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Working With Differences in Everyday Interactions through Anticipational Fluidity: A Hermeneutic Perspective

Ann L Cunliffe
Fundação Getulio Vargas-EAESP, Sao Paulo, Brazil

Karen Locke
College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, USA

Abstract

This paper sheds light on an issue we all face, how to work with differences encountered in our everyday interactions with each other when the outcome of the exchange is not simply up to us. Our contribution lies in proposing the notion of *anticipational fluidity*, of finding ways of relating and responding to others as we orient ourselves to each other and to what might happen next within the moment of conversation. Situated in a hermeneutic lens that highlights the interplay of interpretations in unfolding responsive moments, we integrate the work of Shotter and Ricoeur with our interpretation of empirical texts generated from an ethnographic inquiry of academic/practitioner collaboration. We suggest that anticipational fluidity encompasses open work, difference-making and tentative intentionality, and elaborate these sensitizing resources by putting readers within unfolding moments of a meeting where differences are addressed.

Keywords

dialogue, difference, ethnography, hermeneutic phenomenology, relationality

Introduction

> Our understanding of how to act in each practical situation we meet will emerge in the unfolding course of our detailed explorations of the unique possibilities to act it uniquely offers us. (Shotter, 2011, p. 447)

Within daily conversations at work and at home we face differences and similarities expressed at many levels as people voice and respond to each other in 'unfolding' moments: sometimes in ways

Corresponding author:
Ann L Cunliffe, Fundação Getulio Vargas-EAESP, Av. 9 de Julho, 2029, Bela Vista, Sao Paulo, 01313-902, Sao Paulo, Brazil.
Email: ann.cunliffe@fgv.br

that preserve openness and possibilities for going on, and sometimes not. How we orient to those different views, values, perceptions, intentions, and so on, can be crucial in terms of shutting the conversation down or keeping dialogue going. Our contribution lies in proposing the notion of *anticipational fluidity* as a way of relating with others when working with differences within the unfolding living flow of responsive conversation. Anticipational fluidity comprises three sensitizing resources – open work, difference-making and tentative intentionality – which help create possibilities for 'going on' (Shotter, 1996a, 1996b, 2011). We draw theoretically on the work of Shotter and Ricoeur and extend our inquiry empirically by a 'detailed exploration' – an interpretive interplay of data and literature – of academic–practitioner collaboration around curriculum issues at a business school. Their work has been used sparingly in organization studies, Ricoeur mainly in the area of narrative sensemaking, identity and ethics (e.g. Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Mallett & Wapshott, 2012; Rhodes, Pullen, & Clegg, 2010; Sparrowe, 2005) and Shotter in relation to process-based and dialogic approaches (e.g. Greig, Gilmore, Patrick, & Beech, 2013; Hernes & Maitlis, 2010). We bring forward Shotter's emphasis on the ongoing responsive nature of everyday interaction and the need to work with relation-making and 'difference-making speakings which can "move" us *ontologically*, not just *epistemologically*' (Shotter, 2016, p. 101). We integrate Ricoeur's ideas on action, agency and the nature of interpretation to foreground the importance of people's interpretations within living speech.

While conflict is recognized as inherent to working with differences, many studies focus on minimizing or bridging differences to reach a predetermined static endpoint (final agreement, trust, etc.). Failure to do so is often 'rooted in partners' diverging/misaligned interests' (Gulati, Wohlgezogen, & Zhelyazkov 2012, p. 535). As van Marrewijk, Ybema, Smits, Clegg and Pitsis (2016) note, much of this current work addresses how to establish order, stability and consensus, while their study of collaborative dynamics in a global construction project found participants engaged in both harmonizing and contestational social practices and talk. Our approach embraces this dialectic by offering three sensitizing resources. First, *open work*, where we explicitly draw attention to the persons dealing with the tensions of working together, to their intentions, predeliberative and deliberative responses to each other and to the issues. Second, we suggest that working with differences means attuning ourselves to *difference-making speakings* that may help us express tensions in the interactional moment. And third, we propose participants embrace a stance of *tentative intentionality*, i.e. exploring and keeping in play their differences and similarities as a means of continuing on in their efforts.

Our inquiry, consistent with Shotter's (e.g. 2009) work, foregrounds living unfolding moments of conversation where the possibility for continuing dialogue arises as participants keep open the potential of the situation by accepting and working with differences. Here, relationality is implicate, because living conversations are constituted by entwined anticipations, responses and relationships, by the interplay of multiple and contested interpretations and intentions that both generate and impede possibilities for moving on. Generalized abstract theories do not account for, nor help participants deal with contextualized, ambiguous and spontaneous activities. Rather, we argue that people need to be attuned to what is happening within relational moments. Sensitizing resources are not finalized constructs but encompass a practical comprehension (Bourdieu, 2000) of the particularities of dialogue.

Our paper unfolds as follows: to situate our approach, we briefly overview why working with differences is important and its current framing in the literature. We then elaborate our theoretical orientation, extending it through explication of a concrete instance of difference between academics and practitioners. Doing this, we engage interpretation as method, 'reading' empirical texts generated in the setting integrated along with Ricoeur's and Shotter's theoretical texts. Finally, we discuss the implications of this way of 'theorizing' for research and practice.

Working with Differences

Organizational members work with increasingly complex networks of relationships between and across organizations. The literature surfaces two main domains: collaborating across inter-organizational/professional differences in a network or field at a macro level (e.g. Bucher, Chreim, Langley, & Reay, 2016; Daley, 2009; Hibbert, Huxham, Sydow, & Lerch, 2010; Jarvenpaa & Majchrzak, 2016) and collaboration between functions, expertise and professions within organizations at more meso and micro levels, for example, in committee, team and project group meetings (e.g. Bruns, 2013; Li & Robertson, 2011; Pouthier, 2017). Depending on the study's onto/epistemological grounding, suggestions to address the differences inherent in network relationships include establishing appropriate structures, systems, or utilizing discursive resources that enhance collaboration (DiBenigno & Kellogg, 2014; Hardy, Lawrence, & Grant 2005; Koschmann, 2012; Martin & Eisenhardt, 2010). At the meso and micro levels, a communication perspective is often taken, proposing the common construction of key issues through linguistic practices such as framing or humour, using different forms of talk (e.g. assertive or collaborative), or engaging in behavioural strategies such as encouraging weaker voices to speak, and/or the staging of physical and symbolic spaces. Barbour, Treem and Kolar's (2017) study of expert collaboration in analytics work, for example, proposes three mechanisms of requesting data, collaborating in sensemaking, and commissioning (relationally rich delegating based on trust and connections) as ways of navigating practical difficulties.

