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"Let's Think Together!"
(A Review Of Dialogue In The Workplace)

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Abstract

This thesis explores a conceptual understanding of dialogue within a community of practice. It argues that meaningful conversations are at the core of critical, reflective, and analytical praxis, and that a critical understanding holds transformative possibilities for teaching and learning. Aspects of western and ethnic paradigms and their theoretical constructs, which may either enhance or hinder current practices, are identified, as are elements that arise from several case studies drawn from a large banking organisation operating out of South Africa. It is hoped that an evaluation of the research findings will provide a basis for an understanding of dialogue within a local context and that, further, it will provide a platform for extended dialogical exploration and research.

Keywords:

case study
community of practice
conceptual understanding
critical, reflective, and analytical praxis
critical understanding
dialogue
theoretical constructs
western and ethnic paradigms

"The first known conversationalist was Socrates, who replaced words [with] dialogue. Perhaps he did not invent dialogue, which was originally a Sicilian mime or puppet play, but he introduced the idea that individuals could not be intelligent on their own, that they needed someone else to stimulate them. Before him, the model for all speech was the monologue: the wise man or god spoke and the rest listened. But Socrates had been through the trauma of studying science and had been left with the feeling that he would never know what to believe. His brilliant idea was that if two unsure individuals were put together, they could achieve what they could not do separately: they could discover the truth, their own truth, for themselves. By questioning each other and examining their prejudices, dividing each one of these into many parts, finding the flaws, never attacking or insulting, but always seeking what they could agree between them, moving in small steps from one agreement to another, they would gradually learn what the purpose of life was. Wandering through Athens, through the markets and meeting places, Socrates demonstrated how dialogue worked, accosting artisans and politicians and people of all callings, questioning them about their work and opinions. Whatever they happened to be doing at the moment, they must have a reason, they must think it was right or just, or beautiful; so he led the discussion to what those words meant. He argued that it was inadequate simply to repeat what others said, to borrow beliefs. One had to work them out for oneself. He was a teacher such as had never existed before, who refused to teach, who refused to be paid, insisting that he was as ignorant as the pupil, and that the way to find a reason for living was to engage in conversation."

Theodore Zeldin. (2000: 7). An Intimate History of Humanity

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Background:

I developed an increasing interest in dialogue as a technique for engaging adults in the processes of furthering their continuous education, training and development when, during my initial research, it was revealed that multinational organisations across a number of diverse disciplines had begun to experiment with dialogue as a core business process, with some powerful results (Isaacs, 1999:20). I was particularly drawn to studies conducted by William Isaacs, whose work has been strongly influenced by quantum theorist David Bohm, in which experiments with dialogue "as a core process in *self-governing* within large institutions" (Isaacs, 1999: xvii, emphasis mine), had been used.

In delving further into the available literature I discovered that dialogue within organisations was being understood as a way of "improving our thought processes, especially in groups where the solution depends on people reaching at least a common formulation of the problem" (Schein, 1993: 27), and that it "holds promise as a way of helping groups reach higher levels of consciousness and thus be more creative and more effective" (pg. 27). Edgar Schein also describes dialogue as "different from many other techniques that have been proposed before" (pg. 27), lays claim to evidence that "it has considerable promise as a problem-formulation and problem-solving philosophy and technology" (pg. 27), and sees it as a necessary vehicle for "understanding cultures and subcultures". He contends "that organisational learning will ultimately depend upon such cultural understanding" (pg. 27). I was intrigued to learn more, particularly in view of my own immediate context.

As an educator, working for a leading corporate banking organisation operating out of South Africa, the need for exploring alternative avenues to develop competencies among workers leading to critical thinking, self organising, personal mastery, and the ability to communicate effectively and independently, had become a priority for me. The results of independent customer satisfaction surveys were beginning to show that, despite a proliferation of in-house training initiatives and interventions, there was little

evidence to suggest that workers were able to successfully integrate learning transfer into the complex, integrated and systems-oriented workplace environment. Whilst there was strong, measurable, and empirical evidence to show that workers knew their basic product and systems by 'rote', they appeared to lack the ability to respond to challenges requiring them to apply their knowledge across organisational structures and operational divisions formed by functions of administration, marketing, finance, sales, product development, and those imposed by geographical boundaries.

I discovered that these were not unusual or isolated problems, particularly within today's business environment where organisations are said to have traversed 'the global village' where everything has become connected with everything else, and where global trends, such as "accelerating change, complexity, uncertainty, and interdependence" (Joiner, 2002: 1), were seen to impact even the most 'local' of businesses and communities. Joiner describes the results of a particular study using "pivotal conversations" as a means of overcoming organisational barriers created through the operation of "functional silos" across divisions of work, and the establishment of integrated process design initiatives that had "a large impact on key process outcomes, such as revenue-generation, cost, quality, and timeliness" (pg. 2). Is this what was needed in my own organisation? Was it possible to use dialogue as an effective means of facilitating the necessary change required by local workplace challenges? And, most intriguingly, was there a particular kind of dialogue, different to the one that I had become familiar with?

It had already become clear to me that what was needed was an entirely different way of seeing and doing things. The prospect of experimenting with a new kind of dialogue as an alternative means of engaging with workers to explore with them the root cause of the problem, and to investigate another avenue of achieving teaching success using Isaacs's research findings as a 'working-model', became increasingly attractive.

In turning to Isaacs's work on dialogue, which is regarded by many as a virtual organisational treatise on "the art of thinking together", the practice of dialogue is defined as "a living experience of inquiry within and between people" (Isaacs, 1999: 9), and in which Isaacs argues that the process of dialogue has application for ourselves, our relationships, our organisations, and our communities. According to Isaacs,

dialogical inquiry provided a platform for resolving conflict; for creating and generating effectiveness; and for achieving breakthroughs in organisational productivity and performance. Further, it was seen as a means of harnessing collective intelligence, fostering communication and understanding, suspending assumptions, and proposing a cogent methodology for sustaining partnership, in that "dialogue offers a route for understanding and effectiveness that goes to the heart of human beings – the meanings we make, and the thinking and feeling that underlies what we do, individually and together" (Isaacs, 1999: 10-12).

1.2 Problem Statement:

At the heart of Isaacs's *raison d'être* is the belief that dialogue, as practiced today, has somehow lost its cogency and effectiveness, in that individuals no longer know "how to think or talk together in a way that summons up our deeply held common sense, wisdom, and potential" (Isaacs, 1999: 2; see also Senge, 1990: 10). The underlying problem, expressed as being partly the lack of personal capability and partly the larger context in which we live, was seen both as our inability to "recognise the undercurrents beneath the surface of conversations" (pg. 2), and "a symptom of a larger set of fragmenting forces not just resident in the body politic but in the culture of humanity as a whole" (pg. 2). Isaacs argues for the hypothesis that, if dialogue is to regain some of its effectiveness, "then what is needed is a powerful set of practical tools and practices that can help us deal with *both* dimensions" (pg. 3). These tools "must let us produce pragmatic, successful results out of difficult conversations … and at the same time they must call forth and help us address these fragmentary forces by helping us integrate the good, the true, and the beautiful within each of us and within the larger institutions in which we live" (pg. 3).

Isaacs's contention, as we have already seen earlier, is supported by Schein (1993), who believes that "the ultimate reason for learning about the theory and practice of dialogue … is that it facilitates and creates new possibilities for valid communication … [I]f problem solving and conflict resolution in groups is increasingly important in our complex world, then the skill of dialogue becomes one of the most fundamental of human skills" (Schein, 1993: 28).

I also found it interesting to discover that, while Isaacs, Schein and others (Bohm, 1990; Ellinor and Gerard, 1998; Senge, 1990) were drawing my attention to the idea of a particular theory and practice for dialogue, their claims that the current and contemporary use of dialogue was not working appeared to be supported by independent research conducted by Fenwick and Rubenson (2005). Their research findings show that the use of what they call 'sense-making' methodologies, such as those associated with group critical reflection, dialogue and inquiry, are rarely being used in organisations today because "individuals are disillusioned with such practices" (pg. 7), and feel that the use of these methods "fails to sufficiently account for power relations in workplaces and knowledge hierarchies" (pg. 7).

As an educator who advocates 'communicative competence', which is "to apply rationality to dialogue" (Mezirow, 1991: 69), as the quintessence of self-direction in adults, I became increasingly absorbed by the suggestion, on the one hand, that current practices of dialogue were failing and that what was needed was a renewed theory and practice of dialogue and, on the other hand, that the lack of dialogical engagement within organisations today may account for their apparent loss of critical thinking skills, such as what appeared to be the case in my own organisation. Within this context dialogue began to take on new meaning, strengthened by the view of Mezirow who believed that "because critical reflection is a process of testing and the justification or validity of taken-for-granted premises, the role of dialogue becomes salient" (Mezirow et al, 1990: 354).

I began to wonder whether what was being said about dialogue could be relevant to South Africa, and was surprised to learn that there have been no specific tests contrasting the effects of differing methods of communication carried out within this country.

1.3 The Importance, Purpose And Aim Of The Research:

The overall intent of my research project is to make a contribution (however small) to adult and organisational learning and to improve educational practice (Parlett, Dearden and Rowland, quoted in Hammond, 1989: 108). In this context, as Hammond poignantly reminds us, the aim of the project is not to presume to offer any one 'truth'

about dialogue, but to “find ways to focus on aspects of the picture which were not previously known, or to look at a familiar aspect from a new angle, and to share our insights with others who may benefit from or enjoy learning about it” (Hammond, 1989: 110).

To this end, the specific aims of the research project are:

- To conduct a critical review of the literature dealing with dialogue in organisations and elsewhere in order to provide an understanding of what dialogue means and what dialogue is within organisational contexts;
- To investigate whether existing models of dialogical practice within organisations, as suggested by the literature review, will be easily replicated within the South African environment and context;

Schein (1993) argues that at the root of complex problems, potentially volatile issues and corporate decision-making lie “communication failures and cultural misunderstandings that prevent the parties from framing the problem in a common way, and thus make it impossible to deal with the problem constructively” (Schein, 1993: 27). He suggests that, for this reason, dialogue ought to be “a central element in any model of organisational change” (pg. 27).

The importance of this research project, therefore, is to examine our skill to communicate in such a way that processes of testing, validation and critical discourse itself are made clear. Its purpose is to reflect on the use of dialogue within organisational learning contexts to ask questions relating to its efficacy and best practice.

1.4 Research Questions:

In order to do so I pose the following questions to serve as the central focus in this study –

- What is dialogue?

- How does dialogue occur within an organisation operating in South Africa?

Underlying these questions are others that, although they do not form the central focus of the study, nevertheless serve to help me to provide additional impetus for my study: What does the dialogic form look like? What does it resemble? Is the theory and practice of dialogue being advocated by Isaacs (1996) and Schein (1993) possible to replicate within the South African context? What benefit will it bring to a South African organisation? Is there a distinctly African form of dialogue? If so, what does it look like? And is it likely to influence how South African organisations experience dialogue?

Chapter 2
Literature Review

2.1 Background:

I found the general literature on dialogue, in some respects, to be quite voluminous, and I agree with Nichol (quoted in Bohm, 1996), whose own enquiry into dialogue led him to the acknowledgement that "in recent times a profusion of practices, techniques, and definitions has arisen around the term" (pg. xv). Moreover, I discovered that there was a plethora of literary articles and works emanating from a profusion of activities claiming dialogue as their *raison d'être* but which, in reality, are nothing more than trials or experiments, which Senge (1990) describes as "a product of circumstance rather than systematic effort or disciplined practice" (pg. 222). I have ignored these contributions and therefore exclude them from the literature review for practical purposes.

In addition, I have given particular emphasis to the literature which addresses the issue of dialogue as framed within the context of organisational learning and culture. Where necessary I have attempted to explore converging areas of interest, such as those associated with critical social theory, quantum theory, communities of practice, and the like, though I have deliberately limited my enquiry to focus upon perspectives which have a direct impact on our understanding of dialogue only, without attempting to offer a full exposition of the relevant field of research itself.

2.2 What Is Dialogue?

2.2.1 Introduction:

[A historical perspective]

I am inclined to agree with Ellinor and Gerard who posit the theory that "dialogic communication in some form has been in existence ever since the dawn of humanity … otherwise language and culture could not have developed" (Ellinor and Gerard, 1998: 28). Ellinor and Gerard maintain that "shared meanings form the bedrock of

social behaviours, which include things such as spiritual practices, artefacts, architecture, art, symbols, and, of-course, ways of speaking together" (pg. 28), and see dialogue as an intrinsic part of the human experience (pg. 28). Its etymological roots, according to Kazepides, speak about "all things related to human development and experience" (Kazepides, 2004: 170).

It is speculated that the genesis of the dialogic form came from pre-literate European and African societies (Isaacs, 1999: 24; Senge, 2006: 222; Ellinor and Gerard, 1997: 29-30), although, in the case of African indigenous societies, its historical development was severely disturbed by the onslaught of colonialism and other influences. Anthropologist Maria Gimbutas traces European societies as far back as 7000 B.C., whom she characterises as "partnership-based cultures" whose use of dialogical communication has been postulated on the basis that their cultural identity was not predicated on the use of force to secure compliance, but rather on the idea of "the equality of all [human forms of] life" and the "sacredness that resides in all forms" (Gimbutas quoted in Ellinor and Gerard, 1998: 30; addition mine). In contrast it is thought that "dominator-based" cultures, whose emergence from Aryan influences was seen to be in evidence much later than those documented in Gimbutas, introduced "ways of conversing that were probably more confrontational and closer to the discussion-oriented form that still predominates today" (Eisler quoted in Ellinor and Gerard, 1998: 31).

In ancient Greece, with the introduction of "a novel cultural constellation, namely democracy" (De Maré quoted in Ellinor and Gerard, 1998: 31), which guaranteed the right of every citizen "to attend the assembly, where two to three thousand people at a time would come to vote and listen" (Ellinor and Gerard, 1998: 31), the existence of dialogical communication is assumed to have been present. Socrates (469-300 B.C.), the early Greek philosopher who lived through these times, is credited with being the first to introduce the notion of dialogue through his now famous "question and answer" methodology (Plato: The Apology of Socrates, 1914: 4, 11). However, it is his pupil Plato who perfected it into dialogues of "search" and "exposition" (pg. 5). Plato is credited to be "the first thinker to draw out the dialogical nature of the mind" (Kazepides, 2004: 170), in which "thinking and discourse are the same thing; except

that what we call thinking is, precisely, the inward dialogue carried on by the mind itself without a spoken sound" (pg. 170).

Ongoing developments of critique and 'critical thinking', which gained prominence in the fields of philosophy and literature, began to champion the use of dialogue as a means of conversation which gave rise to "critical debates in aesthetic" (Leonardo, 2004: 11). With the emergence of the Frankfurt School of thought in Germany, critical theory evolved into "a Kantian theory of knowledge coupled with a Freudo-Marxist theory of modern society" (pg. 11). It has been suggested that "theory first became critical with the arrival of Kantian critiques of reason, ethics, and beauty" (pg. 11), and the Frankfurt School, under the leadership of Max Horkheimer, "sought to make critical theory 'critical' insofar as it exposed the dialectical tensions in modernity, such as between authoritarianism and enlightenment" (pg. 11). Later, a 'politically edgy' form of critique, made critical by its use of "agitational theory", was seen to emerge. (Agger, 1992, quoted in Leonardo, 2004: 11). This form of 'critical thinking', which advocated the use of dialogue in the context of 'argumentation' and 'debate', was concerned with the critique of "institutional and conceptual transformations" (pg. 11).

Subsequently, developments in educational theory such as pragmatism, an educational and philosophical discourse advocated by Dewey (1994), Freire's theory of adult education which is set "within a larger framework of radical social change" (Merriam and Cafarella, 1911: 262) and encompasses significant contributions to "ideology critique, an analysis of culture, attention to discourse, and a recasting of the teacher as an intellectual and cultural worker" (Leonardo, 2004: 12-13), and Mezirow's notion of perspective transformation which involves communicative learning (Mezirow, 1990: 65), began to strengthen the view of critical social theory as a "multidisciplinary framework with the implicit goal of advancing the emancipatory function of knowledge" (Leonardo, 2004: 11), through dialogue.

Within this framework, dialogue came to be viewed as a core function of the learning process and there are several features or disciplines which differentiate it as "a critical form of classroom discourse; one whose contribution promotes criticism as the defining aspects of a quality education" (Leonardo, 2004: 11). Firstly, the bringing together of a diverse group of individuals brings with it a "convergence of existing disciplines" (pg.

11), allowing for a collective pooling of a wide range of expertise, knowledge and experience. This in turn creates the "context for a critical approach" (pg. 11) and the "promotion of critical thinking through in-depth analysis" (pg. 11) by "*critique* in material and discursive forms" (pg. 11; emphasis mine). When groups of individuals are brought together to discuss a common topic of interest, each brings aspects of their own understanding and perspectives to the occasion, which results in the creation of a conducive milieu for healthy interaction in the form of deeper analysis, assessment, evaluation, review and appraisal. The result is that the group, by virtue of their intercourse with one another, are thereby able to broaden their own horizons of possibility, expand their sense of what it means to belong to a larger humanity and escape from the confines of common sense (pg. 11), in order to open themselves up to alternative ways of perceiving and understanding reality.

