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# Creating Value-Based Collaboration: Life Forms and Power in a Change Project

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Kenneth Mølberg Jørgensen

Aalborg University  
Department of Education and Learning  
eMail: kmj@learning.aau.dk

This paper explores collaboration in one innovative project in a production company. The focus is on one particular relationship—that between change agents and project participants with the emphasis on the relations of power between the life forms of ordinary project participants and the change discourse applied. Drawing on Wittgenstein's concept of "language games" and Foucault's concept of "power", this case demonstrates how the change discourse constructs its own image of who the participants are, and how these constructions shape the main content of the change project. Rather than becoming employee-driven and guided with reference to employee identities and life forms, project participants and project activities are constructed by concepts, methods and techniques that are opposed to the extant identities and life forms within the company.

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper explores one particular tension in collaboration: the tension between change agents and project participants. This tension exists in the context of another tension—that between value-based collaboration and disciplinary means of power. The case in question is an innovative project in a production company that attempts to introduce value-based collaboration as a new form of governance. Value-based collaboration resembles governmentality (Foucault, 1994; see also Clegg, Pitsis, Rura-Pollay, and Marosszeky, 2002) where moral standards serve as an art of self-government and self-reflexivity. This project, however, represents a radical shift from prior history in the company where work was dominated by techniques resembling disciplinary means of power (Burrell, 1988; Clegg, 1989). Formal rules, hierarchical control and standardization were dominant.

The project is an organizational learning project in a production company within the metallic industries sector. The initial actors are two consultants, a project manager, and thirteen project participants. The project is then broadened to include a greater number of employees as it develops. The two consultants, one senior to the other, and the project manager, who is also assistant manager of the company, are responsible for designing a learning process for the thirteen participants. Project participants include both skilled and unskilled workers, a middle manager, a technician and a few office workers. This paper explores collaboration between the change agents—in particular the consultants—and the project participants. The focus is on the relation

between the change discourse applied by the consultants and the project participants' life forms and identities. The concept of "change discourse" comprises the beliefs, concepts, methods, and techniques of the change agents. This paper demonstrates some of the major problems inherent in such forms of collaboration. It demonstrates how differences in language games and the specific relations of power in the project result in the project progressing in a manner contrary to the project's original goals. Under these circumstances the change discourse constructs its own image of who the participants are, and the paper demonstrates how these constructions shape the content of the project. Instead of becoming employee-driven with reference to employee identities and life forms, project participants and project activities are constructed by concepts, methods, and techniques that contrast sharply with extant identities and life forms. The end result—the value premises—does not, as a consequence, mirror real values and real identities in the company. People don't disagree with these values *per se* but the values are simply not expressed in a language that they can understand. As such, the case demonstrates how discourses that aim to facilitate this type of innovative collaboration often themselves carry with them their own images and measures of surveillance, which may actually impede collaboration.

The case story is written here by drawing on the central concepts of "language games" and "power". Wittgenstein's concept of language games (1983) describes collaboration and is outlined in detail in the next section. The positions, interests, intentions and strength of language games are described by means of Foucault's conception of power (Foucault, 1978, 1979), which is outlined in detail later. Power is also applied in viewing language games in use from a critical perspective. It is useful to highlight how a particular change discourse constructs problems, methods, and solutions that entail particular images of who the employees are, and why they think and do what they do. The case story is based on 26 interviews and participant observation in project activities. Finally, the conclusion presented suggests that "value-based collaboration" was essentially an illusion—as it was not grounded in the everyday life and language of the company.

## **LANGUAGE GAMES**

Collaboration has traditionally been understood through the notion of rules or routines. Thus, extant perspectives suggest that collaboration is controlled and guided by a set of rules such as norms, traditions, standards, and procedures. Institutional, behavioural and cultural perspectives, for example, share this basic assumption (e. g., Cyert and March, 1963; Smircich, 1983; Powell and DiMaggio, 1991). This paper also describes collaboration in terms of rules. However, it frames these rules in a particular way not usually seen in the literature. More specifically, the paper doesn't seek to define the rules of the game *per se*. Polanyi (1966: 6) uses the term tacit knowing to emphasise that what

we see, recognize and do is the result of an integration of elements of which we have knowledge that we cannot tell. Therefore he uses the term tacit knowing. Knowing to use words, tools and do particular things under particular circumstances depends on this tacit integration of elements, where the integration is the result of knowledge of both an intellectual and practical character (Polanyi, 1966: 7). Rules should be considered in this tacit way—namely as something learned and interiorized (Polanyi, 1966: 17) and used to accomplish and create particular things; i. e., knowing to use words, knowing to do particular things, knowing to behave in particular ways, and so on.

The framework developed and used in this paper remains true to this conception of rules. It is based on a combination of Wittgenstein's concept of language games (Wittgenstein, 1983) and Foucault's concept of power (Foucault, 1980). Viewed in this way, collaboration becomes a question of participating in language games through which social and organizational realities are constructed (Adolphsen and Nørreklit, 1995). Collaboration simply becomes a question of how people communicate, understand, coordinate, and accomplish things together. The rules of collaboration are implicit in what people do together in everyday life. They are parts of being and living, and they are parts of interacting and communicating with other people. Such rules are integrated into peoples' life forms and identities. Rules do not only concern questions of doing but also questions of being particular persons. In other words, knowing and being cannot, and should not, be separated (Brown and Duguid, 2001: 200-201). As such rules become vivid, alive, and active in constructing peoples' and organizations' realities. It follows that collaboration is as much a question of identity and life form as it is of knowledge. Through collaboration social and organizational realities are constructed, negotiated, shared and changed in an interplay or game that often involves many different actors with different interests and in different positions. Such rules are not only static, in the sense that rules recreate realities, but are also used to create change.

The concept "language games" is part of Wittgenstein's later philosophy as described in the *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein, 1983). Wittgenstein's later philosophy is concerned with language as part of what people do in everyday life, language being understood as a local and contextual phenomenon. By emphasising time and place, language is also a social phenomenon that must be understood in relation to other actors, technologies, institutions and history. In Wittgenstein's understanding, language becomes part of living and doing things, basically part of everyday life. The meaning of language is understood as the work that language does in social life. Word works (Clegg, 1975: 6) and this work is also the meaning of words (Wittgenstein, 1983: §§ 10-11).