In studies that address collaboration, whether between industries, public and private sector organizations or organizational units, difference is implicated as individuals with varied goals, status and roles find themselves interacting, sharing information and trying to work together towards a common purpose (Amabile et al., 2001; Gertsen, Søderberg, & Zølner, 2012; Ren & Gray, 2009; Rondinelli & London, 2003; Schwab & Miner, 2008). Consequently, efforts to work together have been characterized as sites of conflicting understandings and divergent concerns (Di Domenico, Tracey, & Haugh, 2009; Huq, Reay, & Chreim, 2016). Delbridge (2008), for example, argues that diverse team members trying to work together experience *conflicted collaboration*, a 'simultaneous interdependence and disconnection'. The need to grapple with difference and 'engage in conflict without being captured by it' is also expounded by Silva et al. (2014, p. 298) who examine how team spirit is impacted by individual differences. Both studies underscore tensions that may exist when different people explore ways of collaborating. Thus, while the intention may be to work together, 'what practitioners and scholars both struggle with is the ability to make collaboration productive' (Feldman, 2010, p. 159) in the face of difference.

In a world where the challenge is to work across boundaries within and between organizations and to establish collaborative relationships (Linden, 2002), relational considerations are required. We explicate alternative ways to explore and address the differences inherent in these situations – not as generalized constructs but as moments of possibility in everyday conversations. Navigating the difference entailed in collaboration contrasts with many of the above studies in the following ways: (1) rather than agreement, we focus on difference-making; (2) instead of endpoints managed by individuals, we attend to the emergent ongoing flow of moment-to-moment relational endeavours; (3) in place of generalized constructs, we offer sensitizing resources that can help participants notice and express 'difference-making distinctions' that can change our ways of working with difference (Shotter, 2014). If 'scholars are just beginning to unravel the complexities of situations in which mutually interdependent parties struggle to cope with their incompatible interests' (Brummans et al., 2008, p. 26), then *how are possibilities for going on in the face of difference generated within the living flow of complex responsive activities?* We address this question, turning next to an overview of the work by Shotter and Ricoeur that informs our understanding.

Overcoming relational difficulties

> We must study how, by interweaving our talk with our other actions and activities, we can first develop and sustain between us different, particular *ways* of relating ourselves to each other. (Shotter, 1996a, p. 299)

Shotter (e.g. 1996a, 1996b, 2008, 2016) emphasized that an understanding of our everyday life is formed in what we do and say: not through representational forms of knowledge but through a knowing-from-within constituted through everyday interaction in which we are morally obliged to treat people as participants. Accordingly, we live in relational landscapes of complexly intertwined anticipations, conversations and interactions where much of what we do involves an 'unreflective, *bodily way* of being related to our surroundings' (Shotter, 2009, p. 219) that shapes our activities in unpredictable ways. Because the spontaneous responsiveness of our interactions and activities means that each occasion is different, externally derived and generalized fixed 'rules' of conduct are inadequate. Being able to respond in a 'fitting manner' is based on a fluid inner sense of, and feel for, what may be going on. Although we cannot predict what will happen next in our talk and interactions, we can anticipate others and our 'next possible movements' – which may meet our expectations or surprise us (Shotter, 2011, p. 443). Drawing on Wittgenstein, he notes that many of the relational difficulties we face are because of the '*expectations, inclinations, attitudes*, etc. we adopt in approaching a particular situation' (p. 447, italics in original), i.e. when we go into a situation with pre-fixed anticipations, rather than being open to unfolding moments. These unfolding moments are not unanchored, they are connected with past conversations, identity preserving, and developmental continuities. We have to learn to see both the continuities and the unique, unanticipated possibilities arising in the moment – the 'expressions of an agency "at work"' (p. 453). Thus:

> *Relational difficulties* have to be overcome by *resolving* on a *line of action*, a s*tyle*, or a *way* of proceeding with respect to each other and/or to our shared circumstances, something that must be accomplished practically, in the moment, in relation to the sensed, anticipated outcomes of one's projected actions. (Shotter, 2009, p. 232)

From Shotter's perspective therefore, abstract theories and techniques cannot take this practical accomplishment into account. Consequently, we need to focus our studies on ongoing and momentary relational encounters between people – in living conversations – articulating forms of theorizing consistent with being within, rather than outside of, unfolding moments. We suggest one way of proceeding occurs through *anticipational fluidity: anticipational* because we are creating ways of going on as we orient ourselves both to the moment and to what might yet happen, and *fluid* in terms of finding ways of relating and responding to others when the outcome of the exchange is not simply up to us. To further elaborate this way of thinking and acting, we move to Ricoeur's work.

Agency, action and interpretation

Ricoeur's extensive work (1976, 1981, 1990, 1992, 2006) enriches our perspective on relationality and difference, two threads being particularly relevant: agency and interpretation. In his later work, Ricoeur (1981) moved away from analytical philosophy to develop hermeneutic phenomenology, which necessitated a radicalization and interweaving of hermeneutics and phenomenology wherein understanding is not just a way of knowing but is also a way of being and relating. His overriding concern was with how we make our experience intelligible and how we can live our life in ethical and moral ways. Part of this task lay in exploring the relationship between human action, agency and experience. It encompassed a complex and nuanced conceptualization which moved away from essentialist views of action and agency and replaced them with the notion of 'self' *in relation*

to others within lived moments. Additionally, he emphasized how, in trying to give meaning to what otherwise might remain 'chaotic, obscure, and mute', we draw together the past and present while anticipating the future (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 115). These aspects of his work are key because they sensitize us to how working with differences unfolds in and across moments of time in anticipational and fluid ways.

Ricoeur (1992) argues that essentialist approaches to action and agency privilege actions and events and efface the subject (p. 86). This is evident in studies focusing on forms of talk, individual or generalized roles, or patterns of behaviour – talk and behaviours separated from people and their relationships to each other in living interactional and situated moments. For Ricoeur, this is problematic because actors are *always* present in actions and speech, and so it matters who is smiling and who is speaking (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 206): 'Who is acting? Who is telling his or her story? Who is the moral subject of imputation?' (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 169). Thus, it matters that the person sitting across the table is someone you know will keep their word. And, while in practice it is difficult to attribute events to specific individuals because our actions are so entangled with others and with our physical and social world, we do need to consider the intentions, actions and talk of persons in the conversation. This is not to say that every comment we make is an intentional one – indeed much of what we say and do on a day-to-day basis is both predeliberative (instinctive) and deliberative (intentional). But while the latter gives us the power to act and to change the world (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 112), instinctive comments can be just as influential as deliberative ones. In our everyday conversations *who* is speaking and *how* they relate with others is of consequence.