2.2.2 Dialogue Is Language:

Burbules, who studied dialogue in educational settings, sees dialogue as a "language of listening, where participants are willing to hear each other's contributions" (Burbules quoted in Roman, 2005: 19). He argues that "dialogue is a fundamental issue, not only for education per se, but for a range of broader human concerns" (Burbules quoted in Roman, 2005: 61), citing human practices, such as language, reasoning, morality, and social organisation, as a direct result of the way in which we communicate (pg. 61).

A more sophisticated theory of dialogue as language was developed by Bakhtin. He believed that "discourses, as social viewpoints, or 'voices', circulate across time and space, some of which become internalised in the individual's consciousness" (Hamston, 2006: 57). According to Bakhtin, "the multiplicity of social voices – heteroglossia – arises because different discourses are available for an individual to appropriate, to internalise, and to speak through and, thus, permeate the language exchanged between individuals when they engage in dialogue" (Bakhtin quoted in Hamston, 2006: 57). Within this framework discursive tensions arise because of the various social voices which surface during the dialogic process (pg. 57), creating opportunity for changes in consciousness and perspectives which in turn lead to a change in discourse. Bakhtin believed that this was made possible "because dialogue is a process of building and consciousness-raising that increases individual's

awareness of the varied discourses available in society and, ultimately through self-reflection, the discourses she chooses to speak through" (Bakhtin, quoted in Hamston, 2006: 57).

> "To Bakhtin, such a conceptualisation of dialogue acknowledges the mutuality of the individual and society; the language an individual speaks, and larger social discourses; and the ongoing dialogical process and discourse-change. Language as dialogue therefore encourages an ethical agency which foregrounds the linguistic basis of 'becoming' and of discursive change" (Hamston, 2006: 58).

I understand this to mean that dialogue is informed by the choice of language through which participants consciously 'choose' to communicate; a choice which is, in turn, governed by several dynamics based upon historical, social, political contexts, amongst others.

2.2.3 Dialogue Is Relationship:

Martin Buber viewed dialogue as evidence of 'beings-in-relationship'. "The importance of the spoken word, I think, is grounded in the fact that it does not want to remain with the speaker. It reaches out toward a hearer, it lays hold of him, it even makes the hearer into a speaker, if perhaps only a soundless one … the word that is spoken is found … in the oscillating sphere between the persons, the sphere that I call the 'between'" (Buber, 1961: 354). "In the dialogue of which Buber writes, all living is a meeting. There is no "I" which stands alone, but only the "I" of "I-It" and the "I" of "I-Thou". There is an alternation between those two modes of existence. The I-It mode is vitally necessary for living, the I-Thou for the realisation of personhood" (Jacobs, 1989: 1). Roman interprets Buber to mean that "we can create two kinds of relations to others: either we can turn genuinely towards the other and see him or her as an equal being, or we can treat the other as an object or thing" (Roman, 2005: 60), and draws connections to Buber's world of primary words: the I-It denoting the other person as an object, while the I-Thou is seen in terms of a direct and mutual relation.

I interpret this to mean that dialogue occurs between two or more people who are bound by their humanness as equals in a genuine encounter with each other. I think that this is what Paulo Freire meant when he wrote that "if it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings" (Freire, 1970: 69). Freire, writing through the lens of one who understands what it means to experience being reduced to the level of a 'thing' in an imposed I-It purview of reality, believed that by "founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence" (Freire, 1970: 72).

Bakhtin (1981), who, as we have seen, believed that language is fundamentally dialogue, also believed in the dialogical 'encounter' as one of 'relationship', from the point of view that, when speaking to one another, the interaction thus created through the ensuing conversation served to create a web of connection between the speakers (Bakhtin, quoted in Roman, 2005: 61). This relationship, which lay in the things people had actually said, and thus included prior conversations, was dialogical in nature: "through language we are joined to previous as well as present speakers" (Bakhtin quoted in Roman, 2005: 61). In this way Bakhtin draws attention to the view that dialogue exists within a relational framework between the past and the present as well as that which is immediately evident amongst the dialoguers themselves.

2.2.4 Dialogue Is Communally Constructed:

Isaacs describes dialogue as "a shared inquiry, a way of thinking and reflecting together" (Isaacs, 1991: 9). He also describes it in terms of "a living experience of inquiry within and between people" (pg. 9), and as "a conversation among peers" (pg. 322). Isaacs speaks of dialogue as "an altogether very different way of talking together" (pg. 19), and not simply as better conversation. For Isaacs, dialogue represents a "conversation with a centre, not sides" (pg. 19) and explains: "It is a way of taking the energy of our differences and channelling it toward something that has never been created before. It lifts us out of polarisation and into a greater common sense, and is thereby a means for accessing the intelligence and coordinated power of groups of people" (Isaacs, 1991: 19).

In dialogue “participants find that they are involved in an ever changing and developing pool of common meaning … a shared consciousness emerges which allows a level of creativity and insight that is not generally available to individuals” (Bohm et al, 1991: 5). Bohm et al see dialogue as having an evolving methodology in which the essence of the dialogical encounter is seen as that of exploration and learning as opposed to the process of “consuming a body of information or doctrine imparted by an authority, [or] as a means of examining or criticising a particular theory or programme” (Bohm et al, 1991: 2). In this context dialogue was regarded as an unfolding process of creative participation between peers (pg. 2).

In a similar vein, Schein sees dialogue as a technique or mechanism that makes it possible for people to discover that they use language differently, that they operate from different mental models, and that the categories they employ are ultimately learned social constructions of reality and thus arbitrary (Schein, 1993: 29). Schein advocates that an important goal of dialogue is to enable the group to reach a higher level of consciousness and creativity through the gradual creation of a shared set of meanings and a common” thinking process (pg. 30). “In dialogue … we explore all the complexities of thinking and language. We discover how arbitrary our basic categories of thought and perception are and thereby become conscious of imperfections or biases in our basic cognitive processes” (Schein, 1993: 30).

Within these contexts I am left with the sense that dialogue can be viewed as an ‘exploratory’ think-tank in which participants share their collective knowledge and experiences, examine them in the light of what others have to say and contribute, and thereafter collectively participate toward obtaining a shared perspective which ultimately leads to a collective constitution of meaning. Meaning is derived at consensually through “reflective inquiry” (Isaacs, 1999: 194), which has developed its understanding from what Argyris calls “balancing advocacy and inquiry” (Argyris quoted in Isaacs, 1999: 188). According to this frame of reference, advocacy is taken to mean “speaking what you think, speaking for a point of view” (Isaacs, 1999: 188), whereas inquiry “means looking into what you do not yet know, what you do not yet understand, or seeking to discover what others see and understand that may differ from your point of view” (pg. 188). At its core, bringing advocacy and inquiry together

implies “learning how to make explicit the thinking that leads you to say what you say” (pg. 189).

In Mezirow’s transformation theory, which includes perspective transformation, consensual validation is used as a means of validity testing in which “the focus of communication is not establishing cause-effect relationships but increasing insight and attaining common ground through symbolic interaction” (Mezirow, 1991: 80). Influenced by the work of Jürgen Habermas, a German social theorist, whose ideas on rationality in dialogue were to anchor Mezirow’s understanding of “communicative learning”, Mezirow asserts that “dialogue or communicative action (spoken or written communication) occurs whenever an individual with particular aims communicates with another person in order to arrive at an understanding about the meaning of a common experience so that they may coordinate their actions in pursuing their respective aims” (pg. 65). In Mezirow’s terms, the purpose of communication is that of reaching consensus or understanding, and he proposed that “dialogue or communicative action allows us to relate to the world around us, to other people, and to our own intentions, feelings, and desires (pg. 65). ”Dialogue in any of these areas involves either implicit or explicit claims regarding the justification or validity of what is said, implied, or presupposed. The meaning of an utterance is inherently connected with the validity claims it makes” (pg. 66).

Habermas is credited with having provided “the sociolinguistic theoretical context for transformational theory” (Mezirow, 1991: 64), at the heart of which lies the use of metaphorical-abductive logic (as opposed to hypothetical-deductive logic), and the application of rationality, which is to make sense of meaning by a process of reflection (pgs 84-5; 99). Metaphorical-abductive logic is distinct from hypothetical-deductive logic in that it moves from the concrete to the abstract rather than from the abstract to the concrete. “In communication, we try to understand what someone else means ‘abductively’, that it, by drawing upon our experience to explain theirs” (Hanson quoted in Mezirow, 1991: 85). In this sense abduction draws on what *might be*, deduction on what *must be*, and induction on what *actually is*. Together they form the self-directed elements that constitute the dialogical process where reflection is seen as “the central dynamic in intentional learning, problem solving, and validity testing through rational discourse” (Mezirow, 1991: 99).

For Habermas, there are three types of reflection involving differing levels of cognition, which he labels “habitual action” (Habermas, quoted in Mezirow, 1991: 106), “thoughtful action” (pg. 106) and “reflective action” (pg. 108). The latter involves an element of thoughtful action when directed at an assessment of content, process or premise of our action, and occurs only when we require guidance in negotiating a step in a series of actions or run into difficulty in understanding a new experience. In habitual action, such as learning to drive a motor vehicle, we are free to act while focusing our attention elsewhere and therefore involves a non-reflective response (pg. 106). In thoughtful action, we involve higher-order cognitive processes to guide us as we analyse, perform, discuss or make judgements drawn from prior learning, or from using our beliefs to make an interpretation, or by introspection (pg. 107). The ground for our justification is not brought about through a deliberate appraisal or re-appraisal, or by a process of validity testing, but rather through cognition – which is not the same as reflection (pg. 107). An example of this would be deciding on the next appropriate move when confronted with an enforced detour along an otherwise familiar road. Thoughtful action only becomes reflective action when we examine how we perform in relation to our perceiving, thinking, feeling or acting and undertake an assessment of our efficacy in performing them (pg. 107), or when we begin to question whether ‘good’ or ‘bad’ are adequate values or concepts for judging and involves our becoming aware of why we perceive, think, feel or act (pg. 108). An example would be found in the decision taken to purchase a particular vehicle in relation to others, requiring that we examine the motivation for our choice against criteria such as aesthetics, performance, functionality, pricing, and affordability.

In dialogue participants engage each other in the solicitation of critique in material and discursive forms whilst using the processes of reflection (rationale) and metaphorical-abductive logic to make sense of their understanding of reality. In order to do so, according to Habermas, they bring into play “three interrelated dynamics … involved in communicative action” (Mezirow, 1991: 69), which are “the life world, learning, and social interaction” (pg. 69). The life world is a representation of our daily social activity, which we tend to take for granted, comprising of all our “unquestioned assumptions and shared cultural convictions, including codes, norms, roles, social practices, psychological patterns of dealing with others, … [and] individual skills” (pg. 69, addition

mine). The facilitation of our communication through language "provides learners with a basis from which to begin negotiating common definitions and situations" (pg. 69) and offers a level of interaction, which in turn ties participants into "the transformative nature of the learning process" (pg. 70), which is defined and bounded by the "self-regulating system of society and social interaction" (pg. 71).

Mezirow (1991) emphasises the importance of critical thinking and the determination of meaning within the dialogical process. Consensus is reached through the concept of what Habermas calls "argumentation", which refers to "that process of dialogue in which implicit validity claims are made explicit and contested, with an effort to criticise and vindicate them through arguments" (pg. 68). The goal of the dialogic encounter, as I understand it, therefore, is to provide an opportunity for participants to examine their own perceptions in light of those being presented by others and to engage in arguments containing reasons or grounds that are relevant to supporting a validity claim using reflection, which is the application of rationality to validity testing. Within this framework metaphorical-abductive logic becomes salient in communication as participants try to understand what someone else means while drawing from their own experience to do so.

Boghossian (quoted in Zimmerman, 2007: 160 pp) emphasises the need to balance this level of inquiry, articulated by Mezirow as having "its current context in the insurgence of constructivism, critical theory and deconstructivism" (Mezirow, 1991: xiii), with "objective criteria" (Boghossian quoted in Zimmerman, 2007: 161). Boghossian argues that 'epistemic relativism', a term he uses to describe the construction of knowledge in groups where knowledge itself is perceived "from the metaphysical view that knowledge is a 'social construction'" (pg. 161), fails to take into account that: "(1) At least some of the facts we know are not constituted by human minds and activities. (The fact that dinosaurs once roamed the earth as an example.) (2) The relation of support that holds between a body of evidence and some hypothesis that this evidence gives us to reason to endorse does not depend upon us for its existence. (3) We are capable of believing some things because we appreciate the evidence in their support and not for ulterior motives" (pg. 161). Boghossian also argues that there can be no such thing as 'equal validity' that is based upon the idea "that there are many radically different yet "equally valid" ways of knowing the world" (pg. 160). He illustrates his

argument by pointing to the fact that while the Cheyenne River Sioux might believe that humans descended from 'buffalo people', the scientific community may also be right in asserting that humans evolved, instead, from non-human primates: both explanations cannot be true. If validity "is supposed to involve truth, these explanations can't both be valid and they can't both constitute items of knowledge" (pg. 160).

2.2.5 Dialogue Is Fellowship:

In the 1970s, the psychologist Patrick de Maré began to research dialogue in large settings, and its effect on culture (Roman, 2005: 39). De Maré "suggested that large group socio-therapy meetings could enable people to engage in understanding and altering the cultural meanings present within society to heal the sources of mass conflict, violence and ethnic bigotry (Isaacs quoted in Roman, 2005: 39). As related by Nichol in his foreword to Bohm's book *On Dialogue*, "the theory of the "microculture" proposes that a sampling of an entire culture can exist in a group of twenty or more people, thereby charging it with multiple views and value systems" (Nichol quoted in Bohm, 1996: xix; see also Matos, 2006: 5). "De Maré formulated this theory in his work with groups of twenty or more people, who sit in a circle to talk, eventually developing a sense of impersonal fellowship among them known by the Greeks as Koinonia. Impersonal refers to gratitude towards a group of individuals with whom we share no family ties or past experiences" (Matos, 2006: 5).

Bohm refers to impersonal fellowship as the emergence of "authentic trust and openness … in a group context, without its members having shared extensive history. Bohm et al (1991) extrapolate the idea further in the context of hunter-gatherer bands of about this size who "seemed to provide and reinforce a kind of cohesive bond of fellowship that allowed its participants to know what was required of them without the need for instruction or much further verbal interchange" (Bohm et al, 1991: 4). Seen in this way, "what might be called a coherent culture of shared meaning emerged within the group" (pg. 4).

De Maré's study led him to explain that the driving force behind both the sustainability and transforming power of dialogue is frustration and hate (Roman, 2005: 70). "De Maré says that a larger group, because of its size, generates hate, and he actually

sees this as an achievement for the group" (pg. 70). According to De Maré, "We can learn to transform this hate into Koinonia, which is a special kind of atmosphere of impersonal fellowship" (De Maré quoted in Roman, 2005: 70).

I agree with Roman (2005), who observes that to make use of the word "hate" as "the driving force of dialogue" (Roman, 2005: 73) is too reductionist "because hate alone can also lead to violence" (pg 73). Roman proposes that "dialogue is born from a willingness to solve differences in ways other than using violence" (pg 73) and seeks to look for an alternative descriptor to describe this 'frustration', which De Maré has attributed to the dynamics which operate within the group.

2.3 Dialogue Within Society:

In a comparative study of community dialogue processes Wasilewski (2005) reviews several dialogical models which she refers to as "an 'alphabet soup' of approaches to communication" (Wasilewski, 2005: 2). Whilst her study primarily aims to construct approaches to communication as seen in evidence "in-between social worlds" (pg. 2), her research findings summarise contemporary structured dialogue processes currently found within society today.

In her research paper, Wasilewski focuses on four primary models of dialogue, which she calls: the Boundary-spanning Dialogue Approach (BDA), within which the concept of Indigeneity emerges; the Transcultural Dialogue Approach (TCD), which is based upon the work of David Bohm; the Coordinated Management of Meaning Approach (CMM), based on the work of W. Barnett Pearce; and the Powerful Non-Defensive Communication Approach (PNDC), which is based upon Sharon Ellison's model of communication.

Wasilewski acknowledges, though she pays it scant attention, the existence of what she has loosely labelled "the Western Approach," which is characterised as an "attempt to solve things through words instead of through fighting … the emphasis [being] on persuasion and argumentation" (Wasilewski, 2005: 1). According to Wasilewski, this particular practice of dialogue is dominant in the West and particularly widespread (pg. 1).

2.3.1. Boundary-Spanning Dialogue Approach (BDA):

In the Boundary-spanning Dialogue Approach (BDA), participants "discuss the question, "What is the nature of the 'good' society?" … in the context of the issues facing the region at the present time" (Wasilewski, 2005: 3). According to Wasilewski, this is a structured dialogue process that is "used around the world to deal with complex issues" (pg. 3), and usually involves indigenous societies that have an association or claim within the region under discussion. It was a model developed over two decades of collaboration between the AIO (Americans for Indian Opportunity) in the United States, a "national indigenous peoples' advocacy organisation", and Alexander Christakis (pg. 3). The process "generated four cores values which cross generation, geography and Tribe. These four core values, the four R's, are Relationship, Responsibility, Reciprocity & Redistribution" (pg. 5). Expressed collectively as a comprehensive construct called "Indigeneity" (pg. 6), it has relevance for dialogue in that: the dialogical encounter is seen as a relationship that "exists … in this moment of time, engaging in this interaction, in this dialogue" (pg. 7); these relationships include "various personal, social, political, cultural, physical and spiritual contexts" (pg. 7), which are invoked by dialoguers during the dialogical process as a contemporaneous "state of valuing" (pg. 7) and "sense of caring interconnectedness" which is felt by participants. "Thus this dynamic valuing of the other is inseparable from true dialogue" (pg. 8) and involves 'listening' and 'learning' and "caring enough for each other to engage in true dialogue to enable ourselves to be ourselves together" (pg. 8). Against this background the self can be seen only in the context of community and so there are, in effect, no personal or 'private' truths, only collective ones (pg. 8).