From this discussion, it follows that the focus is not on language *per se*, but on how language works in social life. The term "language games" comprises both linguistic dimensions and those actions into which language is woven (Wittgenstein, 1983: § 7). These linguistic and non-linguistic dimensions comprise a whole where neither the lin-

guistic dimension nor the non-linguistic dimension can be understood separately from each other.

Further, “language games” is a social phenomenon, something that is played by people in specific contexts, inherent in what people do together. Through such games, social and organizational life in organizations is constructed and shared. These games do not depend on precise articulation; in fact, words cannot, in Wittgenstein’s opinion, be defined once and for all. People know many things that are hard to define or even to describe including such simple everyday things like the “sound of a clarinet” or the meaning of the word “game” (Wittgenstein, 1983: § 78).

As such, a universally and unequivocally correct language does not exist. This is, however, not necessary for communication to work. The ability to converse or communicate does not depend on the ability to say things in a correct manner—but on saying things in an understandable manner. The criteria for understanding or misunderstanding are embedded in the life forms that language is part of. As Wittgenstein (1983: § 23) succinctly puts it: «the speaking of language is part of an activity or of a form of life». When people speak a language they are able to participate in a life form and use language for different things: to correct, invite, report, describe, persuade, emphasise (Harré and Gillett, 1994: 21; Hartnack, 1994: 72-73). To learn a language is to learn how to use it; understanding language is equivalent to understanding customs, practices, uses, institutions and so on (Wittgenstein, 1983: § 199). The rules of language—the customs, practices, and so on—are in themselves a result of people that have learned to use language and do things in a particular manner.

Describing collaboration in terms of language games has certain implications. Collaboration becomes a question of how people communicate, understand, coordinate, and accomplish things together in their everyday settings, most particularly through the use of language (Silverman and Jones, 1976: 166). To understand collaboration is thus to understand how members use language to accomplish particular things together. Organizational realities are constructed through these language games. To understand collaboration is also to understand the life forms of people inside organisations and how they influence how members frame and solve problems and how they participate in organizational life in general.

Language is not a neutral object, something beyond the world (Adolphsen and Nørreklit, 1994: 19), but an integral part of the shaping of organizational reality, and an integral part of collaboration. As such, the object of investigation is the everyday understandings and language games through which meanings and regularities are recognized (Silverman and Jones, 1976: 166). To be able to collaborate is to be able to participate in the language games according to the customs, practices, uses, institutions, norms, and standards of a particular organizational reality. Collaboration follows rules in organizations as well as in others social realities. These rules are, however, not precise and they can only be vaguely defined (Adolphsen and Nørreklit, 1994: 19). Instead, language and collaboration are linked to a social practice,

which follows rules that are largely tacit and taken-for-granted (Hardy and Clegg, 1996: 634).

## **POWER**

Collaboration is constituted by the language games played in organizations. These games are regulated by tacit and taken-for-granted norms and standards that are themselves historically created. These organizational standards regulate behaviour and define criteria for, amongst others, competence and incompetence, membership and non-membership and so on. Some participants are seen as competent in the life form, others may have a more peripheral position. The relationship between master and apprentice is one example (Lave and Wenger, 1991) where the apprentice has a legitimate peripheral access to the knowledge of the master who has the dominating position in the language game (see also Fox, 2000). It follows that everyday life in organizations is also characterized by relations of power that regulate behaviour.

Language games and power may be linked through Foucault's conception of power. This power concept should however not be understood as a theory of power but, rather, as an analytics of power (Foucault, 1978: 94). The idea here is not to say anything general about power but to show how power works, and through this to gain an understanding of power. This is a non-essentialist, non-universal conception of power (Gane, 1986), a social constructivist understanding of power (Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998)—and one that is consistent with the concept of language games.

In Foucault's formulation, power is not found in particular locations or positions in society. He doesn't, for example, speak of the power of the king (Foucault, 1993: 332; Flyvbjerg, 1998) because power doesn't work top-down. It works bottom-up (Wickham, 1986) as it emerges from the interactions of many different forces (Foucault, 1993: 333). It emerges from the petty and ignoble power relations at work in the relations of everyday life (Haugaard, 1997: 43, 68-69). They emerge from the power relations in the family, in the schoolroom, on the factory floor and so on where they stem from deeply ingrained assumptions embedded and embodied in the practices of everyday life. It follows that power is implicit in the way that language games are played in everyday life.

Power emphasizes the fact that language games produce particular versions of what is true and what is just. Truth and justice are historical creations that cannot be separated from time, place and mind. Foucault is thus concerned, among others, with analyses of the scientific system and the juridical system (Foucault, 1980). Further, power emphasises that different language games speak with different powers (Lyotard, 1984). Participants in language games have different positions from whence they may speak such that arguments and points of view speak with different powers and have different possibilities of being heard.

Motives, intentions and interests are embedded and embodied in language games, as are differences, positions, and domination. Social life is constituted by language games, and the positions of the participants' version of truth and justice vary with every move. This is somewhat similar to Von Clausewitz' war game (Tryggestad, 1995) where the best strategy is a question of the ability to adapt to weather conditions, landscapes, weapons, means of transportation, morale of the soldiers and so forth.

Power is, in this sense, the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society or organisation (Foucault, 1993: 334). Power emerges from all the mobilities in all spheres of social life where struggle, conflict, and war are permanent conditions. Reality is constructed through battles between different conceptions of truth and justice ingrained in the small, pitiful, ignoble practices of everyday life: «power is war, a war continued by other means» (Foucault, 1980: 90). This war is eternal in the sense that peace doesn't neutralize the imbalance. The war is reinscribed «in social institutions, in economic inequalities, in language, in the bodies themselves of each and everyone of us» (Foucault, 1980: 90).

Collaboration should in this sense be seen a place of unspoken "warfare". Inequalities, differences, dominance and control are inscribed in collaboration. In collaboration different language games struggle to define and construct organizational realities with some language games being stronger than others. Thus relations of power are inscribed in how language is used and how language games are played in organizational life. In every conversation a positioning takes place of arguments and viewpoints (Czarniawska, 1997: 17). These positions are fluid, dynamic and negotiable (Harré and Gillett, 1994) and they are embedded in everyday conversations and in the use of language.