In addition to agency, the second relevant theme is interpretation. Ricoeur focused on interpretation *in* living speech and the interpretation *of* written text whereby writing detaches meaning from the event. Within the former, interpretation is central to action and self-work because it influences how we view our life and the choices we make (Ricoeur, 1992). Interpretation also influences our meaning-making with others because it is 'in the interplay of question and answer, the interlocutors collectively determine the contextual values that structure their conversation' (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 107). From Ricoeur's perspective, prior meanings do not exist, but are worked out in particular conversations and contexts in which a range of potential or partial meanings and 'possible worlds' may unfold from our interpretations (Ricoeur, 1976, p. 88).

There are connections with Shotter's work, as both are concerned with themes of unfolding relationality and interpretation (not representation). Rather than identifying the actions, dynamics, mechanisms and/or linguistic moves that are required to sustain agreement, both point to the need to inquire into how people explore their differences including the multiplicity of meanings and intentions present in the 'search for solutions that go beyond their own limited version of what is possible' (Gray, 1989, p. 5). Both highlight the importance of considering the intersubjective nature of relationality: to our *practical sensing* and orientation to the persons with whom we are engaging; to the time and contexts in and across which we are relating; to our interpretations and embodied anticipations of others' talk, actions; and the uncertainties in the situation, etc. This orients us to others rather than just fixing on our own interests because, as Ricoeur (1992) notes, we are authors of our own and others' stories, as they are of ours, i.e. we can talk about ourselves as a person … but a person *in* a situation *with* others.

While there are connections between Ricoeur and Shotter, there are also differences. Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics develops a theory of interpretation in terms of how we create knowledge about our experience. Shotter (2009) embraces a dialogical practical hermeneutics focusing on developing a situated understanding of our living experience. Ricoeur's work is grounded in phenomenology, both sense (what is said) and reference (what is talked about) in which individual consciousness in the form of reflection and personal responsibility plays a key role. Shotter is more concerned with the '*spontaneous responsivity* of living' (2009, p. 231, italics in original) and a

fluid commonsense understanding (Shotter, 2016). These differences are important because they draw attention to both lived and also reflective moments of experience – to the intentions and to the past and present conversations and actions of people.

We extend our inquiry into difference empirically by considering interactions between faculty and business executives in a business school around curriculum issues. The academic–practitioner context provides a rich opportunity to inquire into how differences are worked through theoretically and practically because it is recognized as a problematic relationship central to the current focus on the impact and relevance of research and to the need to create productive relationships that bridge the gap between theory and practice, communication styles, and interests (Bartunek, 2007; Bartunek & Rynes 2014; Beech, MacIntosh, & MacLean, 2010; Collier & Lawless, 2016).

Interpretation as Methodological Approach: Reading Theoretical and Empirical Texts

We generated the sensitizing resources as we integrated our reading of Ricoeur and Shotter with our interpretation of empirical data around collaboration and difference between faculty and executive partners (EPs) in a business school, treating their actions and words as texts (Ricoeur, 1981). At this point, we wish to underscore distinctions between interpretation *of* lived experience and *in* lived experience. The former relates to our 'method', the latter to working with difference as an everyday interpretive process, i.e. from within the moment. This is consistent with Ricoeur (1981), who highlighted how interpretation takes place both within the event of speaking and also apart from it, where action can be approached as a form of readable text. Methodology inevitably involves the latter as we interpret the lives of others from outside.

Setting

Our inquiry's setting is a group of current and retired business executives at a US business school who organized themselves as *executive partners* (EPs) to provide a range of contributions. Among involvements with admissions and career services, they work with faculty on curricular offerings, including a two-year MBA competency-based leadership development programme. We focus on this programme, which is administered jointly by designated faculty and a lead EP who recruits and manages a cohort of EPs assigned as individual student coaches for the two-year duration. EP coaches extend curricular content taught by faculty, for instance, by participating as observers and feedback-givers in experiential exercises, helping students process the results of assessments, and guiding them in crafting personal development plans.

The lived experience of working across difference is salient here because EPs define their ongoing contribution to the business school as based on their business experience in contrast to the faculty's academic knowledge. They are sensitive to how they relate to academic faculty, *"*We don't want to be the guys from the "home office" … telling the divisions what to do*"* (EP interview). For their part, faculty recognize the contribution made by EPs to the school, yet, also see themselves as safeguards of the curriculum's academic integrity. Thus, as they work to deliver the programme, faculty and EPs find themselves facing tensions and differences at many different levels.

Empirical Texts

The empirical texts on which we draw were generated through fieldwork by an insider/outsider team of two (Bartunek & Reis Louis, 1996). They include transcriptions of: audio-taped monthly planning and coordination meetings for the leadership development programme; interviews with

meeting participants reflecting on themselves, their intentions and their relations with participations; audio-taped interviews with the leadership group of the EP organization focusing on their roles and the opportunities and challenges of their efforts to collaborate with faculty, and fieldnotes. We also collected archival materials (internal presentations, training documents, newspaper articles and memos) related to the curricular offering. Audio-taped planning and coordination meetings were key in capturing living moments of interaction, while reflective interviews with participants revealed their interpretations of meeting interactions. Broader interviews with EPs, plus archival materials, clarified the historical ground of interactions.

Interpretive analysis

Analysis of the data progressed through multiple interpretive cycles as we worked to recognize and understand phenomenological moments of unfolding interaction among participants by moving back and forth between the parts and wholes of the empirical texts and the data as a whole (Ricoeur, 1981). We attended in brute terms to what the empirical texts said, working to 'follow the path of meaning [they] opened up' (p. 161). Specifically, informed initially by Ricoeur's notions of action and agency, we organized the interview and archival data under the themes of selfhood, sameness and difference. Comments such as "We are a foreign body in the system" (EP interview) and "I guess we have forced things in the past […] so it takes a lot to overcome that" (faculty interview) underscored the relational work required for collaboration. To examine this work in its unfolding, we then reviewed meeting transcripts. We focused on participants' efforts to move forward in relation to each other and the curricular project at hand, identifying moments of tension and disjuncture, as well as moments in which efforts moved forward. Provisional themes such as contestation and concurrence, and especially their co-presence, highlighted the deliberate tentativeness used by participants' in arguing their differences. We integrated these with participant reflections after the meetings. As we interpreted these empirical texts, we were also re-reading Ricoeur in relation to the themes, particularly his rendering of interpretation and intentionality. Struck by the importance of responsiveness in the phenomenological moment, we turned to Shotter's explication of relational responsivity and rethought our original themes. Thus our pre-understandings as interpretive researchers, and our concern first with Ricoeur and then with Shotter, influenced our engagement with the empirical texts, with the latter concurrently shaping our understanding of the theoretical texts. We generated the sensitizing resources through the interplay of theoretical and empirical texts as we explored potential insights for our theme of working across difference. The sensitizing resources concretize our reading and thereby offer possibilities for expanding our ways of seeing and orienting ourselves in the world (Geanellos, 2000; Ricoeur, 1981; Tan, Wilson, & Olver, 2009). We now move to explicate the sensitizing resources, beginning with a contextualized excerpt from a curriculum planning meeting involving two faculty members (Emma and Jane) and the lead executive partner (Lisa). We selected this excerpt because it offers a way of placing readers within a moment of responsive conversation where differences are addressed in relationally responsive dialogue.