2.3.2 Transcultural Communication Dialogue (TCD) Approach:

The Transcultural Communication Dialogue (TCD) Approach, acknowledged as a dialogic practice that grows out of the work of De Maré (1970s), Bohm, Factor and Garrett (1996), it is seen as "an almost completely unstructured form of dialogue for groups of 20-40 people through which the processes of thought can be slowed down in order to be able to observe it collectively while it is actually occurring" (pg. 10). It is held that "such observation reveals the patterns of incoherence that lead a group to

avoid certain issues or, on the other hand, to insist, against all reason, on standing and defending opinions about particular issues (Bohm et al quoted in Wasilewski, 2005: 10). This approach to dialogue "is based on the collective communication practices of hunter-gatherers and reveals an aspect of dialogue called Koinonia, or impersonal fellowship, which was used originally to describe the early form of Athenian democracy in which all the free men of the city gathered to govern themselves" (pg. 10).

2.3.3 Coordinated Management Of Meaning (CMM) Approach:

The Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) Approach, which bases its methodology on the work of Mezirow's (2000) transformational learning, has given rise to three models and five concepts that "enhance our understanding of the dynamics of social spaces" in which learning cam take place (Wasilewski, 2005: 11). The Serpentine Model looks at communication as something "we are making together" (pg. 11). "According to this model a conversation consists of a linear dimension, a sequence of turns, and of a hierarchical dimension of meanings held by each participant in the conversation. The meaning categories consist of different kinds of 'stories' having to do with culture, relationship, self and episode. These kinds of stories are prioritised differently by different people at different times in different contexts. This analytical tool enables us to see if there are any commonly held stories in a conversation, and we can see all the stories in the conversation simultaneously and how each participant's stories interact and coevolved with all the others. In short, we can see what we are making together" (pg. 11). The Daisy Model "helps us analyse all the conversations that are taking place simultaneously in any discrete conversation" (pg. 12). "When we talk, we are not always talking only to the person or persons in front of us, but to others not present. This model enables us to identify who the real audience of a statement might have been" (pg. 12). The LUUUTT Model "helps us analyse stories **Lived**, **Untold** stories, **Unheard** stories, **Unknown** stories, stories **Told** and story**Telling** within any communication" (pg. 12). "This allows facilitators to look at a communication event and think how to enrich the mode of storytelling so that more good things can happen" (pg. 12).

2.3.4 The Powerful, Non-Defensive Communication Approach (PNDC):

The Powerful, Non-Defensive Communication Approach (PNDC), "focuses on the ability to make non-defensive statements, to ask non-defensive questions and to make non-defensive predictions" (pg. 13). "It enables a person to give up trying to control other people, to leave everyone, including themselves, with choice, to get out of the victim mentality and to be responsible for themselves. Particular attention is paid to intention, tone, and body language, that is, totally authentic communicative behaviour" (pg. 13).

2.4 Social Dialogue In South Africa:

I am unaware of any official, definitive, or structured dialogue processes currently in evidence within the South African context. This is due, partly, as highlighted by Parsons (2005), to the fact that whilst "the social dialogue process has been part of the South African public life for several years, … its role has not been adequately noted or evaluated" (Parsons, 2005: 1).

Parsons argues that its development has been characterised by what he calls "institutionalised social dialogue" (pg. 1), which is tripartite in character – by virtue of its convergence of social, economic and political contributions – and driven by the larger agenda of "social capital" – which he defines as "the ability of people to work together in their enlightened self-interest for common purposes in groups and organisations" (pg. 3). According to Parsons, social capital "identified the conditions in which individuals can use their participation in groups and networks to obtain benefits" (pg. 3). The need to work together in groups was borne out of the collapse of apartheid. "The system of apartheid, by fracturing South African society horizontally and vertically, reduced its investment in social capital substantially. It left a widespread legacy of mistrust and suspicion. The sense of 'give-and-take', of compromise, of consensus-seeking, all these needed to be rediscovered in the post-apartheid era. It was necessary to create institutions and structures which could rebuild trust in a deeply divided society" (pg. 4).

According to Mgijima (2003), “The struggle against apartheid that trade unions were centrally part of was a struggle for ordinary people to take part in shaping the future of South Africa. Right up to the beginning of the 1990s, struggles taken up by trade unions ranged from campaigns for new worker friendly labour laws, strategies to deal with high unemployment and questions relating to social and economic policy choices for the whole of South African society” (Mgijima, 2003: 3). The result was that: “In South Africa there is social dialogue at different levels of the social and economic sphere. There are statutory and non-statutory forms of social dialogue at the workplace or local level, departmental or sectoral level, and at national level. The parties involved include labour unions, employers, government and communities” (pg. 3).

Through several initiatives, driven mainly by business and labour, and the formation of the National Economic Forum (NEF), leading to what eventually became known as Nedlac (National Economic Development and Labour Council), was formed (Mgijima, 2003: 3), and “the power relations within the South African economy started to shift from a highly paternalistic framework – which essentially had government deciding what was best for the country, and employers deciding what was best for their workers – towards a more inclusive and consensual framework of decision-making” (Parsons, 2005: 5). As the devolution of power began to be negotiated and reconstituted, individuals became “equipped … with the necessary tools to act as facilitators, mediators and negotiators, and in doing so made a more collaborative decision-making process possible” (pg. 5). The presence of labour unions, which had begun to assume increasing political roles, “which extended far beyond the general framework of an inclusive collective bargaining unit” (pg. 5), led to severe tensions between all parties and organised business, and when the “rising use of strikes and boycotts by the unions” (pg. 5) began to hurt the economy, a move away from “a dominant culture of ‘adversarialism’ in the socio-economic arena towards one of consultation and dialogue” began to emerge (pg. 5).

There have been ongoing developments with regard to dialogue (see Parsons, 2005, for its full treatment), some successful and some less so, for various reasons. However, the formation of Nedlac and the ensuing dialogue that it caused to develop

"proved to be a distinctly important institutional bridge between the 'old' and the 'new' regimes and in the building of social capital in South Africa" (Parsons, 2005: 9).

2.5 Social Dialogue Within An African Context Taken From South Africa:

Mekoa (2004) provides a useful insight into what he describes as 'the African way' of doing things. He talks of the fact that "in traditional African meetings (imbizos) which are usually held under trees in rural areas, African men will always cite many examples from their previous experiences in order to justify their suggested solution to the issue before them. It is very common in such meetings to hear old men (in African thought seniority is always associated with wisdom, not formal education) citing other experiences and examples before offering a direct solution to the issues before them. This is because African traditional meetings are not usually rushed and interrupted by points of order, or time up, or calls for votes. Decisions are also reached by consensus after long discussion and this approach is also intended to accommodate as many diverse views as possible" (Mekoa, 2004: 1).

Mekoa's account is the only description of an African traditional meeting or dialogue, and whilst it is extremely sketchy there are some valuable insights to be gained from a closer study of the narrative used. It is important to notice, for example, the absence of women, and the subtle wordplay between older and younger men; the steps that are incorporated in the dialogical process, ranging from the citation of stories or examples by both older and younger men, through to points of decision and judgement involving some form or other of consensus. For example, the fact that consensus is reached after participants share their personal experiences, and thereby provide some or other ground by which they *justify* their choice of a proposed solution to the problem before them, indicates that a certain degree of advocacy must be involved. Coupled with advocacy are assumed behaviours such as 'discussion' or possibly even 'debate' as speakers attempt to win over others with their argument. There are indications that these meetings are not without a purpose or, at the very least, an agenda, and that they are possibly structured around a problem-posing strategy, which suggests a form of reflection. If we attempt to follow this line of reasoning it is possible to reconstruct a basic idea or outline of what the practice of dialogue would look like in a typical African meeting or *imbizo*.

2.5.1 Participation:

Turning again to the inference that traditional African dialogue is a strictly male affair (pg. 1), and that the meetings are devoid of the presence of women or children; or, if they are present at such gatherings, that they are not invited to participate in the proceedings, this leads us to questions relating to power and gender relations, and to whether or not there is any substance in the contention that both women and children are without voice. In REFLECT circles (REFLECT is an acronym for *Re*generated *F*reirean *L*iteracy through *E*mpowering *C*ommunity *T*echniques) in Lesotho, for example, it was found that "women do not commonly participate in the traditional public decision-making meetings, although they make most of the day to day decisions in the household" (Attwood et al in Robinson Pant, 2004: 144). In contrasting studies of REFLECT circles in Uganda, which sought to elicit an understanding of gender oriented differences between men and women based upon a separation of their respective workloads, participants found it difficult to identify or position themselves within the debate conjured up through the "stereotypes about gender that the tool was attempting to criticise" (Fiedrich in Robinson Pant, 2004: 223), i.e. that "women tend to be subordinate to men, and to have a heavier workload" (Archer and Cottingham quoted by Fiedrich in Robinson Pant, 2004: 222), suggesting that the REFLECT gender-workload-calendar, which was being used as the tool through which to stimulate the discussion, was not "an authentic representation of participants' realities as perceived by them" (Fiedrich in Robinson Pant, 2004: 223). These differing perspectives highlight the need to further examine the role of women within African cultures and, specifically, their place within traditional gatherings.

2.5.2 Storytelling:

Mekoa's use of storytelling as the primary means of communication amongst those who have assembled begs the question as to whether these encounters do in fact resemble a dialogue-session, or whether they are more likely to conform to a monologue-session, where participants talk 'at' each other rather than through 'turning to one another' which implies an interactive dynamic. Fasokun et al state that "in essence, the story is a primary form of oral tradition used in conveying culture,

experience, values, knowledge and wisdom" (Fasokun et al, 2005: 16). In this sense they are said to inform, instruct and support the basic tenets of African culture (pg. 16). Fasokun at al also note that "only those people who are regarded as adults by the community can make use of stories and … an adult's repertoire is also likely to include myths and legends … a rich mixture of history and traditional beliefs – tales of gods, ghosts, spirits, famous ancestors, heroes and powerful kingdoms of the past" (pg. 16-17). The invocation of the sacred aligns with Ntuli's notion of linking "with the supernatural forces that guide our destinies" (Ntuli, 2002: 58). Fasokun conveys the sense that participants' engagement is linked to an understanding of their community status and the tacit ground from which it is derived. The status of "men" versus "older men" for instance, in Mekoa's account (pg. 1), gives rise to a dynamic that suggests older men have a certain community status or positional authority over younger men, which may or may not affect the outcome of a perceived consensus. It is interesting that, according to Mekoa (pg. 1), younger men "justify their suggested solution" implying some form of advocacy, whereas older men offer "a direct solution", implying that it is considered unnecessary that they should advocate a rationale for their preferred choice of action. Fasokun et al state that older people "are believed to be wiser and are able to call on experience to guide their intellectual decision-making" (Fasokun et al, 2005: 72) and that this accords them with "a major role in the governing of the community" (pg. 76). A case study is needed to examine these connections with a view to clarifying their importance for an understanding of a typical African *imbizo* or dialogue, with particular emphasis on the structure and preferred mode of engagement.

2.5.3 Discussion:

Mekoa (2004) makes reference to the fact that a "long discussion" of the "experiences and examples" constitutes the order of proceedings in a traditional African meeting, in which there is no rush, no interruption, no points of order, no time restraints, and no votes taken (pg. 1). Native American indigenous cultures, for example, are said to "talk and talk until *the talk* starts" (Isaacs, 1999: xvii). In wanting to establish a sense of the essential components of how Mekoa's notion of a 'discussion' takes place, I begin by looking at the etymological derivative of the word. The word 'discussion' is derived from the same root as "percussion" and "concussion" which supports the meaning of "to break things up" (Bohm, 1990: 7), or "to shake apart" (Isaacs, 1999: 42). The

picture that this evokes appears to conflict with an African world-view as enunciated by both Ntuli (2002) and Ramose (quoted in Horsthemke and Enslin, 2006). If an African understanding of reality involves the acceptance of shifting realities and the notion of "interrelationship and interconnectedness" (Ntuli, 2002: 58), duality (pg. 55), and a "holistic vision" (pg. 60), then what, if anything, is to be gained by a practice of examination which requires an attempt to arrive at meaning by an examination of the whole through the lens of its constitutive parts? Sithole (2004) provides an alternative insight, albeit an African one, and suggests that there are two types of rationality: cause-and-effect reasoning which emanates from so-called Western knowledge and requires the condition of objectivity, and consciousness-reasoning or persona-centred reasoning, as preferred by Sithole, which emanates from our "various social values" (pg. 2). Persona-centred reasoning is predicated on a renewal of our understanding of rationality, which is said to be "the power 'to reason', 'to disaggregate and reconstitute', according to 'certain principles' of association and disassociation" (pg. 3). If the ability to reason is seen as an act of attributing judgement or value, merit or worth, then, according to Sithole, "To reason can therefore not stand alone: it is completed by the values that make a judgement on why action is or should be taken. If rationality is a distinctly human attribute, then judgement or morality that comes with reason is a distinctly human obligation" (pg. 3). In this sense, Sithole argues, that it would seem "that judgement, value, or to be categoric about it, morality, is a requirement of rationality which is characteristic of being human. This merger between the power to reason and morality is called ubuntu. Ubuntu is recognition of the fact that reason and morality cannot exist without one another" (pg. 3). If, by 'discussion', Mekoa has Sithole's view of 'persona-centred' reasoning in mind, then the notion of advocacy and judgement as perceived by Ramose's rheomodic thought, where reality and truth are seen in the context of a relationship between the observer and the observed, would once more hold currency. This brings into question the issues pertaining to subjectivity and the relativism about truth (cf. Horsthemke, 2004: 74-5 for an in-depth discussion and analysis), which are problematic. Sithole's suggestion that rationality is also associated with the principle of *ubuntu* raises other important considerations as to whether *ubuntu* can provide a model for rational discourse and action based on the fact that "some of the values and principles claimed to be emphasised by *ubuntu* are dubious" (Enslin and Horsthemke, 2004: 548), and "appears to be contradicted or at least weakened by the staggering incidence of genocide, dictatorships and autocratic

rule, corruption, sexism (and practices of clitoridectomy), heterosexism and homophobia and, indeed, environmental degradation (and connected with this, human suffering) on the African continent. … Moreover, defenders of *ubuntu* would find it difficult, if not impossible, to resolve possible conflicts between values or principles broadly associated with *ubuntu*; between liberty and humanness or between spirituality and morality" (pgs. 548-9). It would suggest a serious dichotomy between what Chris Argyris and Donald Schön (1974) refer to as "the problems of relating theory to practice" (pg. 3) or those of "integration of thought and action" (pg. 4).

2.5.4 Advocacy, Consensus And Judgement:

Some of the components required for the justification or support of a particular view have already received attention; such as the dynamic between older and younger men, the role of the supernatural, issues of relativism and the subjective nature of what is perceived as truth, through to an examination of a rationale based upon consciousness-reasoning that is grounded in the principles of *ubuntu*. Each has received its own share of criticism and in the absence of concrete examples of their application in practice, it is difficult to gauge just how advocacy would be 'argued' and consensus reached to ensue in a judgement (value or worth) in terms of a course of action for the "issue" at hand. For instance, the belief that a majority-view constitutes the truth is not obviously correct, and the claims of consciousness-reasoning advocated by Sithole (2004) require some form of demonstrable "proof" as their legitimacy and practice.

2.5.5 Resolution:

It is worth noting that '*imbizos*' or 'meetings' are value-bound in the sense that (1) they have an agenda, (2) and they have a purpose; which is to make a concrete decision about a matter that is of concern to the group. What remains in contention is just how either consensus or judgement about such a decision is reached.