This has certain implications in terms of how formal rules, formal procedures, routines, supervision and external control are understood in organizations. These rules and standards have been viewed as disciplinary techniques of surveillance in classical organization theory as defined by Weber (Weber, 1971; see also Burrell, 1988; Clegg, 1989; McKinlay and Starkey, 1998). Techniques of surveillance are means of governance or control of collaboration. As such, they denote strategies of «how to be ruled, how strictly, by whom, to what end, by what methods and so on» (Foucault, 1994: 202). These disciplinary techniques of surveillance should be understood through how they are used. For example, through how they are used in evaluating, judging, selecting, and training junior administrative staff in a large public sector organization (Silverman and Jones, 1976). Silverman and Jones demonstrate brilliantly how the formal rules and procedures are integral parts of the language games of, for example, a review panel that judges and selects young applicants for a career in the organization. Recently, more liberal forms of government or governance have become more and more popular. Neo-liberal forms of governance also fit under the heading governmentality, which emphasizes an art of self-government that is linked to morality (Foucault, 1994: 206). The central idea is that

control of subjects is based on their active consent and subjugation rather than their oppression, domination or external control. Instead of being controlled by external sources, subjects are controlled by moral standards that serve as a basis for reflexive self-control (Clegg, Pitsis, Rura-Pollay and Marosszeky, 2002: 2). Value-based collaboration is one example of such collaboration. In the production company, value-based collaboration runs into the problem of prior history where work used to be based on very different means of surveillance. Secondly there is the problem that the change discourse carried by the change agents—especially the consultants—has its own norms and means of surveillance.

## THE CASE STUDY

The paper now turns to the case study of collaboration in one innovative project in a production company. Following the framework outlined above, collaboration in the project is considered as a set of language games between different actors, who have different positions, intentions and interests. The project, including its content and organization, is created, shaped and negotiated through these games. The project is thus a continuous accomplishment where understanding between the actors becomes embedded in the emergence of tacit rules for using the words, methods, and procedures of the project. The key question is whether these rules are capable of creating the desired change. The actors in the project participate in collaboration from their own concepts, methods, and procedures. The consultants use concepts, methods, and techniques from their consulting backgrounds. The participants from the company participate from their background in language games dominated by rules that resemble those of disciplinary power. This is expressed in a sharp division of labour, centralization of control, specialized and repetitive work, and a classic symbol of disciplinary power, a bell, regulates and controls labour time, lunch and coffee breaks. This is the culture in the company when the case study begins. At this point, the old managing director has retired and a new top management group has taken over.

The case story is organized as follows. An overview of the full case story is provided in **Table 1**. The case story presented here concentrates on three significant episodes in the project: the second meeting in the project, change in project design, and some aspects of the value formulation phase, which are now considered in detail.

### THE SECOND MEETING IN THE PROJECT

This meeting takes place on May 31, 2001, and is my first encounter as researcher/observant with the project. The consulting methods applied in this meeting are psychological contract, a questionnaire, and group work in relation to three problem areas identified at the first project meeting: namely, efficiency, decision authority, and collaboration (From the agenda of the meeting of May 31, 2001).

This contract comprises only the project participants. The two consultants (referred to here as primary and second), the project manager

and I are not part of the contract. The process is guided by the second consultant and formulated by having each participant present a number of points that he/she wants to be part of the contract. These points are identified by means of a schema containing three questions. The result is a number of written points, which are to be transcribed and signed by the participants at one of the following meetings. The psychological contract is illustrated in **Table 2**.

**Table 1.** Overview of the Project

Chronology	Activities	Methods and Tools	Actors
	<i>The project begins</i>		
May 2001 - December 2001	Focus on relevant themes and problems Preliminary goal is formulated Learning- and reflection room	Reflection instrument Psychological contract Group work Relation and construction	The project group Project manager Consultants
	<i>Change in project design</i>		
December 2001 - April 2002	Change in the organization of the project Work is decentralized to the subgroups The concept "values" emerges	Values Dialogue games Social styles	The project group Project manager Consultants
	<i>The value formulation phase</i>		
May 2002 - October 2002	Different drafts of the value premises are formulated at the management level and in departments These are integrated into one set of value premises covering the whole organization. These activities take place at Seminars 1, 2, and 3 The set of value premises is approved by the steering committee	Relation and construction Group work	All employees and managers participate in seminar 1 In seminar 2 and 3 representatives participate Consultants
	<i>Implementation of value premises</i>		
November 2002 - February 2003	Seminars-4 and -5 formulate employee and management tasks The consultants are given a more peripheral position in the project.	The value premises Group work	Representatives from managers and employees Consultants.

**Table 2.** Psychological Contract†

We feel, as participants, that work is most beneficial if behaviour is characterized by:	
- openness,	- motivation,
- safety,	- dialogue,
- honesty,	- respect,
- humour,	- willingness to cooperate,
- creativity,	- efficiency,
- constructive criticism,	- optimism
It helps if it is manifested as follows: (examples)	
- no questions are stupid,	- people are active,
- there is room for asking questions,	- people are equal,
- people say what they mean and feel,	- an understandable language is used,
- people accept/understand others' viewpoints,	- people are disciplined,
- there is an open exchange of ideas,	- there is room for humour,
- work is characterized by helpfulness,	- there is room for both small and big problems
We feel, on the contrary, that it is de-motivating if behaviour is characterized as follows:	
- people have a negative attitude	- company roles
- people are quiet/silent	- a language that people don't understand
- people are non-informative	- bad moods
- knowledge is not shared	- stress
- work is characterized by special interests	
- people will not listen	

†: Psychological contract signed at the project meeting of June 28, 2001

The schema is a methodology to assist participants in systematising their thoughts about what should characterize project collaboration. It is signed off at a project meeting on June 28, 2001. The contract, at first glance, appears to be innocent and rather commonplace in the sense that none of the points are especially controversial. They are of a very general character and almost everybody can agree with them. This begs the question as to what this method may be used for? On the other hand, the psychological contract is something that is signed by project participants; it may be held against them and this is exactly what happens later on.

