consultancy practice is performed by a consultant in a particular situation with a client, is shaped by the prior knowledge the consultant accumulated either as a consultant or as

a previous professional in a specific field. This specific way is carried with him[8] to a project and might disturb the existing practice. Furthermore, the newcomer challenges the existing ways of performing by questioning self evident truths and underlying premises in the company, and generally forcing colleagues to reflectively account for what they do and why they choose certain tools or strategies. Evidence was found in the data that this was more difficult for newcomers without prior experience, as they reportedly take on a "humble attitude" and do not challenge the "heavyweight gentlemen".

General knowledge from the field of management consultancy was constantly added to the organizational stock of knowledge in Consul A/S. During the Concademy – Introdays the newcomers were invited to present themselves and talk about their areas of expertise and their previous work. When discussing Consul's position in the market, participants commented on compelleagues[9], their experiences from working there, the strengths and weaknesses and other potentially interesting knowledge about the market. This apparently seemed to be an important means of getting and sharing information about market developments and notes were taken during the whole session by the lead instructor. Several hours were dedicated for extending the customer relations database. All the newcomers were obliged to add information about relevant relations and update information about existing posts (clients, projects, or people) in the database. As a standard procedure on the Concademy – Introdays, one of the managing directors is present during some of the seminar. Prior to his arrival a large poster was put up for questions to the management, and these were used as an offset for discussing and questioning strategy, concepts, market developments etc. with the manager.

In striving for efficiency, the existing "First days" seminar is improved in relation to content and design from year to year. As the newcomers are not only becoming part of a particular bank, but also get socialized into a broader context of bank practice, the content of the "First days" seminar is constantly redefined and altered in order to reflect the newest developments in legislation, procedures and forms. Besides it is improved in

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[8] The majority of the consultants (and newcomers) are male.

[9] A local neologism comprised of *com*-petitor and col-*leagues* to denote that they recognize other players in the market and speak courteous about them at all times.

terms of didactics and the informal information that ought to be provided to the newcomers for a smooth entry, for example what to do in case a class at vocational school is cancelled or how to deal with gossip in the branch. Second year apprentices are believed to have the right aptitude for selecting the relevant informal information, as they have a similar age profile and, despite of one year experience, still have the perception of newcomers. The trainers representing the organization are aware that they can learn how to induct newcomers from the project members and therefore select only apprentices who proved to be creative during the selection event. However, no ground-breaking changes occur and the reproduction of a scheme usually results in relatively small changes; most parts are adopted from the previous year. In designing the seminar, the project members are guided by their own experiences they made attending their own "First days". The impressions sustained in their heads are consistently positive: "You can't bring in too much innovative things in the end, because it [the seminar] was already terrific" (Former apprentice of Capital Bank, who organized the First days himself, July 19th 2006). As Gherardi et al. (1998: 291) put it: "[…] the path of learning opportunities [is] unreflexively followed […] once the former novice becomes a 'teacher' […]". Besides, the process is supervised by the trainers, who review, check the feasibility, and subtly guide the apprentices, so that the changes are merely refinements of the existing agenda or as Gherardi et al. (1998: 281) encapsulate: "Thus, when today's newcomers have acquired sufficient legitimacy to act as masters, they tend to make those who follow them tread the same path as they did, perpetuating the curriculum with some of the innovations that have occurred in the meantime."

6   Concluding Remarks

As for concluding remarks, we start by going back to the beginning. Our work with this paper was initiated by the fact that induction literature is primarily focused on individual learning processes and to a large extend neglects organizational learning (exceptions include Wenger (1998) and Van Maanen and Schein (1979)). As presented in the theoretical part of the paper, several scholars see a persistent and inseparable connection between practices and learning (Gherardi 2000, Wenger 1998). We looked at induction as a *generative dance*, e.g. as a series of steps that is enacted and performed

in practice by knowledgeable human actors and constantly affected by and affecting the surrounding organization. In order to look at dance as learning processes that evolve as a consequence of the mutually constituting interplay between individual and organization in practice, we distinguished between individual and organizational learning as two different processes. Building on that insight, we showed that induction practice could result in much more than individual learning which seems to be always existent in induction practices: Organizations can in fact benefit from their newcomers and use opportunities to develop their knowledge (Berends et al. 2003).