2.6 Dialogue Within Organisations

Argyris and Schön have explored “the gaps between what people intend to do and what they actually do” (Isaacs, 1999: 187). In an article delving into organisational dynamics Argyris explains that “people acquire through socialisation two kinds of skills and values for dealing with people“ (Argyris, 1982: 8). “The first are the values and skills that they espouse, the ones of which they are conscious and aware. I call these espoused theories of action. Often when people are dealing with difficult and threatening problems, their behaviour is inconsistent with their espoused theories. ‘Do as I say, not as I do’ illustrates the point and at the same time proves that the point is not new … I call it the theory in use. We use it without thinking about it. When we do think about it, we see that the results are often at odds with what we espouse” (pg. 8). These observations led Argyris and Schön to develop what has now become known as single and double loop learning. Mezirow explains it in the sense that single loop learning reflects the values of “achieve the objective as I see it,” “strive to win and avoid losing,” “avoid negative feelings” and “be rational (stay cool)” (Mezirow, 1990: 370). He points to the fact that this kind of reasoning leads to engagement strategies that “include unilateral control of the task environment and of protection of self and others” (pg. 370), and argues further that interpersonal relations are viewed as a win-lose dynamic which is “a closed and defensive orientation” (pg. 370). In contrast, double loop learning is critically reflective and constitutes “learning about the values and assumptions that generate one’s own or another’s behaviour” (pg. 370). Argyris shows that single loop learning leads people to engage in “defensive” routines and strategies that are designed to “save face”, which ultimately allow them to “create misunderstanding, self-fulfilling prophecies, self-sealing processes and escalating error” (Argyris, 1982: 9). According to this perspective, organisational behaviour reduces to encounters that are primarily “competitive win / lose group and intergroup dynamics with many protective games that are undiscussable” (pg. 9). Schein, working with Argyris and Schön’s model, recognises that “to be polite, to protect everyone’s face, especially our own, we tend to say what we feel is most appropriate and least hurtful [where] it becomes a cultural rule to “say something nice if you say anything at all, and if you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything” (Schein, 1993: 28; addition mine).

I find that Argyris and Schön's "defensive routines" accurately reflect my own experiences of interaction within organisational settings and can agree with Schein who argues that, for this very reason, problem-solving groups "should begin in a dialogue format to facilitate the building of sufficient common ground and mutual trust, and make it possible to tell what is really on one's mind" (Schein, 1993: 29).

Schein (1993) and Isaacs (1999), who were colleagues at MIT and studied the theory and practice of dialogue within learning organisations, have arguably become the first to develop a theoretical model for organisational dialogue:

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<td colspan="3"><u>Isaacs's Model:</u>
(Isaacs, 1999)</td>
<td colspan="2"><u>Schein's Model:</u>
(Schein, 1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td colspan="3"><u>Conversation</u>

(to turn together)</td>
<td colspan="2"><u>Conversation</u></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td colspan="3"><u>Deliberation</u>

(to weigh out)
(fundamental choice point)</td>
<td colspan="2"><u>Deliberation</u>

(lack of understanding; disagreement; personal evaluation of options and strategy)
(fundamental choice point)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td colspan="2"><u>Defend</u>

(to ward off, protect from attack)
(fundamental choice point)</td>
<td><u>Suspend</u>

(Listening without resistance; dis-identity)</td>
<td><u>Suspension</u>

(Internal listening; accepting differences; building mutual trust)</td>
<td><u>Discussion</u>

(Advocacy; competing; convincing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><u>Controlled Discussion</u>

(Advocacy, competing; abstract verbal brawling)</td>
<td><u>Skilful Conversation</u>

(Analytic, uses hard data to get to answers to problems; reasoning made explicit)</td>
<td><u>Reflective Dialogue</u>

(Explores underlying causes, rules, and assumptions to get to deeper questions and framing of problems)</td>
<td><u>Dialogue</u>

(Confronting own and other's assumptions; revealing feelings; building common ground)</td>
<td><u>Dialectic</u>

(Exploring oppositions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><u>Debate</u>

(Resolve by beating down)</td>
<td><u>Dialectic</u>

(Tension and synthesis of opposites)</td>
<td><u>Generative Dialogue</u>

(Invents unprecedented possibilities and new insights; produces a collective flow)</td>
<td><u>Metalogue</u>

(Thinking and feeling as a whole group; building new shared assumptions, culture)</td>
<td><u>Debate</u>

(Resolving by logic and beating down)</td>
</tr>
</table>

In each model the flow of dialogue reaches a 'fundamental choice point' in which the dialoguer pursues one of two possibilities put before him. In the case of Isaacs defensive routines lead to controlled discussion and debate or skilful conversation and dialectic confrontation, while suspending or listening leads to reflective and possibly generative dialogue. Schein's model is simpler but equally effective. He sees the choice point emerging into a conscious flow of listening (suspending) or discussion, which in turn flows into dialogue and metalogue, or dialectical confrontation and debate respectively.

Within this framework the salient features which constitute the dynamics of the dialogical process are said to be:-

2.6.1 Suspension:

Schein describes how, "as a conversation develops, there comes a point where we sense some form of disconfirmation … we perceive that our point was not understood, or we elicit disagreement, challenge, or attack" (Schein, 1993: 32). According to Schein, this moment is critical and leads to "a genuine choice between (1) voicing my reaction and (2) letting the matter go (thereby suspending my own reaction)" (pg. 33). Bohm et al (1991) believe that this suspending of one's thoughts, impulses, judgements, etc., lies at the heart of dialogue (Bohm et al, 1991: 6). For them, "suspension involves exposing your reactions, impulses, feelings and opinions in such a way that they can be seen and felt within your own psyche and also be reflected back by others in the group" (pg. 6). Bohm et al, like Schein, see suspension as a way of examining and evaluating one's own perceptions and assumptions, as well as those within the group in what Schein portrays as a "process of becoming reflective that makes us realise that the first problem of listening to others is to identify the distortions and biases that filter own cognitive processes" (Schein, 1993: 33). Suspension "does not mean repressing or suppressing, or even, postponing" (Bohm et al, 1991: 6) one's thoughts and feelings, but rather the act of giving "attention to, say, the strong feelings that accompany the expression of a particular thought – either or your own or another's – and to sustain that attention" (pg. 6) so that by doing so it "will permit you to begin to see the deeper meanings underlying your thought process and to sense the often

incoherent structure of any action that you might otherwise carry out automatically" (pg. 6). Schein sees this as "a state of knowing one's thought as one is having it" (Schein, 1993: 33), which results in our being able to "get in touch with what is going on in the here and now, and become conscious of how much our thought and perception are both a function of our past learning and the immediate events that trigger it" (pg. 33). Similarly, Isaacs (1999) defines suspension as that state of becoming "aware of the processes that generate thought" (Isaacs, 1999: 143), which in turn lead to a deeper awareness "that our thoughts do not simply arise from nowhere but have an origin of a very particular and deterministic sort" (pg. 144). Isaacs call this 'certainty' and sees awareness as the absence of certainty, which allows us to "change direction, to stop, step back, see things with new eyes" (pg. 135). In this context, suspension, for Isaacs, can thus also come to mean "to disclose, to make available for yourself and others the contents of your consciousness so you may see what is going on" (Isaacs, 1999: 142). When this type of suspension is in evidence, it can either lead to reflection and new opportunities for seeing things from a different perspective or it can lead to a certainty of one's own perspective, devolving into discussion and not dialogue (pgs. 139-140).

2.6.2 Listening:

For Isaacs (1999), "the heart of dialogue is a simple but profound capacity to listen" (Isaacs, 1999: 83). "Listening requires we not only hear the words, but also embrace, accept, and gradually let go of our own inner clamouring. As we explore it, we discover that listening is an expansive activity. It gives us a way to perceive more directly the ways we participate in the world around us" (pg. 83). Schein says that "we have to listen to ourselves before we can really understand others" (Schein, 1993: 33). "Furthermore," says Schein, "there may be nothing in our cultural learning to support such introspection" (pg. 33). For Bohm et al (1991), listening is a vital component of the participative process within the dialogic encounter, where the word participation has two meanings: 'to partake of', and 'to take part in'… "listening is at least as important as speaking" (Bohm et al, 1991: 6-7). "Our capacity to listen puts us in contact with the wider dimensions of the world in which we live … I see listening, properly understood and developed, as an immediate gateway that can connect us with the much-touted but much-misunderstood notion that we live in a 'participative universe'" (Isaacs, 1999: 87). By "participative universe", Isaacs refers to a principle of

participation which "builds upon the realisation that individuals are active participants in the living world, a part of nature as well as observers of it" (pg. 87). At its centre is the idea that human being participate intimately in their worlds and are not separate from them (pg. 87).

2.6.3 Reflection:

Schein (1993) observes that "suspension allows reflection, which is very similar to the emphasis, in group dynamics training, on observing the 'here and now'" (Schein, 1993: 33). He goes on, however, to distinguish a notable difference in the exercise of reflection by recalling that Isaacs sees 'reflective attention' as that of "looking at the past" (pg. 33), in contrast with "'proprioception' – attention to and living in the moment" (pg. 33), which is the essence of dialogue as a way of achieving "a state of knowing one's thought as one is having it" (pg. 33). Says Schein:

> "Whether proprioception in this sense is psychologically possible is debatable, but the basic idea is to shorten the internal feedback loop as much as possible. As a result, we can get in touch with what is going on in the here and now, and become conscious of how our thought and perception are both a function of our past learning and the immediate events that trigger it. This learning is difficult at best, yet lies at the heart of the ability to enter dialogue" (Schein, 1993: 33).

Isaacs sees the kind of thinking implied here as "something we do while acting" (Isaacs, 1999: 141), and links this to the work of Schön who describes it as "the ability to see what is happening as it is happening" (Schön quoted in Isaacs, 1999: 141). "Reflecting in this way means we are able to free ourselves from habitual ways of responding and stay fresh and alive" (Isaacs, 1999: 141).

Isaacs (1999) and Schein (1993) have each been influenced by the work of Bohm, who was drawn to the study of dialogue as a particular phenomenon whilst studying electrons. Bohm drew an "analogy between the collective properties of particles and the way in which our thought works" (Roman, 2005: 39). He saw that "this sort of analogy could throw an important light on the general counter-productiveness of

thought, as can be observed in almost every phase of life" (Senge, 1990: 223), and argued that "our thought is incoherent and the resulting counter productiveness lies at the root of the world's problems" (Bohm quoted in Senge, 1990: 223). Bohm believed that "since thought is to a large degree collective, we cannot just improve thought individually" but "as with electrons, we must look on thought as a systematic phenomenon arising from how we interact and discourse with each other" (Bohm quoted in Senge, 1990: 223).

Within this context "dialogue is aimed at the understanding of consciousness per se, as well as exploring the problematic nature of day-to-day relationship and communication" (Nichol quoted in Bohm, 1996: xx). According to Nichol, Bohm's work highlights several key components of dialogue: "shared meaning; the nature of collective thought; the pervasiveness of fragmentation; the function of awareness; the microcultural context; undirected enquiry; impersonal fellowship; and the paradox of the observer and the observed" (Nichol, quoted in Bohm, 1996: xx).

In the nature of collective thought, Bohm proposes that a "pool of knowledge" – both tacit and overt – has accumulated throughout human evolution. It is this pool of knowledge, says Bohm, that gives rise to much of our perception of the world, the meanings we assign to events, and indeed our very sense of individuality. Such knowledge, or thought, moves independent of any individual, or even any particular culture – very much like a virus. From this perspective, our attempts to resolve our problems through highly personalised analysis, or by attributing malignant qualities to "other" groups or individuals, are of limited validity. What is called for, says Bohm, is to begin to attend to movement of thought in a new way, to look to places we have previously ignored. Using the analogy of a river that is being perpetually polluted at its source, Bohm points out that removing the pollution downstream cannot really solve the problem. The real solution lies in addressing what is generating the pollution at the source" (Nichol, quoted in Bohm, 1996: xxii). Dialogue was, therefore, the most appropriate vehicle for tackling and addressing this task.

Isaacs explores dialogue further from the perspective of David Kantor's four player system. Kantor developed a theory that "conversations reflect innate structures that only partly stem from the individual's needs … they also reflect the unspoken needs of

the group" (Isaacs, 1999: 192). Kantor suggested that "people take a stance not because they intend to, but because the conversation needs someone to fill that role" (pg. 192). By using Kantor's model, Isaacs asserts, "we can build an intuitive ability to predict how the conversation 'wants' to play out" (pg. 192), and points the way to four fundamentally different kinds of actions within a group:

> "When someone makes a *move*; they are initiating an action. They carry, at least for the moment, the focus of the conversation. Another person listening to this initial proposal might agree and want to support what is being said. This person says so, and symbolically comes close to the first person. The second person could be said to be *following* the first. A third person, watching these two may agree, may think to him- or herself, There is something not quite right with this picture. He or she steps in and *opposes* them, challenging what they are saying or proposing. Symbolically, this third person might stand between the first two. Finally, a fourth person, who has been observing the entire situation, and who has the advantage of having one foot in and one foot out of the circumstance, describes from his perspective what he has seen or heard. This person may propose a way of thinking and seeing that expands everyone's vision, and could be called a *bystander*. He or she adds a valuable dimension to the conversation. The term bystander here does not necessarily mean someone who is uninvolved or silent. Bystanders can speak, but they provide perspective instead of taking a stand" (Isaacs, 1999: 192-3; emphasis carried).

This 'movement' in the conversation denotes a 'healthy' interaction between dialoguers where "all the people in the conversation find themselves free to occupy any of the four positions at any time" (Isaacs, 1999: 193). Moreover, according to Isaacs, "these four action positions, while valuable on their own, become extremely powerful guides for understanding the nature of action in dialogue as one links them to the underlying practices that lie behind them" (pg. 197). Thus, "each position – move, follow, oppose and bystand – has a dialogue 'practice' that corresponds to it … for *move* it is the

quality of truthfulness and voice; for *follow*, listening; for *oppose*, respect; and for *bystand*, suspension" (pg. 197; emphasis carried).

Isaacs goes on to argue that each of these actions "also has a generic set of "intensions" behind it" (pg. 200), and that our understanding of what these are allow us to "set aside our reactions to the noise of another's communication and listen for what they are really trying to say" (pg. 200).

Isaacs proposes the following patterns for recognising these hidden intensions:-

Opposer	courage integrity correction protection survival	**Mover**	direction discipline commitment perfection clarity
Follower	completion compassion loyalty service continuity	**Bystander**	perspective patience preservation moderation self-reflection

Isaacs maintains that "the art of thinking together is an exploration of the underlying motives and intentions of the people concerned" (Isaacs, 1999: 202), and believes that "the central spirit behind this approach is forgiveness – a stance that looks to the motives that a person intended regardless of how their actions appear" (pg 202). In this understanding action is not necessarily disregarded, but rather participants of the dialogue come to the point of *understanding action* far better than they would have done otherwise.

Ellinor and Gerard (1998), whose work on dialogue has also been largely influenced by Bohm (1996), define certain characteristics or behaviours that serve to contrast dialogue with other forms of discourse, such as discussion or debate (Ellinor and Gerard, 1998: 21):

Dialogue:

characteristic	characteristics of dialogue	patterns of behaviour
seeing the whole		seeing the whole among the parts
seeing the connection		seeing the connections between the parts
enquiry into assumptions		enquiry into assumptions
learning		learning through enquiry and discourse
shared meaning		creating shared meaning among many

Discussion / Debate:

characteristic	characteristics of discussion/debate	patterns of behaviour
breaking down		breaking issues / problems into parts
seeing distinctions		seeing distinctions between the parts
justification		justifying / defending assumptions
advocacy		persuading, selling, telling
agreement		gain agreement on one meaning

In summarising what dialogue is, and what dialogue is not, Ellinor and Gerard point us to the notion that "dialogue is about gathering or unfolding meaning that comes from many parts, while discussion is about breaking the whole down into many parts" (Ellinor and Gerard, 1998: 20).

2.7 Dialogue Within Communities Of Practice:

Lave and Wenger (1991) see language and dialogue as closely connected, where language is seen as having more to do with "legitimacy of participation and with access to peripherality than they do with knowledge transmission" (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 105). Learning to participate in a community of practice, such as those evidenced within the workplace, meant "learning how to talk (and be silent) in the manner of full

participants" (pg. 105). Drawing from the work of Jordan (1989), who emphasises the importance of storytelling, they sketch a distinction between "talking about and talking within a practice" (pg. 109), where *talking about* is taken to mean the regaling of stories and community lore, and *talking within* to refer to the exchange of information necessary to the progress of ongoing activities (pg. 109). According to Lave and Wenger, "inside the shared practice, both forms of talk fulfil specific functions: engaging, focusing, and shifting attention, bringing about coordination, etc., on the one hand; and supporting communal forms of memory and reflection, as well as signalling membership, on the other" (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 109). Within this context, then, the purpose of dialogue was not to learn from talk but rather to learn to talk "as a key to legitimate peripheral participation" (pg. 109).

Chapter Three
Research Design

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The Researcher

3.1.1.1 Introduction:

In view of the fact that my study is, to a large extent, qualitative in that it involves an enquiry undertaken between and by "participants in a social situation" (Blaxter et al, 1996: 63), it is important to provide a brief summary of who I am as an individual and to recognise the importance of my role and the influence it may bring to the study.

I agree with Blaxter, confirmed by my own experience, that the case study research approach is about personal observation "which for some periods or events may develop into participation" (pg. 66), and so it becomes necessary to make certain things explicit to avoid any possibility of prejudice occurring. Roman (2005) states that "qualitative research is very much about investigating the stories the investigator sees and hears; the investigator is an observer, a filter and an interpreter of the phenomena" (Roman, 2005: 34), and so it becomes easy to understand just how I, as the researcher, would be able to exert a significant influence on the research orientation and subsequent findings.

3.1.1.2 Who Am I?

My background is in short term insurance as an operations manager and as a divisional training manager where I am responsible for the overall supervision of further education, training and development of employees. In this context I am closely involved in assessing and assisting individuals to improve their personal performance and ability, and to offer an informed insight into their ongoing development in terms of human performance gap analyses, personal career development choices across a

broad spectrum of career opportunities, and the ancillary support needed to pursue a selected course of action.