The phenomenological moment: Excerpt from a curriculum planning meeting

The excerpt presented below illustrates participants' explicit and ongoing efforts to make a decision about whether and how the emotional intelligence inventory might be a component of the following year's leadership development curriculum. The struggle to interact collaboratively occurs not only in relation to the task, but also in the intersubjective relationships between participants – Emma and Jane (faculty) and Lisa (lead executive partner). Playing into the conversation

are previous meetings, discussions and hallway conversations between those present and with other EPs and faculty, that have been ongoing since the programme's initial launch (e.g. over the programme's name EP selection content instruments). For example, 18 months prior to this meeting, shortly after the first group of students in the programme received their first assessment results, Lisa and other EP coaches came to Jane (internal author) expressing concern that the initial group of assessments had little traction with either the students or coaches. As one executive said, "The students don't believe their data." The EPs then proposed alternatives to faculty (based on instruments they had used), some of which were incorporated, while others were declined.

Emotional intelligence assessment played a prominent role in faculty–EP discussions. For the second iteration of the programme, mindful of the ongoing debate in the research community about its validity as a psychological construct, faculty advocated for and introduced a new tool whose psychometrics had been recently endorsed in the academic literature. At the end of the year, students panned it, with respective averages of 2.8 and 2.6 (on a 5-point scale) in the annual programme evaluations.

In light of this evaluation data, Emma, a month before the meeting highlighted here, sent an email acknowledging the "ongoing discussion about whether to include emotional intelligence in our slate of assessments'. Pointing to a published article in *Administrative Science Quarterly* that suggested the construct had a degree of overlap with Big-5 personality dimensions and was only useful in predicting job performance for people "low in cognitive intelligence", Emma stated, "I think this argues for *not* measuring emotional intelligence with our MBA audience – perhaps using agreeableness as an approximation" (emphasis in original). She was among a number of faculty members who questioned its use and value. Lisa (lead EP) regularly highlighted and advocated emotional intelligence (EI) because of its popularity among practitioners. In the face of these challenges, Jane (internal author) had consistently argued for the consideration of emotionality and action in the leadership development curriculum. This background sets the scene for the intentionalities that play out in the meeting in relationally responsive and spontaneous ways.

The following verbatim meeting excerpt offers an opportunity to replay the conversation and delve into its living moments. The relationally responsive open nature of conversation may be seen in the meeting, which incorporates an interplay of interpretations, questions, evaluations and intentions that make it difficult to attribute control or cause and effect to one single participant. The excerpt is intended to offer a dynamic portrayal, i.e. 'to show whilst also talking about' (Shotter, 2008, p. ix) ways of dealing with differences from within a conversation. We highlight the three sensitizing resources through colour. They are: open work, difference-making and tentative intentionality.

KEY:	Open Work	*Difference-Making*	**Tentative Intentionality**
	Anticipating & keeping differences in play.	Pointing out features needing further articulation.	Respecting & building on differences.
	Emma – faculty	Lisa – lead executive partner	Jane – faculty and author

Emma: I'm still struggling with how with 60 students are we going to um… if we're not happy with any of the assessments, are we going to get from this generalized understanding of emotional intelligence to doing something…

Lisa: …Something active …

Emma: …Different.

Lisa: I mean *there may be an opportunity for a developmental exercise or something* more so than an assessment because I think that's where it falls down right now is there's not sufficient credible research to say if you assess this way, this is what you are. But

I think there might be some…**I'd be happy to look at that, just looked at another** School that's doing a piece on it and **maybe we can get a conversation there** to say how are you fitting that in and what do you use…

Jane: Now for the first years **we can use an assessment because we'll have the Big 5**

Emma: Right

Jane: *Because one of the things [Emma] said in that email that you get a good indicator of emotional intelligence from was it negative emotionality and agreeableness if I remember*

Lisa: **So you can refer them back to…**

Jane: I remember?

Lisa: I mean another place we can have **that conversation is inside the advisory board to say who's using it inside leadership development programmes that** they're working with you know would be another way to do a bit of an acid test of importance. But it does seem to be curriculum wise, it's been there in a number of institutions, do we want to pull it out or do we want to find a different way to maybe come at it?

Jane: Yeah … *my sense is I take it a little different, I mean if we think there's some value there to help the students*

Lisa: **I think there's value…** the work I do outside of here…

Jane: **And if it fits with the goals of Lead 1** - increasing self awareness, gaining feedback skills, understanding of each of the 6 competencies… so that's what that session would be, *it would be reviewing your big 5 scores* and um …

Emma: Although we have a session in the first semester where we're doing that also

Jane: Yeah: but you don't have to pay that much attention to these scales, *there's a lot of work to do with extrovert*, there's five scales and just say we'll be coming back to this. And then if the Goleman article is there and we use the Big 5, **the Goleman meets sorta [Lisa's] desire to touch with industry and then the Big 5 gives us an instrument we're comfortable with and demonstrated correlation with the concept**

Lisa: I mean the other option [Emma] if that's uncomfortable **I can just talk with the coaches and make**
it an available resource which is what I've historically done with that piece… I mean if a coach is talking to me about a student or something I've usually advised them that that is on our resource list

Jane: I would like, I would like yeah if that's happening I would like that to go through the place where….

Lisa: **I would** but if there's discomfort **I can continue down a path** I've been on with it

Jane: *Yea, an underground curriculum [laughing]*

Lisa: *[laughing] It works with some of my other coaching so I know it's got value.*

Shaping anticipational fluidity

We now elaborate this feature of relationality and difference through an interweaving of theory and empirical data as a means of elaborating our argument. While we have differentiated each sensitizing resource analytically, practically they are intertwined in the complexity of the relational landscape (see Figure 1), which occurs not just in the moment of the meeting, but, as indicated, in conversations before and after the meeting.