A discussion of the language applied in the session follows the presentation. In this situation the participants seek a language that everybody can understand. A great deal of uncertainty is expressed in this discussion where participants seek answers on what the project is all about and what is required from them. None-the-less the contract is signed at the next meeting in the project group.

After the formulation of the psychological contract, the primary consultant presents some results from a questionnaire, a reflection instrument, which had been completed by the participants. Some extracts from this "reflection instrument" are illustrative:

Reflection instrument—a method to define learning and development needs in companies, organizations, and sub-organizations.

The following schema focuses on a number of relations, which are significant for how organizations (companies) work. This includes how they implement and learn from new initiatives. The instrument focuses on relations that illuminate "THE COMPANY" as an overall system. Secondly, the instrument focuses on single functions and sub-functions.

Both managers and employees may use the reflection instrument to think about and talk about how their organization (company) works and how their own function or sub-function works, and where there is a need for learning and development.

(Excerpts from presentation of the reflection instrument).

The reflection instrument considers the company as a system with different sub-systems that contribute to the general system's mode of behaviour. The questionnaire contains 45 questions, where participants indicate if they "agree" or "disagree". The questionnaire contains a clear perception of what the best company should be—a company characterized by written visions, purposes, goals, and plans; a company where people know and accept their roles and where people are dedicated to fulfilling these roles; and, a company where people reflect and evaluate systematically.

The reflection instrument is very systematic and theoretical—very rationalistic and functionalistic. There is no room here for specific or particularistic life forms and identities. And it is probable that the reflection instrument is a reminder for some people of a context where they might not have had great success—the schoolroom. Five or six of the project participants are unskilled workers while the rest of them are either skilled workers or office workers. The project's emphasis on systematic and theoretical reflection, the skills of reading and writing and the skills of presenting view points in open discussion are in any case very much opposed to who the project participants are.

At the meeting, the primary consultant presents some results from his investigation (see **Table 3**).

The company actually works very well according to the premises in the questionnaire. The scores are high on the agree-indicator with the exception of the point on competence. But this conclusion doesn't fit the consultants' agenda. They need the questionnaire to show something else. The primary consultant explains, in any case, that the results mirror very different attitudes. He presents the following overhead:

The culture is composed of many different subcultures. The picture is very differentiated with regard to:

- Basic attitudes and motivation
- The energy and will for development and change (willingness to change)
- The amount and quality of interaction among the departments now
- The role of single departments in relation to totality (sub-optimizing)
- The strategy's impact in relation to the whole company
- The need for change activities.

(Observations from meeting May 31, 2001).

This overhead is commented on by some of the participants. They appear confused with some suggesting that the results depend very much on a single employee's knowledge, interest, location, and function. One participant suggests that this is not written in a language that everybody understands. There is also a long discussion on what strategy is and how it should be understood. It is argued that the company has excellent employees who do their job; however, they don't know the strategy when asked about it (observations from the meeting May 31, 2001).

This situation mirrors significant differences in the language games of consultants and participants. Dialogue between the two is somewhat strained. The project's language is based on the consultants' premises and is remote from the language games of everyday life in the company. Relations of power are, however, in favour of the consultants. This should be seen in a historical perspective as the project is initiated and supported from the top. The learning project is, in this sense, legitimate because top support is the only legitimacy that the project requires; this is the way things have always worked in the company. Further, one of the two top managers is himself a key player in the project as he is the project manager. It follows that the consultants are perceived to have legitimate authority. Further, this is the first time that participants have participated in a change process. They have no experience and no theoretical knowledge of organizational change. For them, four people are experts: the consultants, the project manager, and the author of this paper, the researcher/observant.

**Table 3.** Questionnaire Results†

	Strategies and plans	Result orientation	Communication	Competence	Holistic perspective	Attitudes and norms
Disagree	24 %	31 %	24 %	45 %	39 %	33 %
None	5 %	5 %	9 %	10 %	3 %	2 %
Agree	71 %	64 %	67 %	45 %	57 %	64 %

†: Based on the primary consultant's presentation on May 31, 2001

The consultants are in the position to draw conclusions, while participants are subjected to the consultants' language games. This situation is the opposite of the project's intentions, which states that the project needs to be employee driven. In contrast, participants are pacified and subjected to a very abstract and theoretical change discourse. Reactions of participants in the discussions are striking. At times situations are characterized by almost complete and utter silence. From the 13 participants that are present, 5 don't say anything at all during the 7-8 hours that the meeting lasts. Only about 3-4 people say something generally during the day. Most participants prefer to remain silent during the discussions.

After the presentation of the questionnaire results, participants are organized in three cross-functional groups that work with the three identified development areas: efficiency, decision authority, and collaboration. It is organized around four points:

- definition of content;
- examples from everyday life;
- relevance in relation to the project on organizational learning;
- relevance in relation to strategy (observations from the meeting May 31, 2001).

After this group work, the results are presented on paper plates in the sequence: group 1, group 2, and group 3. The presentation from group 2 is presented below:

Efficiency—Common for all:

- Collaboration
- Efficiency
- Decision authority
- Motivation
- Attitudes and cultures.

Decision authority

- Optimise relevant information
- More information between departments and shifts
- Change the culture to one big family. Departments are like independent companies—which feather their own nests
- Improve in receiving constructive criticism/good ideas
- Delegate more authority to individuals (group leaders), so that action/production doesn't stall or get held up.

Collaboration

- The implications are major for the project, because the implications are major in relation to strategy.
- Employees are more motivated if they are appreciated and valued.

(Group 2's presentation at the meeting May 31, 2001)

Group 2's presentation is different from the other groups' presentations in that the two other groups' presentations are more detailed and concrete. One example from group 3's work is provided below:

Efficiency

1.a. Trust between leader and employee (motivate, appreciate, and support, if one does something on his/her own initiative). Delegation of authority to employees. Better planning; fewer ad-hoc solutions; less paper flow.

1.b. Rationalization: for example, we haven't registered time on products where we have known it for the last 25 years.