To this end I hold formal qualifications as a certified ETD practitioner and as a subject matter expert in insurance, having been certified as a licentiate member of the IISA (Insurance Institute of South Africa). I am also in possession of a bachelor's degree in theology which, after completion, allowed me to work with individuals and groups in pastoral settings where I gained some experience observing individual behaviours and interpersonal group behavioural dynamics.

I see myself as someone who is both interested and concerned about the personal welfare of individuals. I am convinced of the fact that they each hold the key to their own potential and, with proper guidance and counselling, will be able to maximise their opportunities with the right motivation and through the ongoing enlargement of what I see as 'their personal presence', which I define as their emotional, intellectual and physical wellbeing. I believe that everyone has the potential for growth and I see this possibility as something that exists on all levels of human interaction, in the individual, collective and wider life systems.

As a manager within the organisation I am conscious of the influence that this positional role has, particularly with regard to the perceived relationship of power over participants / actors involved in the case study, the ethical considerations attaching to my selection of and engagement with participants, and my own objectiveness when selecting and interpreting the data. I explore these areas in more detail below when reviewing my role as researcher, my research methodology and the research techniques used.

3.1.1.3 My Views On Adult Education:

I view adult education as a lifelong process that comes "from experience, is acted upon, and is functional" (Werner, 2004: 3). This is a progressive philosophy of education espoused by Eduard Lindeman, who is said to have "laid the groundwork for a philosophy of adult education with his idea that education is not training for the future, but life itself, and that the learner's experience is the most valuable part of education"

(pg. 3). I also believe in the underlying principle that there exists "a structured set of truths that are definite and unchangeable" (pg. 2) and that "through reading and discussion of classic poetry, theology, scientific works, and other writings, learners are actively instructed" (pg. 2).

I therefore see myself as a liberal-progressive educator who is drawn to both problem-solving, cooperative learning techniques advocated in progressive adult education, yet equally ready to champion the contemplative, dialectic and critical reading and discussion methodologies being promoted through the liberal arts.

3.1.1.4 Why Am I Motivated To Do This Study?

In this particular study I have been motivated to explore the current theories and practices of dialogue, as observed within multinational organisations, and to 'experiment' with their possibilities in organisations operating out of South Africa, partly because of an awakened interest in several claims attesting to their efficacy in old world cultures, such as those found in Africa (Isaacs, 1999: 24; Bohm, 1996: 18-9; Senge, 2006: 222), and partly because of an interest in the resurgence of dialogue as an organisational tool for learning transformation and change (Isaacs, 1999: 20; Kahane, 2004: 2-3; Brown, 2005: 5-7; Schein, 1993: 27). I have also been intrigued by several studies and, in particular, those of William Isaacs, Edgar Schein and Jani Roman, whose doctoral thesis "A Study of Organisational Dialogue" allowed me to see possibilities for a similar undertaking in South Africa.

3.1.1.5 My Role As 'Researcher':

As a researcher who is currently employed by the organisation within which the data was collected, I am conscious of the need to remain extremely self-aware throughout the research process, and during the social interaction that this elicits (Lincoln quoted in Creswell, 1998: 194).

In so doing I have tried to ensure that any potential biases borne by aspects relating to the determination of value, or the merit and worth of the data being observed, have been 'neutralised' by what Creswell (1998) refers to as "member-checking" (Creswell,

1998: 213). This exchange was later strengthened by the introduction of what Creswell calls “the gatekeeper”, who is seen as “an individual who is a member of or has insider status within a cultural group” (Creswell, 1998: 117), The use of a gatekeeper, albeit a limited one, was used and adapted to represent an advanced form of member-checking, allowing me to obtain access to insider information and perspectives in an attempt to neutralise the possible effects that my identity and status were having on the data. In practice this involved extracting and clarifying information gleaned from the data by deliberately exposing them to the gatekeeper to thereby attempt to curtail or at best eliminate all forms of potential bias.

In addition to this I involved a number of participants in the examination of “rough drafts of writing in which the[ir] actions or words … are featured” (pg. 213; addition mine). I have also engaged in interviews with participants of the study to obtain clarity of information, where necessary. This approach has helped me to ensure that the credibility of the data has not been compromised by subjective analysis ensuing from the fact that as researcher I was also a participant within the process. Scriven and Patton (2005) expose this form of potential bias in evaluation as “not the most accurate evaluation because it is based on self-evaluation” (Patton and Scriven quoted in Fetterman, 2005: 7). Fetterman, however, takes the position that Scriven and Patton’s standpoint is based on the presumption that external evaluation is “impartial, objective, and fair” (Fetterman, 2005: 7), which, he believes, is an unreasonable view, supported by the fact that, according to Greene, evidentiary research findings across a number of programmes illustrate that “all social program evaluators are inevitably on somebody else’s side, and usually that of the side of the evaluation question” (Greene quoted in Fetterman, 2005: 7).

Whilst I agree, to a large extent with Greene and Fetterman’s observations, which serve as an overall point of departure for my own research, in the final analysis I do, however, agree with Scriven, in that “as evaluators we need to examine whether what we think is happening is what is actually happening” (Scriven quoted by Wandersman and Snell-Johns, 2005: 422), which is what I have endeavoured to achieve and apply within my own personal practice with each observation session, and supported by the processes detailed above.

3.2 The Selected Research Approach:

I have chosen to follow a qualitative approach in order to ensure and facilitate the discovery of reality associated with dialogue as experienced by participants within a large corporate banking organisation. Within this framework I have been guided by a particular rationale, which assumes that "Qualitative research is based on a constructivist philosophy that assumes that reality is a multilayer, interactive, shared social experience that is interpreted by individuals. Reality is a social construction; that is, individuals and groups derive or ascribe meanings to specific events, persons, processes, and objects. People form constructions to make sense of their world and reorganise these constructions as viewpoints, perceptions, and belief systems. In other words, people's perceptions are what they consider real and thus what directs their actions, thoughts, and feelings" (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006: 315; cf. Zimmerman, 2007, paragraphs 1-5, pgs. 160-5, for a fuller treatment of Boghossian's disputation against relativism and constructivism).

I decided to follow this approach because I wanted to understand how dialogue was being 'experienced' or 'understood' by a group of participants working within a large corporate banking organisation operating out of Johannesburg, South Africa.

3.3 The Research Design Summary:

I was influenced in my research design by contrasting the objectives expressed in each of my research questions. Firstly, I wanted to understand how dialogue was currently being practiced or experienced within my own organisation. Secondly, I wanted to explore whether it would be possible to validate existing theoretical models of dialogue, such as those advocated by Schein (1993) and Isaacs (1999), through an observation of their implementation within my own organisation.

This required a two-phased approach, which I drew from Robert Stake's models of response-based evaluation and standards-based evaluation respectively. In the first phase the goal was to understand what was happening or taking place within the focus group and thus placed significant emphasis on the responsiveness of participants in order to become better acquainted with participants' knowledge and practice of

dialogue. Stake refers to this type of case study as that requiring "interpretive-thinking" (Stake, 2004: 169), and sees the work of the researcher as one of making "comparisons of data, working through triangulation and meta-evaluation, re-examining issue by issue … [to make] assertions of merit and shortcoming" (pg. 174; addition mine). In the second phase the goal was to assess what was happening or taking place within the focus group against a pre-determined standard or criteria of merit which had been drawn from a determination of 'best practice' espoused by the theoretical models of dialogue developed by Isaacs and Schein. Stake refers to this type of case study as that requiring "critical-thinking" (Stake, 2004: 169), and sees the work of the researcher as one whose "aim is … to report that program outcomes have attained some level of merit" (pg. 174), through a process that looks to see "how different aspects of quality fit together" (pg. 174), and where "low performance is seen as cause for failure" (pg. 175).

I used triangulation (cf., for example, Cohen and Manion, 1994: 233-250; Mason, 1996: 42; Creswell, 1998: 213) to increase reliability and followed Stake's approach to data analysis and interpretation involving analysis and synthesis through a process of naturalistic generalisation, which is "the act of drawing broad conclusions primarily from personal or vicarious experience" (Stake, 2004: pgs. 159-179).

Within this context, and in order to answer my research questions: What is dialogue? and, How does dialogue occur within an organisation operating in South Africa? I developed two sets of supporting criteria by which I would evaluate the data to be collected. The first set was used to support the data collected in phase two of dialogue; the second set was used in both phase one and two of dialogue.

3.3.1 Phase 1 Of Dialogue –

In phase one of dialogue I focused on an examination of the words, phrases, sentences, the structure and progressive stages of the dialogues themselves, which involved an in-depth study and analysis of the narrative. Combining the work of analysis, broadly seen as breaking the total into its parts in order to get a better picture, with that of synthesis, described as the act of putting the parts together to make sense of the whole, I read the observation notes, journal entries, interviews, and field notes,

repeatedly in order to get a clearer picture of the dialogues. I summarised the information separately according to their source, and made further summaries of the summaries to allow the essential elements of the dialogue to emerge. I transferred the summaries into a data matrix to allow for a wider lens of enquiry into the data itself, and for triangulation of the data across the differing methods of collection.

3.3.2 Phase 2 Of Dialogue –

In phase two of dialogue I developed a set of supporting criteria, which I derived from the theoretical models of dialogue espoused by Isaacs and Schein, with some additional descriptions obtained from the literature review itself. The idea was to create themes or categories, based upon several features such as the descriptors used, behavioural patterns that were exhibited and/or evidenced, and facial and verbal expressions and the like, with which to articulate a comprehensive representation of the various facets (criteria) which have contributed to the understanding of dialogue as a practice-field, and to use each series of themes or categories to serve as a unit of analysis which would determine whether the data observed either validates or invalidates the theoretical models used.

'Criteria' in this sense is intended to mean that aspect of dialogue that has been recognised as valid components which support the overall theme and/or category within which dialogue is seen to exist or to have taken root. For example, observation of one's choice of language, seen as an observable criterion, lends itself to the overall foreshadowing of language as a theme or category within which dialogue as an observable phenomenon exists. These criteria – i.e. the elements associated with one's choice of language, including those elements associated with learned theories, notions, beliefs or conjectures drawn from sources external from the immediate conversation or dialogue – is then further extrapolated to determine historical, political and social influences and/or added behavioural attributes such as that associated with "listening".

In this phase the analysis of the data consisted of comparing the criteria gleaned from the narrative obtained by a reading of the observation notes, journal entries, interviews, and field notes, and assessing them against the dialogue-themes/categories in order to

determine their merit or worth. Each theme or category thus conveyed an aspect or facet of the proposed theoretical model of dialogue as evidenced by observable criteria.

In combining the work of synthesis with that of analysis, in the reverse of phase one of dialogue above, I was able to derive a composite picture of dialogue through an analysis of its constituent parts, thus:-

Theme/Category:	Criteria/Description:	Source:
dialogue as language – 1. the choice of language we use … 2. the context in which the language is used – - historical - political - social 3. 'language is listening'	observing the words and their derived meaning as determined by their own particular context … whether personally or within the group … active listening to one another, to the 'flow' of the conversation …	Burbules in Roman, 2005: 61 Bakhtin in Hamston, 2006: 57 Burbules in Roman, 2005: 19
dialogue as relationship – 1. (i) I-it relationship (ii) I-thou relationship 2. horizontal relationship	(i) treating each other as objects or things (ii) treating each other as equals … in a direct and mutual relationship relationship of mutual trust relationship of humility relationship of faith	Buber in Roman, 2005: 60 Freire, 1970: 72
dialogue as communally constructed – - thinking together - reflecting together - talking together *(where absent, incoherence is present, as well as frustration)*	observing a higher level of consciousness which enables the group to reach a shared level of meaning through a common thinking process (Schein, 1993: 30) - a way of channelling our differences into something new - developing common meaning / understanding - exploring, evolving meaning - exploring, evolving methods - discovery of differences	Isaacs, 1991: 9 Isaacs, 1991: 19 Bohm et al, 1990: 5 Schein, 1993: 29

dialogue as consciousness of – (i) complexities of thinking (ii) complexities of language (iii) imperfections or bias	observation of our arbitrary categories of thought and perception …	Schein, 1993: 30
dialogue as reflective enquiry - balancing advocacy with inquiry - explicit thinking	 * advocacy: speaking what you think, speaking for your own point of view; * inquiry: looking into what you do not yet know, what you do not yet understand or seeking to discover what others see and understand that may differ from your point of view learning to make things explicit – explaining or revealing one's own beliefs, or telling why people do what they do	 Isaacs, 1991: 188 Isaacs, 1991: 188 Isaacs, 1991: 183 Isaacs, 1991: 189
dialogue as fellowship (impersonal fellowship)	- koinonia (impersonal fellowship) - authentic trust and openness – showing trust towards the others, or towards situation e.g.: taking risks, going to unknown areas, etc. - cohesive bond (turning to one another, displaying a sense of being together in a spirit of oneness. Playfulness.	De Maré in Matos, 2006 : 5 Bohm et al, 1991 : 4 Bohm et al, 1991: 4
theories-of-action (espoused values & skills) versus **theories-in-action** (unthinking routine)	identifiable 'gaps' between what people intend and what they actually do … observable "defence routines" & "save face behaviour".	Schön and Argyris quoted in Isaacs, 1999: 187 Isaacs, 1999: 370
self-reflection – exposing your reactions, impulses, feelings, and opinions (seen and felt within one's own psyche)	anxiety or frustration behind the action or sentence … disconfirmation, disagreement, challenge, attack.	Bohm et al, 1991: 6

seeing one's own perceptions		asking or repeating; explaining or revealing one's own beliefs, or telling why people do what they do.	Bohm et al, 1991: 6
seeing one's own assumptions		asking or repeating; explaining or revealing one's own beliefs, or telling why people do what they do.	Bohm et al, 1991: 6
dialogue		seeing the whole among the parts seeing the connection between the parts inquiring into assumptions learning through inquiry and disclosure creating shared meaning among many	Ellinor and Gerard, 1998: 21
discussion / debate		breaking issues / problems into parts seeing distinctions between the parts justifying / defending assumptions persuading, selling, telling gaining agreement on one meaning	Ellinor and Gerard, 1998: 21
David Kantor's four player system	**Move**	Initiative (evidenced as initiating action)	Isaacs, 1999: 192-3
	Follow	Supportive (evidenced as symbolically aligning with the issue under discussion)	Isaacs, 1999: 192-3
	Oppose	Challenging (evidenced as challenging what is being said or proposed)	Isaacs, 1999: 192-3
	Bystand	Suspend (evidenced as providing perspective; may propose a different way of thinking and seeing)	Isaacs, 1999: 192-3

3.3.3 Phases I And 2 Of Dialogue –

I developed a second set of supporting criteria for phase one and phase two of dialogue, which I derived from the work of Jürgen Habermas. Habermas posits the idea that there are five distinguishing rationale which serve as patterns of reflection in human beings (Habermas quoted in Mezirow, 1991: 104-111). These 'patterns of reflection' can be discerned through a series of observable behaviours or comments that indicate the level of reflection that has been entered into or reached by the

individual or group being monitored. I undertook to show that the behaviours thus recognised or monitored and observed during the dialogue sessions would provide a framework for understanding the degree to which participants were able to engage in reflective inquiry as a means of obtaining understanding so as to reach a common resolution or consensus.

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Non-Reflective Action</td><td colspan="2">Habitual Action</td><td>Frees us to act while focusing our attention elsewhere</td><td>Observable behaviours
… leads to automatic response actions …</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Thoughtful Action</td><td>Involves higher-order cognitive processes to guide us as we analyse, perform, discuss, judge</td><td>Observable behaviours
… leads to introspection that draws from our prior knowledge, our experience and our beliefs in order to make an interpretation (does not involve any form of validity testing) …</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Reflective Action</td><td>Thoughtful Action</td><td>CONTENT</td><td>We assess what we have defined as our options in order to make the most appropriate next move
Or
It can occur only when the option stops because of a block, in which case it becomes retrospective assessment of process or premise</td><td>Observable behaviours
… leads to deliberate appraisal or re-appraisal of the ‘grounds’ upon which to base our decision-making …</td></tr>
<tr><td>Thoughtful Action</td><td>PROCESS</td><td>Is an examination of how we perform these functions of perceiving, thinking, feeling, or acting and an assessment of our efficacy in performing them</td><td>Observable behaviours
… leads to questions around an actions or series of actions performed in order to examine their effectiveness …</td></tr>
</table>

	Thoughtful Action	**P R E M I S E**	Leads us to question whether good or bad is an adequate concept for judging – involves our becoming aware of **why** we perceive, think, feel, act	Observable behaviours … leads to questions that explore the underlying assumptions or premise upon which our belief or action is based …

3.4 The Research Methodology And Techniques:

The information was gathered from several focus groups or six case studies made up of individuals who met together at weekly intervals over a four month period for approximately one hour. Each group consisted of between 15 (fifteen) and twenty (20) individuals whose ethnicity comprised of eighty seven percent (87%) black, of which fifty percent (50%) were of African origin, and a further twenty six percent (26%) of Coloured extraction. Seventy two percent (72%) were female, of which thirty three (33%) were African.