1. *Open work.* Here, we combine Shotter's and Ricoeur's ideas to illuminate how differences are kept in play. Ricoeur (1981, p. 208) argues that all human actions and conversations are 'open work', in which meanings are in suspense because they are open to multiple interpretations,

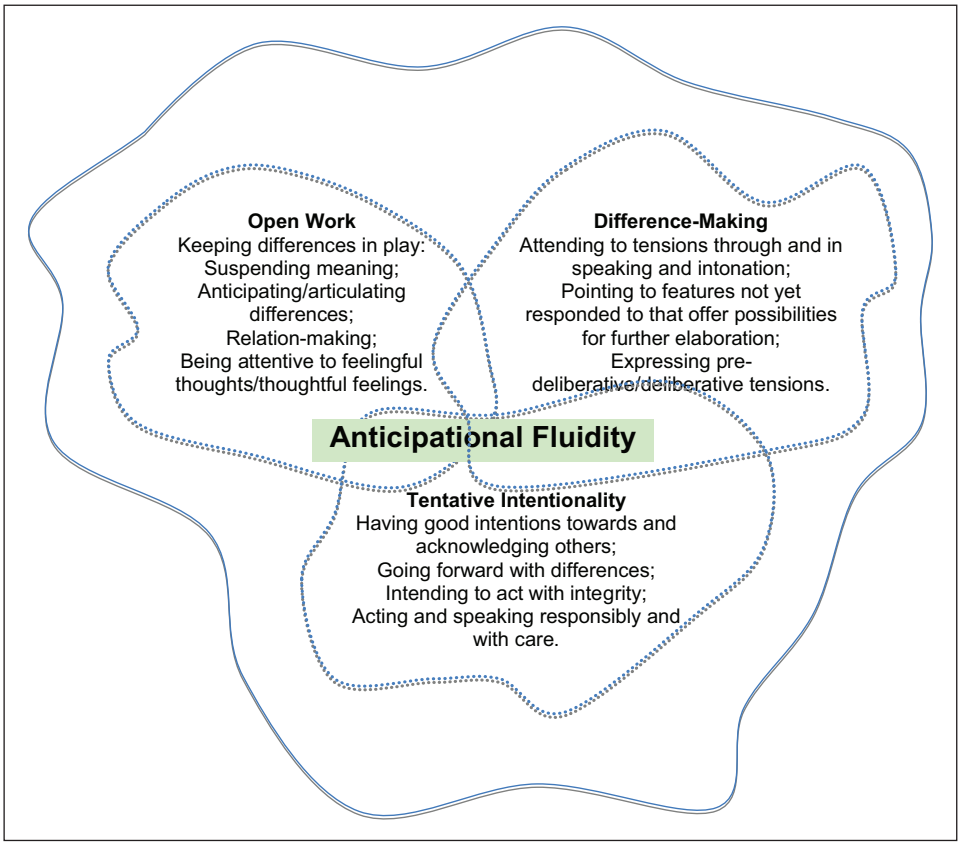

Figure 1. Anticipational Fluidity and Three Sensitizing Resources.

> contestation and possibilities in the phenomenological moment. Thus, open work keeps difference in play by recognizing many possible interpretations in the movement of conversation. Shotter (2008, p. 65) also addresses open work indirectly, arguing that conversations are open not only to further specification, but also in '…arousing expectations and anticipations […] to seek such further articulations'.

We see this in the half-finished sentences, challenges and statements made as Emma, Lisa and Jane attempt to interpret and express meanings and intentions. Beginning with Emma's initial comment "I'm struggling…", which is said with a degree of equivocation so that it both contests the idea of including emotional intelligence in the curriculum and leaves her still open to its possibility, and to Lisa's final comments regarding its value. For example, an attempt to seek further articulation of the issues is expressed in the unfinished statement "doing something…" which Lisa goes on to fill in as "…something active…" (i.e. building on students' experience) and Emma as something possibly "different" from a generalized understanding of EI.

Despite the differing opinions about EI, openness appears to be kept in play by all three, who do not make definitive statements about their position, but hold open possibilities in half-finished sentences such as Lisa's "do we want to pull it out or do we want to find a different way to maybe

come at…?" We suggest that an additional feature of open work means being attentive to its relational aspects, in the sense of *relation-making* (Shotter, 2016, p. 127). We orient ourselves to differences by anticipating participants' interests (Jane's "the Goleman meets sorta of [Lisa's] desire to touch with industry…") and to *movements of feeling* (p. 129) in ourselves and others as the conversation unfolds, for example, Lisa's comment "I mean the other option [Emma] if that's uncomfortable…" and "if there's discomfort…". Thus, dealing with difference is not necessarily a sequential or a managed process, in that many of the responses in the excerpt appear to the observer not to be serially connected. Rather within the multiplicity of interpretations, Lisa, Emma and Jane appear to be keeping open possibilities for going on and for maintaining their relationship by searching for an acceptable line of action that acknowledges the different views of participants.

Lisa expressed the importance of remaining open in a post-meeting conversation with the external author, commenting:

> And you saw me in action today, you know. I will come in with everything laid out, structured, […] Will come into a meeting, have my stack of papers, hoping to move my way logically through. And within ten minutes we're off on a different tangent, and we may or may not get to that particular place.
>
> And so you can't just lay it out and say, "Well, you should listen to me because this is my experience." It's not necessarily… You don't play that card, nor do you want to, but you somehow try and figure out how do you establish the rapport and relationship that suggests that there is mutual respect and appreciation for the two different pieces that are brought to the table.

These comments perhaps illustrate an intention to remain open through relation-making: to consider ongoing relationships (not going in with everything laid out, but having mutual respect and appreciation) by being open to the possibility that there's always something else.

Such micro gestures are important, because *how* a speaker says something – the locutionary act – influences the listener's interpretation of possible meanings (Ricoeur, 1976). It also highlights how, in the moment of talk, we may keep open possibilities by being sensitive to how our expressions may arouse *feelingful thoughts* and *thoughtful feelings* in others (Shotter, 2016, p. 131), i.e. the activity of relation-making. While this is often intuitive, we suggest that being open and responsive to movements of feeling of ourselves and others can help us work more thoughtfully with differences. An illustration may be seen in Lisa's comment in a discussion with Jane a few weeks prior to the meeting:

> Lisa: "And then I just have to decide on any given day, whether that's an important point to push. But, if I step out of my … if I don't take it personally and just step away from that, then I'm fine with it and I appreciate the concern, but I just think that sometimes we're at dual purposes about some of these kinds of things."

To summarize, open work keeps differences in play by avoiding fixing meanings and positions too early and being attentive to what may be behind the spoken words, to feeling thoughts and thoughtful feelings.