Furthermore we observed that different amounts of opportunities for organizational learning are resulting from induction activities. We identified a tendency to greater amounts of organizational learning opportunities if the induction practice could be practiced unrestrained. Accordingly, restrained practices yield just few organizational learning opportunities. To speak metaphorically: The more the dance is choreographed with step sequences, movements and expressions, the less the dance could be generative. For future research, it could be interesting to scrutinize why and how different kinds of induction practices (formation dance, freestyle dance, polka, etc.) result in different amounts of organizational learning opportunities and what factors can bound the practice in its execution.

Practice-based theorizing on induction provides a basis to comprehend the complex processes that form induction in organizations. The practice perspective on induction has important implications for those who are involved in induction processes. Knowledge intensive companies are increasingly interested in creating and sustaining competitive advantage through innovation and development. Newcomers might be a source of that. Seeing induction as a *generative dance* puts awareness on the opportunities resulting from induction practice. People from HR departments and managers concerned with the organization's development and progress might benefit from designing induction, not as a pre-cast process, but as a flexible dance that inheres individual learning potentials but at the same time also provide enough possibilities for the newcomers to bring in their experiences and ideas, and thus support the organization in its efforts for development and progress.

In this paper, we have tried to merge our research on both empirical and theoretical levels. One could say that we have tried to combine different dancing styles and sampled different music genres. This challenge was intended to enable us to see things in a different light, and maybe develop a few new moves here and there. But because some perspectives were only merged and integrated with difficulty, some of our attempts barely made us step on each other's toes. These challenges, however, might be turned into future research (Abbott 2004), and are as such a valuable outcome of our collective effort to make sense of our cases.

Challenge # 1: The first of our fusion attempts was to integrate data from two different companies and two distinct industries; a bank and a management consultancy company. Other research suggests that the organizational logics influence learning in the organization (Elmholdt 2006, Ellström 2004, 2006, Davidson & Svedin 2004). Our companies adhere to specific organizational logics, which influences the opportunities for learning. We have tried to approach these opportunities for learning through a (little part of) practice, namely induction. A richer and more comprehensive analysis would have to include the impact of different organizational logics in the learning potentials and also a more detailed analysis of other potentially influential factors such as work load, educational design, and the knowledge embedded in the organizational practice.

Challenge # 2: Data from two different countries were used. This fusion attempt had not been necessary as we have not addressed any impact that the national culture might have had on the learning in the organization. A much larger cultural analysis (see e.g. Hofstede et al. 1990) is needed to get the full benefit of using data from different countries. To benefit from bringing data from two different countries together, it could be interesting to compare two or more companies within the same industry. Such an analysis can shed light on how national and cultural differences impact learning in organizations. However, bringing in national culture, especially if addressed in more detail, requires that we take into account at the various levels of the research (from design, data generation and analysis) the different interpretations of core concepts and biases.

Challenge # 3: We have brought competencies from two research fields into play in this paper. One author is a research assistant and PhD candidate at a department of

management and the other is a PhD candidate at a School of Education. This fusion of competencies is potentially enriching as the field of organizational learning draws on concepts and theoretical frameworks from both (and other) areas, but often approach processes of learning from either one side or the other (see e.g. Elkjaer & Wahlgren 2006 and Fenwick & Rubenson 2005 for recent discussions). In this paper we have tried to combine forces, and besides being enlightening on a personal level to work with and learn from a scholar from a different background, this way of spanning across the field is a potential powerful way of moving the field forward (Antonacopoulou 2006a), and can contribute to more elaborate and sustainable theory building, as long as explicit assumptions that guide respective understandings can be obtained and developed (Easterby-Smith et al. 1998:260). However, as sketched out above, merging different dancing genres has its pitfalls and although the experimental dancing might contribute with new moves, it requires a fair amount of practice to perform.

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