2.a. No reason for waiting for clarification from the manager when one may find a solution himself (when the manager is not present).

2.b. Corrections on drawings are not carried through despite the same errors happening over and over again.

2.c. Understand internal consequences when raw material specifications are changed and such like.

2.d. Lack of resources to solve existing problems that emerge because of tense situations – Thereby problems continue to exist.

(From Group 3's presentation at meeting on May 31, 2001)

During group work, the primary consultant gave some hints to group 2 on how to solve the task. They were instructed to forget about the details and to look at things from above. During the presentations, the primary consultant emphasises exactly this difference between group 2's work and the other two groups' work in implying that group 2's approach is the right way to go about solving the task. Group 2 looked at things from above while the two other groups had concentrated too much on the details. The primary consultant characterizes group 2's work as a total Organization Development (OD) project. After the presentations and the comments from the primary consultant there is a deep silence for some seconds in the room. A tense situation emerges where the primary consultant practically yells at the participants. One person is the target for his yelling, the middle manager in the project group—the situation is clearly out of hand.

The project manager decides to intervene at this point in time. He states that discussions should not go into such great detail as, for example, the coordination of the purchases of toilet paper. The participants have to look at things from above. After this intervention there is again deep silence for some seconds and this is followed by expressions of deep, deep frustration. Several participants say that their work has been wasted. The primary consultant asks if the participants agree to work after group 2's project. The participants agree that they should do that (observations from meeting May 31, 2001).

This is another example of a situation that doesn't work according to the intentions of the project. The primary consultant presses forward a particular conclusion, one not justified by the three groups' presentations. Actually, I liked group 3's presentation better because there were more concrete examples, descriptions of everyday life problems. They, however, put it into their language, not consultant language, and this is probably the primary consultant's main problem. He is better off with a more abstract and theoretical language, one that is more consistent with his competence. As a consequence of the uneven distribution of power, the total OD-project (Group 2) becomes the conclusion; one that was planned in advance and one that the consultants wanted to accomplish. But this conclusion is one which fits the consultants' language games, not the employees' language games.

The dynamics here are very interesting. The group work is designed to try to involve participants but the participants are simply incapable of working in the ways expected. The end result is that the work of group 1 and group 3 is set aside, while group 2's project is what the consultants want, the total OD-project. And the learning from this situation is also imprinted in the participants afterwards. The participants have learned the right result, notwithstanding the fact that they don't understand it.

*Interviewer:* Could you describe your impression of the process so far?

*Project participant:* We were very confused in the beginning. We didn't know what this was all about. We focused too much on details and we needed to look at things from above. We focused on our problems. We didn't focus on the totality. But as time went by, and we have something to relate too, we have improved in looking at the totality. And until the point—where we described the problem—Ah, now we got this far. Then we were divided in groups and we needed to become more concrete again. Now I am confused again. I don't think that I have the knowledge to find out what I should do.

(Interview transcripts)

*Interviewer:* How did you feel after the first meetings? What did you think about it?

*Project participant:* I was a little bit frustrated. There was nothing concrete to relate to, and sometimes I thought that I had misunderstood the whole thing. It seems confusing and a little bit too big compared to my expectations.

*Interviewer:* What were your expectations?

*Project participant:* I don't know. We didn't expect anything, because it came suddenly, you know. Maybe I expected that we had to think about it on our level. You know, how may we improve collaboration in our department? But now it is higher up, and it is between departments. It seems very big now. We don't know all the problems and we are not supposed to either.

(Interview transcripts)

In any case this situation is now problematic. The next meeting begins with a discussion of what had happened. This discussion is an open talk about what went wrong at the meeting on May 31. More specifically, some participants express their frustrations about the May meeting. They request more time and help. In the end the project manager corrects or reprimands the primary consultant whom he felt was too hard on the project group. The project manager also states that it was not appropriate to focus on the differences between the three groups (minutes from the meeting June 28, 2001).

#### CHANGE IN PROJECT DESIGN

The discussion, however, does not lead to basic changes in the way that the project is designed. The diagnosis of the problems emanating from the May meeting suggests that project participants need more time and some assistance. Yet, no question marks are raised on the basic organization of the project including the intervention methods applied. Nor are objections considered against the abstract level of language and methods. Therefore, the distance between the language games of the project and the language games of the everyday working life of the participants remains and is reproduced during two learning seminars in September and November. The results of these learning seminars are dissatisfactory for both the consultants and the project manager. The project manager thinks that there are two problems in the project. Firstly, the group needs to be clearer about its own role in the company; and secondly, the group needs to commit itself 100 % to the project. The project group needs to own the project. Additionally, the project manager wants feedback on his own role as a project manager. The consultants, the project manager, and I have a meeting on December 11 where these problems are on the agenda.

At this meeting, the project manager describes the problems as follows: The project participants do not have the overview, they don't take responsibility, there is no openness in the group, and project participants do not take ownership of the project. The project is considered as the top management's project according to the project manager. There is a *We-and-Them* attitude to the project. One of the central goals of the project is to create a *We-attitude* across hierarchical levels. The primary consultant comments on these descriptions. He agrees with the project manager that the participants have not taken responsibility for and ownership of the project. Another problem is also discussed—that the group seems to be very dependent on the project manager.

This is another example of how problems are constructed as participant problems—and not intervention problems. Participants are constructed as people who will “not” take ownership and responsibility—also as people who are “not” open. The interventions are, however, also discussed and some alternatives are put forward. The results of the meeting are that the project manager and the consultants should support the work in the subgroups, and that the participants should have more responsibility with regard to controlling meetings and seminars (minutes from meeting December 11, 2001). A critique of methods, concepts and techniques are embedded in these suggestions. The change discourse is also changed on some points, but these changes are marginal. The basic change discourse is not reconsidered.

These changes are implemented at the project group meeting of December 19, 2001. The work in the subgroups has stalled, and project participants actually request help (according to interview transcripts). This is one part of the problem. The second part is that the participants are very uncertain about whether their suggestions represent what employees in the company generally want. Therefore, the group wants to conduct interviews in the company. Two themes run through the first part of the meeting. The first relates to the relevance of conducting interviews and the second debates whether the organization into three groups is appropriate (observations from meeting December 19, 2001).