2. *Difference-making.* Working with differences involves dealing with concerns and tensions that may be embedded in and across time, in past and in present conversations, and may be articulated and/or visceral. Tensions indicate 'movements of feeling' in which we need to think about how to 'phrase our utterances both ethically and politically' (Shotter, 2016, p. 102). In the meeting, Emma expresses her tension by questioning what students might gain other than a "generalized understanding" of EI, and in her challenge to the suggestion that

the Big 5 might be a viable way of addressing the topic because it's already being covered in an OB session. Tension is also evident in the exchange between Jane and Lisa over the rationale for including emotional intelligence in the curriculum: Jane challenges Lisa's claim that EI has "been there in a number of institutions" with a direct "I take it a little different", which is met by a challenge from Lisa, "I think there's value", which she explained later to Author (external):

Lisa: "*Now we still push at each other* about other assessment tools all the time… if we're honest. *But I see that as a pretty constructive dynamic* that should exist. I mean I see part of what I need to be able to do is bring that corporate perspective because it…"

Lisa articulates a tension between "pushing" each other because she still wants to bring the "corporate perspective", yet she sees this as "pretty constructive".

Difference-making speakings and intonations (Shotter, 2016, pp. 99–100) work through pointing out differences and features not yet responded to that offer possibilities for further elaboration. Jane's comment that they could continue with Goleman's article and the Big 5 is possibly a difference-making statement that acknowledges the value of emotional intelligence in the curriculum while at the same time responding to Emma's concerns. She initially says that Emma need not exhaust attention to the Big 5 dimensions relevant for EI in the first semester and then underscores agreement with her concern for using tools with a "demonstrated correlation" with the concept. We suggest that difference-making statements offer a way of keeping differences in play while offering opportunities for discussion. Keeping differences in play may also be seen in statements about the opportunity for a developmental exercise and for looking at what's happening in other schools (Lisa), or that EI fits in with the goals of the lead programme (Jane). Recognizing and acknowledging differences is perhaps an important part of trying to go on, as seen in Lisa articulating her understanding of faculty concerns that curricular choices should reflect "credible research', while still pushing EI, and Jane's acknowledgement of that same concern in the reference to dimensions of the research supporting the Big 5.

A further example in the meeting of difference-making statements and intonation occurs at the end of the excerpt where Jane reacts to Lisa's suggestion to continue with EI separate from the formal curriculum. Jane points out a 'feature' of the situation previously undiscussed – an "underground curriculum" – which opens up the conversation. However, she laughs while contesting Lisa's idea (laughter reciprocated by Lisa) perhaps with the intent of softening the challenge as an appropriate way of expressing the difference. She later commented in an interview with Author (external):

Jane: I have this visceral response to the argument that we should do this or that because IBM or GE or Motorola is doing it – that line of argument just runs slap up against […] the disciplines of thinking that come with our training…. I just don't think that because IBM or GE is using it, is a sufficient argument. […] exactly the work that I do all the time, having a visceral response to something, then in the 'feeling' of that negative response, *searching for the… for the right response to make … and the right way to make it, is there a way to move forward that is integrative or is this a place where I should take a stand?*

Her comment about finding a way to move forward is perhaps reflected in the meeting by her suggestion that they could continue with Goleman's article and the Big 5. Lisa also expressed the tension between 'taking a stand' and finding a way of moving forward after the meeting:

> Lisa: So if I can give you one instance where I caught myself today, it was - I'm used to being heard so normally in the past over a 25-year career […] And I find myself, *my instant reaction might be to push back and say, 'Why not?'* I'm getting better at it but not perfect by any means. *You'll pull away and say* at the end of the day that it's really [Emma] and [Jane's] to run, not mine…

These two excerpts illustrate Ricoeur's notion of the interplay between predeliberative ("visceral response", "instant reaction") and deliberative ("you'll pull away") responses, and an intentional 'catching' oneself, perhaps a way of keeping open and generating possibilities for going on amid the tension. Jane and Lisa's comments also draw our attention to the temporal character of tension experienced in past meetings and conversations. A tension that Emma confirmed, saying: "I have a general view of how that [shaping the curriculum] works and the tension I feel." This tension is shared in Lisa's past experience of "being heard" in the corporate world compared to her current feeling of not being heard in the business school meeting and Jane's continual search for the "right response" – which play into the responsive interaction in the meeting.

Thus, in the to and fro over the Big 5, a potential small resolution momentarily opens around the possible use of this instrument as a provisional option for a programme session offered by Jane because this connects with Emma's concern about valid assessment and Lisa's conviction about the importance of EI. This may reflect larger agreement around the importance of assessment validity developed over the history of this collaborative association. The relational responsivity inherent in these potential resolutions is suggested both in explicit statements of connection – "The Goleman meets sorta of *[Lisa's]* desire … and … the Big 5 gives *us* an instrument" – and in acknowledgements of what participants are "comfortable" or "uncomfortable" with. Expressed in the same to and fro of the conversation, though, tensions develop that convey difference. For example, as noted above, difference is implicated in the relative importance of internal rationales, e.g. "if we think there's some value" versus external "outside of here" rationales and perhaps larger differences are indicated in the ways in which Jane and Lisa construe themselves relative to each other and to the disposition of the EI discussion – as academics and executives. Small tensions can provoke us into noticing something different, to interrupt the spontaneous flow of conversation, and relate ourselves to each other or the situation in a different way (Shotter, 1996a, 1996b).

This leads us to the question of how to 'go on' after noticing such differences and tensions? We suggest this occurs not by resolving (coming to a final determination) or negotiating (bargaining, trading off) but by being anticipational and fluid in the way we address difference by making small shifts and adjustments while continuing to search for and explore possible courses of action. Specifically, by recognizing and responding to connections when they are made and shaping provisional options (relation-making); alternatively, it may involve recognizing tensions in the unfolding conversation that call for further exploration and/or a shift in relating (difference-making).

Thus, difference-making talk can also be relation-making in that it can '"move us" ontologically […] in an evolutionary fashion in our very being-in-the-world' (Shotter, 2016, p. 101). As Lisa commented in the conversation with [Author] after the meeting:

> And where there's a struggle is where that breaks down. And I think you just move yourself to places where there is good energy to want to work collaboratively together.

The issue of how to work together in order to *go on*, difference-making in a relationally responsive way, is crucial to creating anticipational fluidity.