Individuals were drawn from a random selection of employees who were working as insurance advisors, indentured as claims or underwriting technicians, and operating within the personal lines insurance sector. Participants were invited to voluntarily participate in the research project through formal letters of invitation which outlined (a) the necessary levels of commitment and participation that were required, (b) the purpose and goal of the study in so far as it sought to examine and explore dialogue as a practice-field within organisational settings in which they were already participating, (c) assurances of individual confidentiality and anonymity and (d) the freedom to withdraw entirely from the project at any time or to withhold the use of their contribution, without fear of consequence or recrimination.

Participants were also chosen by virtue of the fact that the company's CSI (Customer Service Index) within the organisation's personal lines insurance department had indicated that satisfaction levels were at an all-time low, with as few as fourteen

percent (14%) of customers indicating that they were satisfied with the way in which they had been dealt with by staff working within this division of the company. This aspect served to identify individuals working within the department as ideal candidates with whom to explore the use of dialogue as a means of successfully integrating learning transfer into the complex, integrated and systems-oriented workplace environment to achieve the desired levels of operational success.

I conducted each dialogue session, manually recording my observations by selecting observable phenomena based upon their qualifying criteria such as our choice of words, the way in which we see each other as evidenced by our behaviour, i.e. whether we treat others as equals as opposed to objects or things, writing down these observations, taking notes, and asking participants to complete dialogue journals to measure how they experienced the dialogue. I also conducted some interviews in which I sought to extrapolate meaning from observed phenomena.

I used photographs as a means of stimulating discussion. Bessel et al (2007) distinguish the use of photographs in research as being either that of photolanguage or photovoice (Bessel et al, 2997: 559). In photolanguage participants use photographs to facilitate personal expression and interaction within small groups (Burton and Cooney quoted in Bessell et al, 2007: 558). Photolanguage is distinct from photovoice in that it “entrusts cameras to the hands of people to enable them to act as recorders” (Wang quoted in Bessell et al, 2007: 559). I used both approaches in the sense that, firstly, participants were required to take photographs of their personal workspace depicting what for them was either “working” or “not working” in their efforts to achieve success in the workplace. In this context the photographs represented each person’s “voice” or personal expression. Secondly, the photographs thus taken were on display and eventually circulated amongst participants within the group, to smooth the progress of and facilitate discussion and personal interaction between individuals.

At the outset, and for ethical considerations, all photographs depicting the images of people and or individuals within the group were removed. These photographs were then discarded and ignored for the purposes of the study.

A number of ground rules were introduced to provide a sense of the expected degree of interpersonal conduct which would hopefully ensure everyone's contribution and involvement; these were:-

- ✓ Individuals were encouraged to "listen' to one another to gain a sense of each other's contribution (Ellinor and Gerard, 1998: 20);
- ✓ Individuals were asked to look for the cohesion or flow of the conversation so as to grasp a sense of "the whole" and to attempt to recognise inherent patterns or connections evident within the conversations themselves (Ellinor and Gerard, 1998: 20);
- ✓ Individuals were asked to examine their own and others perceptions (opinions, beliefs, ideas) through the deliberate act of suspension (Isaacs, 1999: 143; Schein, 1993: 32; Bohm et al, 1991: 6);
- ✓ Individuals were encouraged to delve into and explore one another's contributions with the aim of listening and learning from each other and thereby directing the conversation into new channels of understanding (Isaacs, 1991: 188-9);

In addition, a "talking-stick" was introduced to represent "an object passed from person to person in order to slow the pace of the conversation" (Senge quoted in Isaacs, 1999: xx), and as a means of ensuring that, when necessary, as in instances of disorder or disruptiveness, participants within the room were brought to order to allow the person in possession of the 'talking-stick' the command of the conversation.

Finally, an added element of the research methodology was the introduction of what Brown, Isaacs et al (2005) refer to as the "cross-pollinating of ideas" (pg. 119) in which, through a process of recording and sharing of ideas from one session to another, participants consider "the linkages between their ideas and those of other teams" (pg. 119). In this sense the conversations were carried through between sessions and resembling ongoing conversations or "rounds of conversation" (pg. 118).

3.5 Limitations And Assumptions Of The Study:

The following limitations influenced the direction of this study and also served as a point of departure for the researcher:

- The data of only one organisation within a defined sector were utilised as a practical example of “best practice”, in this case the personal lines insurance division within the business sector. This approach can hamper attempts to generalise results.
- The data collected failed to support any meaningful connection between dialogue as experienced within indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and dialogue as experienced within an organisation located within South Africa. The lack of any real studies or further exploration within IKS may hamper attempts to measure or eliminate potential influences for determining a measure of best practice for dialogue within a South African context.

The following research assumptions influenced the direction of this study and also served as a point of departure for the researcher:

- The contributions of Jack Mezirow towards the theories of adult learning based on changes in consciousness, which “deal with the mental construction of experience and inner meaning” (Merrian and Caffarella, 1991: 259), have been taken to be authoritative in this field. Mezirow’s theories, based in large measure on the work of German critical social theorist and philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, have been widely used by the researcher. In particular, Habermas’ understanding of reflection (Mezirow, 1991, Chapter 4: Making Meaning Through Reflection).
- The theories of Isaacs (1999) and Schein (1993) on the theory and practice of dialogue in organisations have been regarded as authoritative in this field. Both have been influenced by the work of David Bohm (1996), whose ideas on collective thought have been accepted as being uncontested for the purposes of this study.

Chapter Four
Research Results

4.1 Introduction

In presenting these research findings I find myself being drawn to two interviews that, for me, encapsulate the spirit of dialogue when seen to be present. The first belongs to Mary[1] who relives her rich experiences with her mother, which, more often than not, was played out in the intimacy and privacy of the bathroom at home:

> Mary: We would be in the bathroom at home, my mother perched on the edge of the bath. I would be telling her about the things that were then currently happening in my life. She would listen. I would talk. Sometimes she would tell me something from her own life that would relate to mine. Other times she would talk to me about something about herself I had never known before. I remember it as a special and intimate moment of sharing and caring; it was beautiful. (Interview, I20071)

For Mary, a white middle aged office worker, dialogue involved rare moments that were characterised by feelings of relationship, warmth, security, and love.

The second was told to me by Iain, a young coloured MBA graduate in his mid-thirties, whose life was characterised by vague feelings of disconnection and isolation suffered during the apartheid years:

> Iain: I remember how we would sit together with my father and his friends, and family, none of us divided by status or by our earnings, or by our lack of it, or by being well-off. We were simply drawn together because we felt a connection, a bond of fellowship. In those days we seemed drawn together by what was happening in the country at the time and we would talk and discuss the latest developments. We talked about politics, about a better future, about "us". No one felt they were better than anyone else; there was no power struggles, no separation of race, no hidden agendas. We felt as though we were being brought together by a common purpose. (Interview, I20073).

[1] All actual names of participants have been changed.

With Iain, dialogue represented an opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals who felt something in common, and whose experience of their interaction with one another was devoid of any barriers to communication through feelings of sharing in each other's situation.

Each account brings into sharp focus not only aspects of dialogue obtained from a review of the literature, but also those borne by the results of the case studies themselves.

4.2 The Conversations Within The Room:

4.2.1 Prelude To Dialogue:

In the first two weeks of dialogue participants struggled to converse with one another. Sessions were punctuated by frequent silences and long periods of awkwardness in which individuals appeared to experience a sense of disorientation and a lack of purpose and direction:

It should be noted that in these extracts of the dialogues (pgs. 59-60; 61-63; 65-66; 68-72; 74-76) the use of a loose colour scheme is applied, not in any strict sense of a formal 'colour code' but as a means of documenting particular criteria and/or themes which emerge as movements within the flow of the conversations and paralleled from excerpts of observations drawn from within the literature review.

Extracts from early dialogues …

	…	
mistrust faithlessness	Silence. Participants are still 'finding' each other. More silence. Do I step in? Fidgeting. Participants glancing toward each other. Furtively? My imagination? Smiles. What now? Further silence. Expectation. Late stragglers arrive, held up by workloads. Chatter erupts.	awkwardness
[move] - 1	"Why are you late?" "Where is _____.?"	[direction]
[move] - 2	Some ask what is happening. What have they missed? I explain.	[direction]
[move] - 3	"Are we going to discuss the photographs we all took?"	[direction]
1 - i-it relationship	Yes, okay. I remind them about why they took the photographs. I re-cap the previous week's 'orientation' session. Participants start	incoherence

no playfulness	talking to each other. There is genuine confusion. Or is it inertia?	
2 - defensive routine	Several mini-conversations have begun. What now? I remember the "talking stick". I ask that only one conversation take place at a time	frustration disorientation
3 - defensive routine	and request that the person wishing to "command the floor's attention" so to speak, ensure that they are first holding the stick;	incoherence
no cohesive bond / fellowship	once finished they are to return it to the centre of the table. The next speaker is to do the same, and so on. Silence. Embarrassed, awkward silence? Slight giggling. I suggest that participants decide upon which photographs they would like to talk about, and that	
horizontal relationship	someone initiate the conversation. …	mistrust faithlessness
	Participants look at the photographs – still displayed on the walls and grouped by numbers. A few select their photographs. Some are still looking. No-one appears to know what they are supposed to do once they have selected their photographs. Do they know what is expected? 25 minutes have elapsed.	disorientation
	"Is this a training session? I mean I get that we are supposed to be discussing the photographs, but are you going to start?"	frustration
[move] – 4	I once again discuss why we are here. I tell them that the purpose of	[direction]
4 – defensive routine	the meetings is to dialogue about issues that are of common interest/concern to everyone. I tell them again about my role – i.e. to record what happens as best I can, but that this is their session, that	incoherence disorientation
horizontal relationship	they are to engage in whatever way they deem fit, telling them that the photographs are to serve as the catalyst for their discussion. …	mistrust faithlessness

In these early conversations individuals appeared to be unable to engage in the act of conversing with one another. Kantor's four-player system (Isaacs, 1999: 192-3), was noticeable by its absence in that participants lacked initiative [there were no movers], lacked support [there were no followers], were devoid of challenge [there were no opposers] and did not elicit any conscious suspension of individual points of view [there were no bystanders]. Talk fizzled into lapsed periods of silence, fidgeting, giggling, outbreaks of mini-conversations and awkwardness. As an observer I was unable to discern any apparent bond of fellowship or koinonia (De Maré in Matos, 2006: 5) or cohesiveness (Bohm et al, 1991: 4), and individuals by and large expressed themselves in terms of defensive routines (Isaacs, 1999: 370), asking obvious questions about their purpose within these sessions and their apparent reason for being brought together as a group, an aspect which had already been discussed with them at length. Their interaction was marked by incoherence (Isaacs, 1991: 9, 19; Bohm et al, 1990:5) and frustration as seen through the disruptiveness within the group and their inability to formulate any meaningful topic for conversation. They treated one another with mild forms of accusation (Bohm et al, 1991: 6), and questioning ["why are you late?', "What is happening?", "Is this a training session?"], and were not really listening to one another (Burbules in Roman, 2005: 19). In this they displayed a clear

lack of faith in either themselves or in the dialogue process (Freire, 1970: 72; Buber in Roman, 2005: 60), and did not seem to view each other as equals (defensiveness, suspicion) (Bohm et al, 1991: 6).

In exploring my observations the focus of conversation was channelled by some into expressions of personal fear, the fear of being able to talk freely and openly within the organisation. Participants admitted that they were weary of the process in spite of having volunteered to attend and cited cases where frequent initiatives by management had come to nothing and had petered out after a while. They were disillusioned and wondered whether the proposed dialogue sessions would meet a similar fate. Others admitted that they felt a little awkward and disoriented because they were not used to being given an opportunity to interact with each other in this way before and it felt strange; they felt "rusty" and did not know what to do.

> Thabo: "Usually they talk, we listen. And when we do talk, we might as well be talking to a brick wall" (Interview I200710).

In the following rounds of dialogue the conversation, of necessity, turned to an open discussion of individuals' fears and reservations around the dialogue process, and brought to light some of the perceived barriers to internal communication. It also highlighted the fact that dialogue was indeed language, the words we choose to use as well as the context within which they are used (Bakhtin in Hamston, 2006: 57). Within the group the language of choice was steeped in the historical, political and social inequalities of apartheid (pg. 57):

Extracts from dialogues around "fear" …

	…	
[move] - 1 1. mistrust [move] political inequality advocacy no cohesive bond no fellowship / relationship [follow] advocacy	"We are afraid to say anything. When we do, we pay for it" [I ask what is meant by this] "Well, for instance, if I challenge my manager or supervisor, then somewhere down the line I feel it. My PD is affected" "I can relate. I have experienced being literally "shut out" by my supervisor when I disagreed with her. When I offer an opinion or challenge the way that something is being carried out, she thinks I am attacking her personally! I think managers and supervisors feel threatened if anyone opposes their views, or their way of doing things" "I thought I was the only one! Only yesterday, I had a run-in with _____, because I challenged the way we were using the internal	[direction] fear [direction] fear of consequences / fallout challenges seen as 'personal attack' agreement

political inequality theories of action (espoused) (used)	loss adjusters. I feel that they should be able to work directly with us instead of always having to be appointed by the supervisor. I mean it makes sense to be able to interact with them individually on the merits of the claim. As it is, we get the information second-hand, and they give their report direct to the supervisor who vets their recommendations and then gives them on to us”	language in context
[move] advocacy political inequality	“It’s crazy, right! The so-called company values say that we have the right to question and to challenge each other … but in practice, that just isn’t allowed to happen. In practice the manager is ALWAYS right; I think that they see themselves as the only ones with enough sense to know what’s right for the department”. “I think that supervisors feel that we are too ignorant to get the job done. They think we are stupid. That we have no value to add to the process. If I try and suggest things, or recommend changes to something, it is immediately viewed with suspicion. And God help anyone who comes up with a better idea! What the supervisor or manager says, goes! It’s like working in a dictatorship!”	incoherence direction disparity between company’s espoused theory versus theory-in-use (obstacle to dialogue)
political inequality	[Nods of agreement; eruption of smaller conversations. This comment seems to have hit a nerve].	language in context
[move] advocacy	“We aren’t seen as equals, as people who have something to contribute. It’s funny. On the one hand we are being asked to contribute our ideas, but on the other hand we know that whatever we say is ignored. We go through the motions and the rituals, but in the end management simply implement their own ideas”	incoherence direction issues of equality
[move] advocacy political inequality	“I sometimes feel that my contribution, if I happen to say anything, is ‘stolen’ and used later on. It is changed sometimes, sort of camouflaged, and presented as one of the management team’s idea. I get angry and discouraged. Which prevents me from wanting to contribute anything! I just end up quietly retreating into my own little corner of the office”	incoherence direction management versus employee (obstacle to dialogue)
[move] political inequality	“Let’s face it, on the surface we are made to believe that we, and the contributions we make, are valued and appreciated, but below the surface we are constantly being undermined. That’s how it feels anyhow”	direction
	…	
[move] advocacy social inequality historical inequality [follow] political inequality	“It’s frustrating! I feel that it’s also because the majority of us are black. It’s true! The perception ‘out there’ is that black people are not capable of doing anything meaningful. We are still being treated as incapable of doing anything. Take a look around you. There are more Whites, Coloureds and Indians in supervisory and management positions than there are black people. We are being overlooked. And, if you ask anyone about why it looks that way, then all hell breaks loose”. “And then, of course, we all tend to stop talking. It’s no use and, actually, it becomes dangerous”	incoherence direction division along the lines of race language in context agreement language in context
[move] advocacy social inequality political inequality language in context	“The company hides behind affirmative action when it suits them, because it is acceptable that everyone who was previously disadvantaged fills up the available positions; it’s just interesting that there are no black people out there who seem to qualify, or who are considered good enough. It affects me. I become frustrated and angry. Mostly, I just give up and become despondent” …	incoherence direction disparity between company’s espoused theory versus theory-in-use
[move] advocacy [follow] political inequality	“I feel that we are constantly being measured! It makes me feel like I am being policed” “Absolutely! I agree that there must be some kind of measurement in place so that we are able to gauge the level of our efficiency and effectiveness, but it gets to the point that we are being measured on	incoherence direction agreement over-emphasis

(performativity) language in context	our measures!" [Some laughter. I get the sense that what is being shared is a watershed from the point of view that it marks a level of agreement and camaraderie between those who are present]	on performance / measurement agreement
[move] advocacy	"The trouble is that I feel quite disempowered! I become too scared to do anything in case I end up making a mistake. It's as though we are working for a dictatorship!" [More laughter].	incoherence direction feelings of being
mistrust faithlessness	"No really, it is! I am 'driven' by fear every day; fear that I will not be able to show something for what I have done. Even fear of failing!"	disempowerment
political inequality social inequlaity	"I think that, sometimes, the whole system is designed to make us fail. My supervisor is happy when I do something wrong; somehow it makes him justified. He believes that I am 'proving' that I am not capable … It's a vicious circle"	agreement fear of failure language in context
	…	

These dialogues, the character and nature of which quickly devolved into a series of monologues while dialoguers engaged in repeatedly moving the direction of the conversation to "tell their side of the story" (Isaacs, 1991: 188), were punctuated with spells of advocacy (convincing, deliberation) (Isaacs, 1999; Schein, 1993), characterised by a great deal of telling, selling and persuading of individuals' points of view (Ellinor and Gerard, 1998: 21). Dialoguers provided little time or opportunity for the conversation to 'settle' and thereby allow for cohesion (thinking together), agreement [follow] or disagreement [oppose], neither in the form of controlled discussion, skilful conversation or reflective dialogue. There was also no confronting of one's own and other's points of view, nor any real exploration of any of the opinions expressed.