At one point, the project manager interrupts the discussions about these themes. In this connection he presents the table “social styles” (see **Table 4**) that had been created during a personality course which project participants attended.

**Table 4.** Social Styles†

		Task			
		x	x		
		x			
		Analytical			Driver
		x	x		
		xx	x		
		xx	x		
Ask					Tell
		x			
		x			
		Amiable			Expressive
				x	
				Person	

†: Results of a personality test presented at the meeting of December 19, 2001

This table illustrates the distribution of “personalities” amongst four fields. The test classifies people according to whether they are “ask” or “tell” oriented in the way that they approach others and whether they respond in a “task” or “person” oriented way. The combinations of these classifications result in four categories: analytical, driver, amiable, and expressive. These four categories can be further subdivided to indicate if people are analytic analytical, driver analytical, and so forth.

The project participants are given an identity, and a name for this identity, in this intervention. They are constructed as either analytical, driver, amiable, or expressive. “Social styles” thus becomes a very powerful instrument when applied to the project participants. In this case the project group is categorized as a group of analytics. Analytics are characterized as follows:

An analytic:

- seeks to minimize the risk of doing anything wrong;
- loves to work with details;
- works best when problems are solved, and when he/she feels that he/she knows the issue;
- approaches problems with facts and logic;
- accepts new ideas when he/she is sure that they are well documented and consistent with needs;
- tries out known ideas and procedures before trying something new and untested;
- is careful and alert towards other people—he/she doesn’t engage before he/she feels safe in regard to others’ proposals;
- may be perceived as cold, unsympathetic and very business oriented;
- may be considered hesitating and slow because of his/her carefulness.

Advices for analytics:

- change the pace and way of solving tasks—be more willing to compromise;
- run more risks or find shortcuts and make more decisions based on intuition, when requested;
- take the initiative and act independently when requested.

(Appendix presented at the meeting of December 19, 2001).

The personality test is a very powerful instrument. Through it, employees are given identities, which are described in concepts and characteristics. Compared to the consultants’ tools and methods, this tool is far more efficient. The discussion takes another path when the table is presented. The table has an important effect in making the participants realize that they should take more chances, trust their own judgments, and take more responsibility for the project. This effect mirrors the fact that the participants can actually use this instrument. They are able to construct themselves through such instruments.

This is a turning point; the first part of the operation of changing the course of the project has just occurred. The other part of the operation is that the project manager needs to approach the groups and act in a more supervisory role for them. The project manager begins this operation by presenting a “preliminary status from the project manager”. Three problems are mentioned here. Firstly, the groups do not keep the psychological contract. They are not open and sometimes it appears as if they do not want to collaborate. Secondly, participants have been left alone in the work in the subgroups. Finally, the groups have called for assistance from neither the project manager nor other resource people in the organization (observations from meeting December 19, 2001). The following discussion centres on this last point.

In the discussion, the primary consultant asks the participants if they see a project manager or a top manager. The answer is that the participants see a supervisor. The following question is why participants haven't benefited from the project manager's competence. The answer is that the participants haven't thought of it (observations from meeting December 19, 2001). There is a nice contrast here. A distance is marked between the participants and the project manager. This is the We-and-Them attitude. But it is interesting to see how this problem has emerged. Some of the participants emphasize that fear has nothing to do with the fact that they have not called for the project manager's assistance. They simply haven't thought of it.

The contrast is that the primary consultant seeks to construct the problem in terms of fear—but in my opinion, the problem is caused by identity. The participants simply don't feel that they are part of the same group as the top manager. As some participants stated: "We haven't even thought of it" or "it is simply not in us". The project manager is one of "them", not one of us. Participants want to know more before they approach the project manager. Otherwise, the participants remain insecure. Ironically, the project manager and other resource people, who also feel the need to get involved, have been available for the participants; yet no contacts were made. This also mirrors the culture in the company, which has been controlled in a top-down fashion, while the project is an attempt to organize a bottom-up process.

#### THE EMERGENCE OF VALUES

After the meeting of December 19, work continues in the three subgroups. One of the outcomes of this meeting is that both consultants and the project manager begin to participate in the meetings in the subgroups. This influences the outcomes of these meetings in the sense that goals and processes are more "professionally" described. Thus, the change discourse influences the formulation of goals and how possibly to reach them. But there is no doubt that much written output from these meetings is simply copied from what the consultants bring with them to the meetings. Consultant language, therefore, becomes even more dominant while the participants remain generally confused.

In any case, shortly after this change in project design the concept of "values" emerges. This concept emerges in connection with the work of group 3—the collaboration group. Its emergence is described as the result of a process where group 3 had started working with concrete examples from everyday life with respect to authority and collaboration.

##### Authority:

- to have the right to follow up problems to their source;
- to be allowed to return incorrect or substandard items;
- to expect quick decisions from superiors;
- to change the composition of inventory and to be responsible afterwards;
- to modify a component if this is not done by office workers;
- to plan one's own work as long as delivery times are adhered to;
- to refuse orders from customers, if they don't pay;
- to gain influence with regard to major changes.

##### Collaboration:

- employees are not trusted; for example, the use of the bell;

- a better, clearer and safer method of payment;
- collaboration problems if people are members of different unions;
- top-down management does not facilitate collaboration;
- agreements are not kept;
- it is hard to borrow people from other departments;
- errors on drawings are not being corrected;
- computer screens for printing drawings are missing in the production department;
- it takes too long before questions are answered;
- there are not enough resources for paperwork; for example, to finish export papers;
- lack of understanding for space problems in production, inventory, and development;
- managers are under stress;
- managers do not inform.

These examples are discussed at a meeting on January 16, 2002. These discussions lead to a change in how this group approaches its problems.

“After long discussions the participants agreed that they needed another problem (definition). They agreed that this could be “values for management” and as sub-points: values for management, values for informing middle managers, values for employees, for collaboration etc.”

(Minutes from meeting in group-3, January 16, 2002).