3. *Tentative intentionality*. As we noted above, by pointing to new features and maintaining openness, difference-making arouses anticipations of what might happen next (Shotter, 2016, p. 99). We suggest that this involves a stance of *tentative intentionality*. We define tentative intentionality as having good intentions towards others while recognizing and respecting differences, and being able to attribute those intentions to oneself (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 22), as distinct from the idea of a speaker's rational intention. We suggest this means embodying a way of relating and talking in which participants express their own thoughts, feelings and ideas while engaging with others. In the meeting, Lisa, Jane and Emma try to find ways of moving forward on EI's place in the curriculum, maintaining their individual concerns by offering possibilities for action. This can be seen in statements about an opportunity for a developmental exercise and looking at what other schools are doing (Lisa – "I'd be happy to look at that…"), or Jane's comment that "the Goleman meets sorta [Lisa's] desire to touch with industry and then the Big 5 gives us an instrument …". These suggestions are made in tentative ways that acknowledge others' views and anticipate their voice. Differences are also acknowledged and worked with in Lisa's articulation of her understanding of Emma's concern that curricular choices around the use of the EI inventory should reflect "credible research', and Jane's acknowledgement of the same concern in her suggestion that Big 5 dimensions offer an alternative. Put simply, tentative intentionality is a way of working with differences that is not based on either/or, but on the question of how we build differences into going on. For example, Lisa's comment in the meeting: "… another place we can have that conversation…", or as another EP commented in an interview:

Dan: And I say that to people here… if you really believe something could take place that would be better than what it is today and yet you get real resistance initially, sit back. **We can talk about it as a group, talk about it individually with other members, etc. Maybe there's another way to approach it. And there's always another way to approach it.**

Ricoeur (1992, p. 68) differentiates between three types of intention: (a) acting intentionally and with conscious direction, (b) acting with a particular intention in mind, and (c) intending to do something. He says the first two are observable and are often studied independently from the agent because we focus on what the action/direction/intention is rather than on the person. For example, acting with a particular intention in mind means someone saying "I am doing this because…" and in this situation we tend to focus on the 'because…', not on the 'I'. Ricoeur finds this problematic because it means we ignore the responsibility of 'I'. The third intention refers to a person proposing to act in the future and as such is subject to the test of the sincerity of that person (p. 72). Dan's comment "there's always another way to approach it" is an example of intending to do something that brings a responsibility to be open to others. From a phenomenological perspective this is foremost, because the focus lies on who is speaking and whether s/he can be trusted to keep his/her word. Ricoeur wants to bring this forward, which, we suggest, is important for our project where participants' assessments of the sincerity and veracity of statements and of other participants inform the will to work with difference. This third form connects with our approach by introducing relational (consideration of and responsibility to others) and more tentative aspects of intention.

Jane's comment after the meeting perhaps embodies tentative intentionality in the sense that she expresses her "responsibility to make this thing work":

Jane: I do think that the Executive Partner organization is something substantial here at the school and something that is unique to [the School] and **so I feel that there is a kind**

> **of responsibility to make this thing work… to figure out how we, I, can engage with their experience** to continue to develop the contribution that they can make to the students and to the school.

For her, 'making it work' is enacted by trying to connect experiences and work with the different experiences of others – to "figure out how we, I, can engage …".

Tentative intentionality is therefore about a carefulness in describing and responding to those differences so that relationships are preserved. Of course it is difficult to evaluate and verify tentative intentions: people may declare their intentions or they may not; he/she may act in accordance with his/her statements or not. For Ricoeur (1992, p. 72) such tests of sincerity are 'not verifications but trials that finally end in an act of trust … regardless of the intermediary acts of suspicion' and involve moving between dogmatism and scepticism while settling for neither.

Discussion

The interpretation of the meeting excerpt, deliberately from our perspective, does not resolve the issue of emotional intelligence in the curriculum, nor does it offer a finalized set of discursive resources, techniques or communication strategies. From a dialogic perspective living conversations are always unfinalized, always in relation with – and responsive to – others (Shotter, 2014) and on 'the ethical deed in its making' (Clark & Holquist, 1984, p. 63). Our focus therefore lies on how participants consider relationships and interpret statements and intentions while addressing differences in the ongoing deliberation around curricula. We foreground how, out of difference and relationality, shifts and possibilities might be fashioned to open ideas to further articulation (Shotter, 2008).

In line with Ricoeur and Shotter, our three sensitizing resources foreground agency and intentionality in attuning ourselves to how we may deal with differences from within conversations: *open work* means anticipating differences and keeping them in play to maintain relationality, *difference-making* is about pointing out features that may need further articulation, and *tentative intentionality* entails building on the differences in order to go on. While it could be argued that these are 'just common sense', we point to the interactions that many of us experience where a lack of respect, consideration and attention to others has led to conflictual relationships. Common sense is equated with taken-for-granted, unquestioned and presumed shared practical understandings that we often fail to acknowledge and enact. For Shotter (2008, p. 28) common sense is 'a special kind of ethical sensibility […] to do with sensing or feeling what the people around us are trying to do in their actions'. We suggest that the three sensitizing resources embrace this ethical or relational sensibility that can help us become more adept in dealing with differences from within our lived experience. In contrast to mastering objective, individually performed competencies that are inadequate in dealing with textured, unscriptable conversations, sensitizing resources offer a form of 'prospective theorizing' that calls upon us to anticipate possibilities (Shotter, 2016) by underscoring the need to pay attention to *being in, responsive to, and working within the moment, while considering others.* Anticipational fluidity integrates the three sensitizing resources: in open work by keeping meanings/views/responses fluid rather than fixed, in difference-making by anticipating future possibilities inherent in tensions, and in tentative intentionality by anticipating that what I say now will have an impact on self, others and the future.

Anticipational fluidity is a way of being in a conversation that requires us to notice and move within unfolding moments in which judgements are required 'partly because of the infinite contextual richness' (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011, p. 342) and the uncertainty of what to do or say next. In noticing differences in potential interpretations and intentions, we anticipate the impact of our

words on others, while being fluid in terms of ongoing meaning-making. For example, as Bill (EP) noted in contrasting being assertive with tiptoeing:

> I'm very assertive about my views, and so forth. But you just kind of tiptoe around […] And I would say 'Well, you're allowed to disagree.'

As such, this is not just about paying attention to ourselves and to our words, but also to others by anticipating their responses, i.e. to our relationality. Our approach therefore foregrounds a 'felt discriminative awareness' in which we become sensitized to 'difficulties of orientation' we face in work and life (Shotter, 2011, p. 439). Anticipational fluidity alerts us to how our relationships with others encompass interpretation and difference at many levels, experienced in conversation as fluid, responsive moments of making judgements and proposals while being open to others' and their ideas: a kind of anticipation that entails imagining forward to create space for understanding and further articulation. An excerpt from another planning meeting between Lisa, Jane and Emma about assessing student behaviours illustrates this, as Lisa challenges Emma's idea to have an assessment video:

Lisa: … Um and then you would have to be very clear and have to be able to isolate those [behaviours] and measure those independently.