Conversation was punctuated with a lack of fellowship (De Maré in Matos, 2006: 5; Bohm et al, 1991: 4), mistrust (Freire, 1970: 72), and a lack of faith (pg. 70) either in themselves and their ability, or in the dialogue process. Strong feelings of social and political inequality (Bakhtin in Hamston, 2006: 57) surfaced and participants were affected by what they perceived to be the company's espoused theory of action versus their theory-in-use (Schön and Argyris in Isaacs, 1999:187), which they identified with negatively; in this they also revealed the fact that their particular context was, perhaps, coloured by their historical inequality which had been imposed upon them by apartheid (Bakhtin in Hamston, 2006: 57).

Individuals spoke of being afraid to speak openly and unguardedly when interacting with management and each other. They based their fears upon lived experiences that

had led to significant levels of disassociation and feelings of isolation and frustration. These feelings were exacerbated by perceptions of racism and an over-emphasis on performance measurement, which had had the effect of creating widespread opinions of being disempowered and, in some cases, of general unworthiness. Dialoguers believed that their immediate superiors were ingenuous and that a clear distinction existed between the company's stated or expressed values and those that were being lived out or experienced. The negative effect upon the perceived value of entering into any form of communication or dialogue within the organisation was palpable, and discussions that allowed participants the opportunity to explore their points of view became necessary, so as to clear the way for the further exploration of dialogue to become possible.

This was achieved by, firstly, reassuring dialoguers that their contributions would be treated in the strictest confidence, secondly, that an action-plan would be created to monitor and gauge the successes, or otherwise, of these regular contact sessions and, thirdly, by gradually showing participants that I, as the facilitator, could be trusted and that my word was, in effect, 'my bond'.

4.2.2 Phase 1 Of Dialogue

As the dialogue sessions progressed and conversations around the various photographs ensued, it became evident that not all of the issues being highlighted would result in dialogue. Some of the focus areas such as "untidiness", "absenteeism", "understaffing", "lack of respect", "lack of communication by and from management", "lack of urgency", "too much red tape", "teambuilding", and "passing the buck", quickly devolved into a debate / discussion of the topic and an immediate and recognisable solution or decision was reached and implemented. In the case of 'untidiness' for example, once debated and discussed, the matter was recorded in terms of the agreed action-plan and instructions relayed to the responsible parties concerned to arrange and organise the immediate upliftment and storage of all finalised files and files currently stacked and strewn around the offices in boxes, to the company's external storage facility. In like manner the majority of the issues photographically recorded were resolved.

In the area of systems and technology the opportunities for dialogue came to the fore and I was able to record the following observable phenomena during one of these particular sessions:

Extract of dialogue around “technology” ...

	…	
	“The telephones aren’t working!”	
[move] advocacy	“Tell me about it! Yesterday I got cut off at least three times while talking to customers”	telling
[follow]	” It sucks. Who gets it in the neck when that happens? We do!”	agreeing
[bystand]	“Exactly!”	alternate view
[follow] advocacy	“The trouble is that everything doesn’t seem to be working at the moment. The fax machine at our end of the office is constantly getting	agreeing incoherence
[bystand]	fixed. It’s always out of order. I’m getting sick of if”	alternate view
	“I know. Our Xerox machine doesn’t work, either. It’s forever ‘broken’,	
[follow] explicit thinking advocacy	and the technicians don’t know how to fix it”	agreeing
	“I don’t think they know what they are doing!”	incoherence
	“It’s like the IT system! The technicians haven’t a clue! I don’t think that they are competent enough! They don’t know their jobs!”	split into parts incoherence
explicit thinking advocacy	“There is big difference between being a qualified technician, as opposed to being an IT administrator. The IT people are just clerks. I don’t think they know anything about the system”	split into parts
	“That’s a bit harsh!”	
[oppose] explicit thinking	“I swear! Whenever IT is involved, nothing happens and there are 101 excuses why they can’t help. It always ends up being reported to the help-desk and they have to send out outside technicians to find out what’s wrong. Then it works for a while and, before long, we are back to square one”	challenge validate theory split into parts defend theory
[move] advocacy	“I think there are too many people allocated to one machine. The paper volumes are too much! There are always paper jams and eventually the machine just stops working”	directing persuading
	“Welcome to our department! Everybody stops working, full stop! I	defend theory
explicit thinking advocacy	mean, who wants to work anyway? The machines aren’t working, there are boxes and files littered everywhere, everything looks to be in a mess, no wonder no-one feels the inclination to work!”	incoherence split into parts
[oppose] explicit thinking	“Listen to what you are saying! How can there be a connection between the mess and the untidiness in the office, and the fact that the fax machines aren’t working; I mean come on! I think that you might be able to link the general state of the office to the fact that no-one appears to have the inclination to do anything about it. I think that the managers and supervisors, who are supposed to be responsible and accountable for ensuring that the office equipment is in working order, don’t give a fig because they can’t even give attention to the state of their surroundings. However I don’t think you can say that because the office is in a mess that is way the machines, the printers, the Xeroxes, the faxes, are all in a mess too”	challenge defend theory incoherence split into parts incoherence
[bystand]	“Yeah, maybe you are right. But I do think that the office has something to do with it … I mean, like we saw earlier, untidiness leads to an untidy mind!”	alternate view validate theory
[oppose] explicit thinking	“Oh please! It’s not the same thing. The machines are overworked, clear and simple! Someone ought to do some kind of analysis to find out if the sizes of the machines are adequate for our purposes. I mean, if the machines are constantly on the blink then either they are just useless or they are not designed to produce the volumes that the	challenge incoherence defend theory

	company seems to believe that they can".	
[bystand] inquiry advocacy explicit thinking	"That's what I say! Does anyone know the kind of volumes these machines are supposed to be able to give? I think that the fax machines overheat because of the amount of traffic that comes through them and that is what causes them to eventually jam. Same with the photocopy machines, they overheat with the amount of copies they are being used to make, and then start jamming"	alternate view seeking to discover
explicit thinking	"Well, if the supervisors and managers took an interest in our surroundings, they would be paying attention to the underlying causes that are competing with each other to turn these machines on their heads!"	
[move] inquiry	"Didn't we say earlier that the IT system itself was also part of the problem. The thing is so archaic that I wonder whether the command-prompts are designed to accomplish their tasks. I sometimes think that they are unable to queue correctly and cause the machines to jam!"	direction seeking to discover
[bystand]	"You might have a point! Maybe that is why the telephones are also cutting out! Isn't there an overriding 'housekeeping' system that controls everything?	validate theory alternate view
[oppose] advocacy	"I really don't think so! I think we are starting to go off the point. There isn't really anything to discuss here. The machines are not working because, as some of us have already said, they are overworked! Pure and simple! I think we should get the technicians out here again to do some kind of benchmarking for us; to find out how many faxes these machine are supposed to be able to receive, how many people are meant to be allocated to each machine, and so on. The same with the photocopy machines. Then we need to motivate for additional equipment"	challenge incoherence seeking to discover
inquiry explicit thinking advocacy	"I've never thought of the phone lines being affected by the inadequacy of the queuing system; I think the system stores about 10 callers per extension … which is a lot. Maybe this is not happening and so they are simply being cut off when we eventually pick up their call. I think I should check with switchboard and find out if that is possible".	seeking to discover incoherence defend theory
	"I think that the PABX system itself is the main issue here. The system is supposed to bank all the callers in a queue, up to about five or ten callers. But I don't think it does".	
[oppose] advocacy	"Look it doesn't really matter what the system is supposed to do or not. The callers are being cut off while we are busy talking to them, not because they end up in a queue and are then somehow dropped from the system".	challenge
[oppose]	"No, not from where I am sitting! My clients also complain that they are being cut off while holding on for someone within the department to answer their call. They are put on hold, get given the system music and the voice-over to listen to, and then suddenly end up loosing their connection"	challenge
[follow]	"Ja, dis waar! Our clients have the same problem; and when we complain to line about the issue, they don't seem to have any answers or solutions"	agreement
[bystand] advocacy	"Not only that, we end up getting it in the neck! I was once told that they had 'investigated' the problem and had found out that some of the staff were taking their telephones off the hook, or were hiding behind their were talking to no-one … and had callers lining up to speak to them".	alternate view
	"Is that true?"	
[move]	"I don't know. I can believe it of some of the staff, though".	direction
[follow]	"I don't believe it! I haven't seen anyone doing that. It's insane!	agreeing
[oppose]	"Look, I don't know if it is true; the thing is that some of the staff were apparently caught out by switchboard"	challenge
	"What has all this got to do with the fax machines?"	
[oppose]		challenge
	…	

In this phase of dialogue the aim of the study was to determine how dialogue was experienced by participants in their natural, unaffected setting. My observations allowed me to understand the way in which dialoguers interacted with one another. In this way I was able to recognise patterns of behaviour and establish the level of contact between participants.

David Kantor's "four player system" was immediately discernable as participants began to interact, their conversations reflecting the innate structures of telling and directing [move], agreeing [follow], providing alternative perspectives or views, sometimes simply expanding on those already presented by others [bystand], and challenging [oppose] what was being said (Isaacs, 1999: 192-3). Participants engaged in a fair amount of advocacy, ensuring that they were able to speak for their own point of view to make certain that their individual ideas, opinions and positions within the so-called debate were made known. In achieving this I observed what Isaacs referred to as "explicit thinking" taking shape (Isaacs, 1991: 189), in the sense of participants' explaining or revealing their points of view. I also observed participants engaging in a fair amount of breaking down issues and problems into their constituent parts in trying to 'name' the problems as they saw them (Ellinor and Gerard, 1998: 21), and they followed their observations with attempts to justify and defend their various theories. This was observed in language that sought to persuade, sell, and tell each other of the basis of their assertions (pg. 21). In this sense the conversation clearly resembled a discussion or debate and did not resemble the characteristics of a dialogue. At some point in the discussion several mild forms of inquiry were attempted through the introduction of participants' questions around issues they were uncertain about, but these were not followed through by any in-depth appraisal or by any determined efforts to discover what others may see or understand of the situation.

The session was disrupted by 'incoherence' (Issacs, 1991: 9; Bohm et al, 1990: 5), a term I have used to describe the lack of collective engagement or of thinking together. Topics, whilst loosely aligned with the overall subject matter (technology), nevertheless fluctuated wildly from one extreme to the next – involving telephones, fax machines, photocopy machines, IT personnel and the like – and did not follow any logical sequence or determined attempts at finding resolution or understanding. Once again, participants were preoccupied with merely projecting their individual points of view and

limited their further involvement by not entering into a more thorough investigation or exploration of the problems / issues being tabled for discussion.

I was unable to observe any detailed form or attempts at reflection (Habermas in Mezirow, 1991: 104-111), other than self-reflection (Bohm et al, 1991: 6), as participants drew upon previous forms of knowledge and experience to describe their observation of the issues and problems they were busy presenting to the group for discussion.

4.2.3 Phase 2 Of Dialogue:

In phase two of dialogue the aim of the study was to try and replicate aspects of dialogue derived from what was considered to be the structure of "best practice" as determined by aspects of the literature review. In particular, Isaacs's model of dialogue was used to explain to participants how dialogue is achieved, and to describe to them elements of behaviour and communication considered necessary for dialogue to be a success. In this context participants were introduced to Isaacs's model of dialogue as a "tool" of measurement and the brief characteristics and behaviours attributed by Ellinor and Gerard as the components of dialogue were explained from the perspective of identifying the differences between discussion / debate and dialogue.

These dialogue sessions were introduced during the final phase of the dialogues and allowed for only two meetings to be scheduled, one of which is summarised below for assessment and comparison:

Extract from dialogue around "system problems" …

	…	
[move]	"Is anyone experiencing any problems with EFT?"	direction
playfulness	"Do you seriously want us to answer that? Does snow fall in Antarctica?"	showing trust
playfulness	"I'll take that as a yes?"	showing trust
playfulness	"I don't think it does; snow in Antarctica that is!"	showing trust
playfulness	"Of-course it does!"	showing trust
playfulness	"No ways!"	showing trust
playfulness	"Okay, check it out! Anyway everything is melting away now, due to global warming, so while it does, lets at least try and save ASTI"	showing trust
laughter	[ripples of laughter]	showing trust

	"I reckon ASTI is doomed. Let's stick with EFT!"	showing trust
	"I meant EFT!"	
laughter	[More laughter]	showing trust
[bystand]	"My problem with EFT is that I have to keep requesting the IT department to 'override' the system so that I can access the insured's account directly to correct the mistakes!"	alternate view
[follow] advocacy	"I know. That's because the system is blocked to avoid unauthorised access. Anyway, that still doesn't explain the problem we are experiencing with the system"	agreement
selfreflection	"I don't understand"	exposing
advocacy	"Each time that we make any amendments to the system, the client is being automatically debited"	validate theory
inquiry	"How do you mean?"	discovery
advocacy	"When I change, say, the insured's risk address, the system activates a change in the premium and signals these amendments to EFT. The changes are captured via mag-tape, and the client is debited during the overnight run-off"	thoughtful action: draws from prior learning
[oppose]	"So! If the risk address changes, so does the risk profile, which might trigger an increase in the premium"	challenge defend theory
[bystand]	"Yes, but I am talking about changes that do not affect the risk profile"	alternate view
advocacy seeing the whole among the parts	"I think the example of the risk address is confusing. Sometimes amendments to the risk address don't necessitate amendments to the risk profile. I mean if you move from Florida to Florida Glen, nothing happens. EFT is creating problems with a variety of policy changes, not just the change in the risk address"	learning – thinking, reflecting, and talking together
advocacy	"Okay, let me explain. Yesterday I needed to amend the insured's policy by issuing a roof endorsement. The insured's account was debited with a new premium. This morning the client phoned in, furious! He was angry about the fact that we had taken off his monthly premium twice in ten days"	
selfreflection advocacy [oppose]	"That crazy! So you are telling me that every time we do something to the insured's policy, regardless of whether it changes the insured profile, the system raises a debit against the insured's account?"	
inquiry	'How come you don't know about it?"	discovery
selfreflection	"I don't really deal with the underwriting endorsements. My involvement with EFT is limited to renewals. I just haven't been able to understand why the renewal premiums have been double-debited, and when the insured complains, I refer them to the credit-controller to sort out. I've never really understood what had happened!"	thoughtful action: draws from prior learning
explicit thinking		
selfreflection	"It doesn't affect all accounts. So if you haven't come across it, it means that your portfolio falls outside its scope"	
	"I think it only affects VPMS"	
inquiry	"How do we know?"	discovery
	"We don't. Each of the requests that we put through to Gillian have all been confirmed as belonging to VPMS. She spoke to me yesterday about it"	thoughtful action – seeing one's own perceptions
explicit thinking	"Does Gillian understand why it is happening?"	
	"Yes and no. Gillian seems to think that something in ASTI is triggering the rating field and doesn't know where to look to find what is causing it to happen"	
inquiry	"I don't understand it. Why would only VPMS be affected?"	discovery
	"Has anyone had to correct an endorsement belonging to any of the other products?"	learning – thinking
	"No"	together
agreement	[Others nod their heads in agreement. It is established that everyone who is present works across most of the product disciplines; each have hardly ever been affected; although it is sometimes noted that double-debits can become a problem with lapsed policies. These require a different handling process. All agree that it isn't really the same thing as the current EFT 'crisis']	
[move] advocacy	"Well I think it has something to do with the system modifications that we have implemented with Loss Adjusters"	direction