Value-based collaboration emerges in this group—but, significantly, this is also by means of support from the project manager. This is an important change because “values” from this point onwards becomes the key point around which the whole project becomes (re)organized. As an outcome to a meeting on January 23, 2002, Group 3 proposes that values need to be clarified for the following:

- good management practice;
- good middle management practice;
- good employees;
- good collaboration.

(Minutes from meeting January 23, 2002).

This proposal is put forward at a further meeting in the project group on January 29. From this point in time onwards “values” becomes the main content of the project. At the meeting on January 29 the project manager presents a table that gives the impression of a complete project—with the concrete actions proposed mainly under the heading “values”. These actions include value clarification in regard to management, work, collaboration, and meetings. The other concrete actions proposed are less significant. There is little doubt that the overall goal of the project has been (re)constructed at this point in time—and this goal is to introduce value-based collaboration.

It is mainly the project manager, in conjunction with the consultants, who constructs this goal. There is no evidence that the participants actually understand very much about what has been going on. The project, therefore, is not really theirs; they have approved the project and in this way given the process a form of legitimacy, but it is not theirs in the sense that it doesn’t match up to the language games of their everyday life in the company.

A plan for clarifying and stating these values is formulated during the spring of 2002. This plan includes the following elements:

- information meetings in all departments;
- seminar 1: all departments work with fields of construction and fields of relation;
- seminar 2: representatives from departments work out a proposal for a description of the value premises for the employees;

- seminar 3: representatives from departments and managers work out a common proposal for a description of the common value premises;
- the value premises are written down and approved.

These elements comprise a specific procedure, one that is implemented under the close supervision and surveillance of the consultants. Seminar 1 takes place in the departments, but it is not carried out in a cross-functional fashion as it follows extant hierarchical and departmental structures. It is a seminar where smaller groups in the departments work from a table that describes fields of construction and fields of relation as in **Table 5**.

After working in smaller groups, these groups then meet and work out a common proposal. Seven employee proposals and one management proposal are produced during seminar 1, with the final task in seminar 1 being to appoint representatives to participate in seminar 2.

In seminar 2, representatives for the employees meet to work out a common or general employee proposal from the seven employee proposals. This seminar also ends with the appointment of employee representatives to negotiate the final proposal. Seminar 2 is cross-functionally organized but otherwise the organization is the same. The tools and pedagogical methods are the same. In seminar 3 the final proposal is negotiated between managers and employees.

In the seminars, the consultants use concepts and methods that have been used throughout the project. The problems are also the same and again the participants are forced to speak in a manner that they quite simply are not used to. This conclusion comprises both managers and employees. The language used in the project at this point in time is basically the same as it was in the beginning.

The actors responsible for the value formulation phase are the project group and the consultants. All information regarding work in seminars 1, 2 and 3 is signed off as if the information comes from the project group; but it is clearly consultant language all the way through. There is one interesting observation worth noting in regard to the minutes written down after the first seminar. According to these minutes the process is absolutely the same in 6 out of 7 departments—the descriptions of the processes are, in other words, simply copies.

Further, the value formulation procedure reproduces basic distinctions between managers and employees. That is, it reproduces the We-and-

**Table 5.** Investigation Fields in the Reflection Room†

Fields of construction	Fields of relation
For example:	For example:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— calling in for the meeting;</li> <li>— the primary objective of the meeting;</li> <li>— the agenda;</li> <li>— the material;</li> <li>— the room;</li> <li>— organization;</li> <li>— management and roles;</li> <li>— minutes;</li> <li>— evaluation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— the groups' and the individuals' preparations for the meeting;</li> <li>— discipline;</li> <li>— culture;</li> <li>— collaboration;</li> <li>— attitudes.</li> </ul>

†: Table used by the consultants in seminar 1

Them distinction. As such, seminar 3 may be characterized as a negotiation process concerning things like working hours, work environment, quality, involvement, and authority (observations from seminar 3). Wage issues would also have been part of the negotiation if it hadn't been ruled out. When seminar 1 begins, for example, the first issue discussed in the production department is wages.

*Interviewer:* What do you think about the project?

*Employee:* It is bull....

*Interviewer:* Why? Was this your attitude when it started or is it your attitude now?

*Employee:* I have the same attitude now as I had in the beginning. The purpose of the project is making the company work in a better manner and to improve being in the company. But the managers are those, who gain the benefits. And I think that no matter what you do, it will always be the managers who gain the benefits. Some of the issues that came up in our department were not really big issues. They will not talk about those issues that are big problems in our department.

*Interviewer:* And what is that?

*Employee:* It is the paycheck. We made one of the consultants completely confused at the first meeting in our department. She almost cried at one point because we didn't think that you could take that part or another important part out of organizational learning. It doesn't need to be money. There are lots of other things, which are influential.

*Interviewer:* Does this mean that this project doesn't have much value because it doesn't allow one to speak of wages and the work environment?

*Employee:* Yes, I think that this is the general attitude in our department.

*Interviewer:* Is it the general attitude?

*Employee:* Yes, it is clearly the majority who think like that.

(Interview transcripts)

*Interviewer:* In regard to the project? There have been some meetings. Could you tell me about them?

*Employee:* We were divided in groups. Then we had to put forward the positive and negative things. However, it was like that the negative stuff didn't belong in that forum. They were not satisfied with it. It is of course something about the wages. Wages are always part of it. I can see that it is not important here. Of course it is always nice to have another 15kr. an hour. But you know that it is unrealistic. Then all the environmental issues came up and the slow case processing. We were dissatisfied with that too. Then we were told that the environmental issues belonged in the security committee, the wage issue belonged to collective bargaining. We were also dissatisfied that we sometimes lacked some tools. These issues belonged in the work committee. Then, what is left?

(Interview transcripts)

Thus, the process towards value-based collaboration doesn't change the basic issues of interest in the production company. These basic issues are part of the dominating language games in the production company. They resemble the issues of the traditional production plant ruled through disciplinary means of surveillance—issues that are steeped in working life identities and life forms. However, the dominant change discourse seeks to rule out of discussion precisely these basic issues. The consultants have a hard time instructing the employees that these issues should not be part of the discussions.