Jane: On the other hand … just think about … you know play around with the idea for a minute…

Jane attempts to keep the conversation open, her suggestion to "play around" with the idea invites Lisa to move to exploration and possibility instead of judgement.

We have 'theorized' differently to much of the work in organization studies around collaboration, which identifies general prescriptive constructs (see Introduction) that try to pre-determine the types of actions or forms of discourse needed, for example, validating 'claim rights' (Arvanitis & Karampatzos, 2013), or proposing cooperation and coordination (involving open communication, trust and commitment) as two key facets in collaboration (Gulati et al., 2018). In Ricoeur's terms this involves a value judgement about what is the appropriate action to take. Our intention has been to theorize in a way that foregrounds the emerging responsivity entailed in working with difference.

Our work is also relevant to the challenges of inter-professional and inter-organizational collaboration, which have been examined more broadly within the fields of healthcare, technology, education and science. Many of these studies also focus on ways of managing tensions by considering structural, governance and spatial dimensions that facilitate collaboration (e.g. Le Roy & Fernandez, 2015; Levesque et al., 2018). Our approach differs from these externally derived ways of theorizing because it is not about acting in fixed ways, finding the right words or points of agreement, or applying communication techniques. It is about being sensitive to the need to work differences by becoming adept at remaining open and responsive to others and to the features of the conversation we are in: a practical phenomenological comprehension (Bourdieu, 2000) lying within unfolding situations between particular people, rather than a theoretical representational comprehension concerned with objective relations. Our theoretical framing is consistent with perspectives on skilful practice that highlight relationality and connectedness between participants (e.g. Barge & Little, 2008).

Given that practitioners and scholars struggle to make collaboration productive (Feldman, 2010), our contribution lies in offering a way of working through this struggle by keeping differences in play rather than minimizing them. This has implications for working with difference in

both research and organizational practice. Interest is growing in academic–practitioner collaboration in research – not in the sense of academics facilitating organizational change (e.g. through action research or focus groups) but in the co-production of research (Jung, Harrow, & Pharoah, 2012; Madsen, Larsen, Hersted, & Rasmussen, 2018; Ospina & Dodge, 2005) or in a 'relational scholarship of integration' that requires positive mutual relationships (Bartunek, 2007). Reflections on the co-production of research often emphasize structures (Bartunek, 2007) and/or the importance of dialogue between academic and practitioner (Marcos & Denyer, 2012), but do not go on to discuss the specific nature of that dialogue.

There are a few dialogic studies of collaboration in organization studies, most focusing on knowledge generation rather than day-to-day organizational interactions. Greig et al. (2013) examine the role of arresting moments and reflexivity in dialogical-based research; Cunliffe and Scaratti (2017) offer five conversational resources as a form of dialogic sensemaking when creating socially useful knowledge; and Ramsey (2008) draws on Bakhtin and Shotter to develop a polyphonic classroom. We extend this work and develop Shotter's (2008) notion of thinking with another person's voice in mind by highlighting the need to keep differences in play and offering ways of doing so from *within* dialogue. We suggest this means participants become oriented to being situated within unfolding moments and to understanding these moments as fundamentally interpretive, relational and responsive.

We recognize that the need to express and work out differences in responsive dialogue is challenging work and that positive mutual relationships can be difficult to achieve in practice. Orr and Bennett (2012, p. 13), for example, experience the 'unsettling interplay of identities', the dynamic differences of theory/practice and personal/professional, academic/practitioner, and the politics of co-production in their research. Sharma and Kearins (2011) also note that collaboration is both a relational (in the sense of involving 'problematic processes of social engagement', p. 170) and political process because of the often asymmetrical interdependencies of individuals. Interactions in organizations involve hierarchical relationships, which are embedded in any relational encounter. Dialogism, based centrally on the work of Bakhtin (1984), addresses the power imbalances implicated in monologic ways of talking by emphasizing the need for plurivocality, openness to others, and productive conversation (Deetz & Simpson, 2004; Gergen, Gergen, & Barrett, 2004). While Shotter does not directly address power, Ricoeur (1992) differentiates between three forms of power: power-over (domination), power-to-do (I can act) and power-in-common (living well with others): the two latter are important in recognizing one's ethical responsibility to oneself and to others. In our context, as Lisa (EP) observed, faculty can ultimately make the final decision, but comments (above) from Jane (faculty), Lisa, Dan and Bill (EPs) indicate a responsibility to work things out together to make EP engagement with the school work.

Institutional expectations also influence intentions to 'live well with others'. For example, at a faculty meeting about EPs, the Dean remarked that, "most students don't want to grow up to be like us". This mindedness towards co-operation was supported by EPs such as Victor, who commented on a desire to "bridge the traditional chasm" and make a difference by "working *with* educators". These comments are notable given the prior power positions of many EPs as C-Suite executives. The institutional context can also be a limiting factor to egalitarian engagement, especially in the dialogic co-production of academic–practitioner research as Beech et al. (2010, p. 1345) note, arguing that it is important to 'suspend hierarchy' and 'challenge power dynamics'. We go further by suggesting how this may be done in unfolding moments of conversation, arguing that from a Ricoeurian/Shotterian perspective, power lies in how it is enacted and voiced within dialogue and relating. Maintaining a stance of anticipational fluidity helps sensitize us to the need to pay attention to what we do and say because we are morally answerable to others.

To summarize, much of what we do in lived experience is indeterminate – things happen in our everyday conversations and interactions with others that are not under any one person's control. The issue therefore, is how then, do we orient ourselves to others and to our differences within the unique and emerging situations in which we find ourselves? We suggest the process is a hermeneutical one of interpretation as we relate and respond to others in the living flow of conversation. From this perspective, applying after-the-fact representations does not help, rather we need to sense what might be going on from within the conversation and how to participate in ways that address differences productively. Anticipational fluidity offers a way of thinking from within – and acting into – a situation in order to resolve a line of action (Shotter, 2008). The three sensitizing resources provide a discriminative awareness of the often taken-for-granted features of our conversations and bring forward the kind of detailed work entailed in working with differences generatively.

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Author biographies

Ann L Cunliffe is Professor of Organization Studies at FGV-EAESP in Sao Paulo, Brazil. She received her PhD from Lancaster University. Her current research interests include ethical leadership, embodied sensemaking, non-traditional qualitative research methods, and reflexivity. She organizes the biennial Qualitative Research in Management and Organization Conference in New Mexico, USA.

Karen Locke is the College of William and Mary Pat and Margaret Walsh Professor in Leadership and Ethics at the Raymond A. Mason School of Business in Williamsburg, Virginia. She received her PhD from Case Western Reserve University. Her current research interests include embodiment in stability and change and qualitative research's analytic processes.