The change discourse is again in sharp contrast to the language games of everyday life—which also means that the end result is somewhat disconnected from everyday life. Notwithstanding this fact, the value premises are written and approved in October 2002—exhibiting an almost “religious” flair:

You are a part of the team through what you do. Thereby you are a part of the company's strength. Your energy, your motivation for learning something new, and your sense of collaboration are important means by which, together, we can shape the future and be ready to change and adapt to ensure the development of our work place.

- We are a customer-oriented company.
- Quality is important for us.

- We respect man as a whole.
- We work to ensure the company's future.
- We are motivated by our work place.
- We are one team.

(The value premises in the company).

This is the finishing artistic coating to a language that is somewhat overly affirmative and glossy in comparison to the everyday language of the participants. Nor does it become any better afterwards. Two seminars take place after these value premises have been approved. These seminars seek to translate values into concrete actions and are also designed and supervised by the two consultants. It is organized in the way that managers and employees will describe a management task and an employee task. The end result here appears almost meaningless. The only difference from early seminars is the emphasis on "I will". The result appears almost like a confession of faith. Some examples are illustrative:

Employee tasks:

- I want to participate in planning work hours;
- I will state what I mean clearly and request feedback;
- I will respect my colleagues' work and will always do my best;
- I will contribute positively to the company's competitiveness;
- I will contribute so that processes can be rationalized.

Management tasks:

- I will ensure business development, including a positive development of efficiency with reference to the organization's wish for greater degrees of freedom/benefits;
- I will act according to the value premises;
- I will handle conflicts;
- I will develop/maintain an organization that is customer-oriented;
- I will delegate responsibility and authority;
- I will stick to the course and stay on the road towards it.

(Examples from the formulation of the employee and management tasks).

These values might be considered empty because they have little to do with everyday working life—they are far too general. The values may, however, also have serious consequences because they can be used for practically anything. The consequences of value-based collaboration are, amongst others, discussed in seminar 3. All agree that the value premises should guide work, but they do not agree about the consequences. In this situation, the primary consultant intervenes and states that if people don't follow the value premises they should be fired immediately (observations from seminar 3, September 25, 2002).

This situation tells us a lot about how this change discourse—embodied in the primary consultant—has praised itself highly over and above the language games of everyday life in the company. It gives itself the "right" to speak in a dangerous fashion where it plays with human destinies on a very slim foundation.

*Employee:* I think that the process before we met with the management group—it was the same and the same again. Every seminar is the same. It is just words. The process in the seminar is the same and the same again, and I got tired of that. Then I think that when we, in the end, met with management for negotiating—we could feel that they were used to it. Employees have not been that prepared, and I can understand that many employees have a hard time seeing that what you said during seminar 1 in each department is part of the value premises. I can imagine that because they don't regard it as a headline on each subject. Delegation and competence may mean many different things, whereas they had a concrete word for it in the local department. I believe that we should have taken the value premises back to each department—take all the things from seminar 1 besides the value premises. Then they should have said that now we discuss it from the value premises. I would have liked that. I think that the employees would have had a completely different impression and good understanding of the value premises, because then they see that their words are part of the value premises.

(Interview transcripts)

*Interviewer:* How about the consultants. How have they behaved?

*Employee:* They are probably d... good but I think that especially one of them....If you didn't have the opinion it didn't matter what you thought. When we had expressed our opinion, he would like to steer it in one direction. It was the feeling we had out here [in our department]. And when we said some things, then....But finally I told him that we would say what he wanted, and it disturbed him. But it was the feeling that we had and probably still have—that the consultants wanted to steer it in the direction they wanted themselves.

*Interviewer:* What about the tools?

*Employee:* They have been OK, but the matter is still whether you listen. It was presented as if we—the employees—should put forward some ideas and wishes to the value premises, and they should support and guide us. The idea was not.... that it was their opinion which should be represented. We had the feeling, that it was the feeling that he [the consultant] had, that needed to be put forward and not what we thought and felt. But the tools and the set-up have been OK.

(Interview transcripts)

## CONCLUSIONS

Following the framework in this paper, collaboration is considered as a set of language games emerging between the consultants, the project manager and the project participants. The project is constructed through these games, and the common understanding between the actors becomes embedded in tacit rules for using the words, methods, and procedures of the project. There is no doubt that the project created and requested a particular way of speaking. Relations of power are inscribed in the way that language is used and the way language games are played in running the project. The relationship between change agents and project participants is particularly important in that it positioned the consultants with the right to define the correct and appropriate means of conducting the project. The mechanisms of surveillance became in this way embedded in the change discourse carried by these consultants in particular.

Administrative science may be seen as socially constructed truth (Astley, 1985). In the same sense, management and change discourse constructs truth in its own image. Project collaboration was in this case ruled and dominated by the consultants' language games. Consultants' competencies, in other words, dominated collaboration to such an extent that participant identities were almost pre-constructed before the project began. «A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it inexorably» (Wittgenstein, 1983: § 115). In this sense change discourse had to construct participants as dishonest, not open, unwilling to change, and as unwilling to take responsibility for and ownership of the project. The language games of the change discourse were in any case, in sharp contrast to the language games of everyday life in the company. The project's emphasis on systematic and theoretical reflection, skills of reading and writing, and skills of presenting view points in open discussion were all completely opposed to the life forms and identities of the project participants. Their life forms were simply ruled out—excluded. The end result—the value premises—does not, as a consequence, mirror real values and real identities in the company. People didn't disagree with the value premises *per se* but these values are simply not expressed in a language that they can understand or

relate to. Further, the real values and real identities among the project participants are more consistent with the language games of disciplinary power. The issues that the participants wanted to discuss during the value formulation phase, such as wages and work environment, resemble the issues of the traditional production plant ruled through disciplinary means of surveillance. However, the dominant change discourse sought to rule precisely these issues out of discussion.

It follows that the common understanding and the rules associated with the common understanding are fake in a sense. Common understanding was not really there—it was an illusion. People pretended that they understood but they never really did because change discourse spoke a language completely different from their own. Finally, value-based collaboration is also an illusion—it is not grounded in the everyday life of the company.

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**Kenneth Mølberg Jørgensen** is associate professor at the Department of Education and Learning at Aalborg University in Denmark. His research focuses on ethics, language and power in relation to organizational change and organizational learning.

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