	“No! That doesn’t make sense!”	learning –
explicit	“Yes it does!”	thinking
thinking	“How? How can loss adjusters affect EFT? They have nothing to do	together
inquiry	with accounts, just like I don’t really have anything to do with EFTs. I	thoughtful
seeing the	get involved at renewal, and I only recently got to hear about the	action: draws
whole	problem when I started getting complaints from clients about the fact	from prior
among the	that their premiums had been debited twice against their account”	learning
parts;	“I know, it’s strange. But hear me out. The system now allows loss	
seeing the	adjusters the ability to raise debits against the insured’s policy account,	
connections	for reimbursements such as emergency towing fees. I think that when	
	they activate payment, something is pulled through inadvertently into	
	the payment screen”	
[oppose]	“That’s not right! The payments that loss adjusters are likely to make	challenge
advocacy	does not pull through from the policy premium account, but from the	learning –
	claims suspense account. So why would they trigger anything when	seeing one’s
	making a payment?”	own
explicit	“Guys, I think we are going off the point. Double-debits cannot be	perceptions;
thinking	triggered by a claims payment. Full stop. The entire accounting	thinking
enquiry into	process would be in jeopardy if it did! No, there has to be another	together
the	explanation”	
assumption	“Does anyone know what processes are involved when the loss	
[move]	adjusters make a payment? Is it the same as claims or underwriting?”	direction
inquiry	“Claims”	discovery
[bystand]	“Yip, claims. Access to MA PAY operates off the claims platform”	alternate view
advocacy	“Okay, but then they can’t be affecting the EFT process. The ledgers	
inquiry	are different for underwriting and claims; otherwise claims consultants	discovery
seeing the	would be able to submit fraudulent claims by manipulating the system!”	learning –
whole from	“Yes, of-course!. It has to be something else”	seeing one’s
among the	“What happens when you issue an endorsement? I mean how does it	own
parts;	change anything? What would cause something in the process to	perspective
seeing the	activate a further EFT?”	thoughtful
connections	“That’s what we are trying to resolve!”	action -
selfreflection	“I know!”	content
	“I mean that it might be an idea for us to run through the process to see	reflection
	if we can identify anything that doesn’t look right. If we cannot find	(reflective
	anything, then at least we will know that it isn’t the process, and we can	action)
	let IT look into it”	
[move]	“We tried IT, they say we are the culprits”	direction
explicit	“How come?”	learning –
thinking	“Not sure. They seem to think that we are activating the mag-tape by	seeing one’s
	something that we are triggering manually”	own
inquiry	“But what in the process would cause this to happen? What do we do	perceptions;
	when we activate an endorsement?”	thinking
advocacy	“Well, firstly, the policy moves into draft status to enable the	together
	underwriting clerk to initiate the endorsement”	discovery
	“Yes, the system moves the policy from active to inactive because only	
	then can we access the underwriting file. We cannot work on the policy	
	while appears on the operations drive”	
explicit	“Okay, then what?”	thinking
thinking	“The underwriter pulls through the standard endorsement file and	together
advocacy	selects the one they want – i.e. roof endorsement, or lack of	
	maintenance – and then deselects their choice from the drop-box. If	thoughtful
	they don’t want to do a standard endorsement, then they can deselect	action -
	the free-form option and type the endorsement themselves”	content
selfreflection	“We can also select the Microsoft 2003 editor if we are going to use	reflection
	free-form text”	(reflective
[move]	“Okay, so let’s say that you are doing a standard endorsement, then	action)
	what?”	
selfreflection	“I deselect the download option from the drop-box menu and populate	
	the electronic fields that are opened up from the system. The	
	endorsement is automatically downloaded via the policy schedule and	
	the system generates the necessary wording”	

[bystand]	"We also have to work off the rating screen so that we have pulled through the premium increase"	alternate view
[follow]	"The rate is manually adjusted and then pulled through the system"	agreement
advocacy	"If it is a free-form endorsement then there isn't going to be an automatic rate on the system. We then have to manually enter the rate to be applied so that the system can pull this through into the rating platform"	thoughtful action: draws from prior learning
[move]	"Who calculates the premium?"	direction
[bystand]	"Underwriters. We apply a manual rate and then populate the rating net	alternate view
advocacy	of VAT. The system then calculates this rate against the sum insured and includes VAT. Simple"	learning
	"Then what?"	
[follow]	"The underwriter is supposed to check the file and then save it to draft	agreement
advocacy	status on the system. It then goes through to the supervisor to activate"	thoughtful
inquiry	"Does the supervisor pull the electronic record through from draft into active status?"	action – draws from prior
	"Yes"	learning
	"So when does that happen?"	thinking
	"As soon as the file has been checked"	together
[oppose]	"I can't see how anything that we have discussed can trigger the EFT file"	challenge
[move]	"We had a problem last year with the run-off of Virgin Active, where	telling
seeing the whole from among the parts; seeing the connections	their policies were ring-fenced for gradual transfer to indirect. Some of the files were causing problems with the premium debits and credits, and when we checked we discovered that it had something to do with the temporary status of the files"	thoughtful action: draws from prior learning
	"You mean the policy status?"	
	"Yes"	
[bystand]	"I remember the problem. What did IT do there? Can you remember?"	alternate view
[follow]	"It wasn't an IT issue. They couldn't find anything from their side. As	agreement
advocacy	far as I can remember the problem reverted to underwriting department. Anyway, before we could get to the bottom of it, the files transferred into the new online platform with idirect, so it was a matter of 'case closed'"	learning – thinking together
[move]	"I actually think that you might be onto something though. Do you	direction
advocacy	remember the problems we had with the old Volkskas Bank clients? When we transferred their records into ASTI? They also experienced hiccups in the process, and it turned out to be a really simple solution"	reflective action - content
[bystand]	"Oh yes! I remember! If I can recall correctly, the system defaulted	alternate view
advocacy	when the policy status remained in draft overnight! What happens is that ASTI automatically pulls through all the draft accounts from draft into active status before it can read the file. That makes sense!"	
[move]	"Hang on. Are we saying that if the policy is not activated by the	direction
inquiry	supervisor on the same day, then the system defaults the account and moves it into active status?"	discovery
[bystand]	"Yes. The system transfers all accounts that are left in draft status	alternate view
[follow]	overnight into active status. It does not do that with inactive accounts"	agreement
explicit thinking	"Well, surely then, that is our problem? If the supervisor forgets to activate the policy and leaves it in draft status overnight, then the account is going to be affected by the system?"	thoughtful action – draws from prior
[move]	"Can it be that simple? How does the policy status affect the EFT process?"	learning
[bystand]	"The system reads the policy from its transaction file, meaning that if the policy status has been automatically updated overnight, ASTI reads	alternate view
[follow]	this as a new policy transaction. So, what happens is that once a file	
advocacy	changes from inactive status into draft status the system sees the 'record' created as that of a new policy file. This means that the EFT process is 'triggered' because it sees the policy as being "new" and so the system is designed to recognise this from the movement in the transaction file, and "thinks" that it must pull through the first month's premium"	agreement learning – thinking together
[move]	"Which means that the premium is collected twice?"	direction
[bystand]	"Yes. The first time correctly, and the second time because it sees the	alternate view

advocacy	policy as a new transaction”	
[oppose]	“But that’s crazy!”	challenge
[follow]	“Only if the manual process isn’t what it should be. Clearly our admin	agreement
advocacy	processes are causing havoc because they don’t align with the system”	thinking
	“So what’s the answer?”	together
[move]	“I think that we need to take another look at the way in which we follow	direction
explicit	through with our manual process, and if necessary, we need to change	learning
thinking	them”	
[bystand]	“Why haven’t we come across this before?”	alternate view
[follow]	“I really don’t know! I think this is just another case where, because the	agreement
inquiry into	department’s turnover of staff is so high, the older staff members have	thoughtful
the	left a ‘gap’ in our knowledge base. I mean if I hadn’t been here in this	action: draws
assumption	dialogue forum, it’s possible that we would still be working on finding a	from prior
	possible solution, working in complete isolation from one another.	learning
	Sometimes it helps to know the bigger picture!”	
	“So, finally, some credit for being an old hand?”	learning
	“Something like that!”	
[move]	“So what happens next?”	direction
[bystand]	“I want to check our findings with the IT department and make sure we	alternate view
[follow]	are on the right track. If we are, then we need to revisit our	agreement
inquiry	endorsement processes and ensure that the necessary changes are	discovery
	documented”	
[bystand]	“I will also take a quick look at the current batch and see whether I can	alternate view
	verify what we have discussed”	
[follow]	“If this is the problem, and we have the solution, then that will be great!”	agreement
	“It will certainly make everyone’s life a hell of lot easier!”	

In this phase of dialogue David Kantor’s “four player system” was again immediately discernable (Isaacs, 1999: 49). Participants interacted with each other through a clearly distinguishable pattern of telling / directing [move], agreeing [follow], providing alternative perspectives or views, sometimes simply expanding on those articulated by others [bystand], and challenging the views already presented [oppose] (pg. 49). As with earlier sessions a fair amount of advocacy (Isaacs, 1999; Schein, 1993) was in evidence as individuals periodically presented their ideas and opinions to the forum, with much alacrity, persuasion, telling, and directing in evidence (Ellinor and Gerard, 1998: 21). This level of engagement elicited a proportionate amount of defending and justifying each individual point of view with so-called evidence obtained from personal self-reflection (Bohm et al, 1991: 6) based on previous knowledge and experience. In support of this activity participants were seen to expose their explicit thinking to reveal and explain their various points of view to one another.

I was able to observe perceptible differences from phase one of dialogue from the point of view that participants were seen to make concerted efforts to investigate their underlying assumptions by inquiring into them, thereby allowing some measure of investigation into recognising or seeing interrelated connections and a holistic view of

the issues / problems articulated by the group (Ellinor and Gerard, 1986: 21). There were recognisable attempts, however slight, of wanting to discover each other's perspective and understanding, and an increased "listening" activity, which allowed for real learning to become evident as participants began to openly examine their own perspectives in the light of others (Isaacs, 1991: 189), and moved towards a more encompassing view of the matter at hand.

In the process of learning and discovery through this newly established (for members of the group) form of collective inquiry and discourse (Isaacs, 1991: 9, 19; Bohm et al, 1990: 5; Schein, 1993: 29), participants began to open themselves up to further insights provided by individuals within the group, and this led to a series of connections (Ellinor and Gerard, 1998: 21), which ultimately led to an understanding of the problem and a proposed plan of execution to verify their findings by way of eliciting further information and support.

Also observed in the process were a series of "touchpoints" which showed an attempt to engage in a succession of reflective moments (Habermas in Mezirow, 1991: 104-111), where participants candidly drew from their individual and collective knowledge and experience in directing their own thinking, as well as the collective thoughts of the group, to determine the root cause of their issue / problem. The resultant flow in conversation prevented any form of 'incoherence' (Isaacs, 1991: 9, 19; Bohm et al, 1990: 5; Schein, 1993: 29), and participants were seen to build upon the ideas and opinions of the group in order to obtain clarity and understanding in the form of a literal "think-tank". Individuals were able to "listen" (Burbules in Roman, 2005: 19) and remain receptive to the directional flow of the conversation, and in so doing build towards a constructive engagement and exegesis of the issues at hand.

In the other remaining dialogue session forming part of phase two of dialogue, deliberately designed to be an "open" dialogue from the point of view that it did not centre around a set of photographs to serve as a catalyst for group interaction but rather posed the following open-ended question for participants to consider: Do I have a calling to be fully human?, the following picture emerged:

Extract of dialogue around “Do I have a calling to be fully human?” …

	…	
	[Everyone appears ‘stuck’ once more. Furtive glances towards one another. They check the whiteboard. There lies the question: Do I feel a calling to be fully human? They look at me. No one is rushing each other to talk]	
[move]	“I don’t understand the question”	telling
selfreflection	“Me too. I mean we are all human, aren’t we? So what do you mean? How can we be more fully human than what we already are?”	
intercept	[I ask what it means to be human, suggesting that we use this as the starting point]	incoherence
[move] advocacy	“I think, for me, being human is defined by the fact that we are able to use our reason; we have the ability to think … I guess it is to be more than the animals. We have things like reason, imagination, feelings, emotions … something which animals don’t have”	direction
[follow] advocacy	“Yes. And each of us makes use of our intellect and our senses differently, which is another trait of our humanness. Animals act and behave instinctively, whereas humans are able to modify their behaviour”	agreeing
[oppose] advocacy	“Are we saying that to be human is to belong to the human species, or are we saying that there is a difference? For example, I can say that I am human because I am part of the species OR I can say that I feel a calling to be human. For me being human and being called to be human are two different things. Personally, I think that there is a difference. I am human because I belong to a community of humans, but I am also human because I behave humanely”	challenging
[move] advocacy	“I think that it is more than that. I mean on one level we are compelled to act in certain ways precisely because we are humans, such as when we instinctively show compassion or emotions … and, on another level we have the choice of how we would like to behave … such as when we choose to commit murder … this is not an instinctive choice, like the animals for their survival, but one which I deliberately choose to make”	direction incoherence
[oppose] advocacy	“I don’t know if I agree. I guess I do and I don’t! I think that, as humans, we instinctively behave like animals sometimes, and at other times like human beings … I think we are still evolving and emerging from the animal kingdom, so sometimes we show that we are just like them, and other times that we are different from them … Does this make sense? Whatever … What I am trying to say is that humans have the ability to rise above themselves and even in spite of themselves, but that, occasionally, they return to their base-nature and become like animals”	challenging
[follow]	“When we exercise choice, we behave like humans; when we don’t exercise choice, we behave like the animals”	agreeing
[oppose] advocacy	“Whew! Sounds complicated to me! I reckon that being called to be fully human simply means to be able to use our faculties as humans, all our human traits and abilities to act and behave in ways that show we are superior …”	challenging incoherence
[oppose] advocacy	“I am not sure that I see our calling as humans as a calling to being superior; not in the sense of being better-than or of being dominant, but in the sense of having a higher or more developed consciousness”	challenging
[follow] advocacy	“I like it; if we are to show that we have a more highly developed sense of who we are, then we need to think and act in ways that show that we are better than the animals. For me, this is the purest form of being called to be fully human and to behave as humans”	agreeing
	…	
intercept	[I ‘challenge’ participants to define human behaviour; I ask whether there is a difference between being human and being called to be human?]	incoherence
	“Well, I think that being human is to be part of a wider community; it is	

[move] advocacy	to be in relationship with one another. I think that this is the defining issue that differentiates us from the animals; we live in communities and so are social creatures."	direction
	"We belong to a wider community of other people, and by being part of a community, we interact "	
[oppose] advocacy	"Is belonging to a community a distinctively human trait? Animals also belong to a community, surely, in the sense that they live together in groups in the wild. I think that belonging to a community is secondary, in the sense that like seeks out like. Animals also belong to a community"	challenge
[oppose] advocacy	"I would argue that animals not only live in communities but also show compassion and emotions, so I am not sure if either of these are strictly human behaviours"	challenge
[oppose] advocacy	"Honestly? I think that arguing and debating about animal behaviour versus human behaviour isn't leading anywhere; and it doesn't help us to address the question"	challenge
	…	
intercept	[A period of silence. The conversation becomes 'frozen' once more. No-one appears to be able to take the conversation into a particular direction. I suggest that we take a step back to re-look at what we mean by reason, imagination, feelings, emotions …]	incoherence
[move] advocacy	"I think that because we are so different from each other, we express ourselves differently as well. I mean I have my own feelings and emotions, which I suppose are different from yours. And I will probably express them differently to you. My sadness may lead to tears, yours to depression"	direction
[oppose] advocacy	"Well okay! I guess it will be safe to say that animals probably don't experience depression! However, I think the conversation is straying off the point again. On a very basic level I think that humans are unique from the point of view that they have the freedom to choose any one of several ways of expressing themselves. That is what it means to have intellect. We choose our response. I honestly don't think that animals can reason in that way. They behave instinctively. We behave in ways that are controlled by an act of our will"	challenge incoherence
[follow]	"So in other words, we deliberate, we reason, we decide based upon our idea of the best option at the time!"	agreeing
[follow]	"I agree. To be a fully fledged human being implies that I am able to choose what is best. This is what makes us different from the animals; being fully human means to do and act, as we have already seen, in ways that show we are better than animals"	agreeing
	…	
intercept	[I ask whether, by controlling what we do through an act of our will or through exercising choice, this places a particular burden or responsibility on us as individuals. How does this relate to whether we have a calling to be fully human?]	incoherence
[move] advocacy	"Absolutely! I think we are obligated to choose whatever seems right or appropriate. I think that our choices have consequences and we are obligated to think about the fallout that our actions are likely to cause"	direction
[follow]	"It's like choosing to do what is right; I mean I can do anything I want, but everything that I choose to do has wider implications. If I steal, I deprive others, if I vent my anger, I affect those around me … everything has a context and I think that being called to be human implies that I have a responsibility to act in ways that protect others"	agreeing
[move] advocacy	"Isn't this what ubuntu is about? Ubuntu is an ancient word meaning 'humanity to others'. It also means 'I am what I am because of who we all are'"	direction
[follow] advocacy	"It is an African concept and it means that my behaviour is distinctively 'other-person-centred' in the sense that what I do shows my understanding of what it means to be in community with others. I think that it embraces the idea of being in right-standing with my fellow human beings and asks of me to ensure that all my actions reflect this"	agreeing
	"Unbuntu forces us to use all our reasoning faculties as human beings;	

	it points to our dependency on each other, our responsibility as human	
[follow] advocacy	beings, the showing of our emotions, caring and support for one another, our values, our morals"	agreeing
	"To be human is to be in relationship with each other and to show this by caring for each other"	
[follow] advocacy intercept	[I ask how this compares with the recent incidents of xenophobia which were experienced in South Africa against Zimbabwean refugees. There is a disquieting reaction, as though someone has been caught in the head-lamps of a spotlight. No-one speaks for a while. There is a short embarrassing silence]	agreeing incoherence
	"I think the situation with the Zimbabwean refugees is different. These people are causing conflict in our country, they are involved with crime	
[move] advocacy	and are taking away our jobs and livelihoods" …	direction incoherence

In this dialogue session participants appeared to experience difficulty in finding a common voice (Isaacs, 1991: 9, 19; Bohm et al, 1990: 5; Schein, 1993: 29) in the sense that individuals' engaged in the advocacy (Ellinor and Gerard, 1998: 21) of their own personal perceptions (Isaacs, 1991: 188) and insights without really listening to each other (Burbules in Roman, 2005: 19). The session was marked by momentary points of incoherence (Isaacs, 1991: 9, 19; Bohm et al, 1990: 5; Schein, 1993: 29) as the conversation struggled to emerge following a common and logical thread of development, vacillating between perceived human behaviours and animal behaviours, periodically threatening to become a discussion / debate about the differences between the two. Participants were, seemingly, inattentive to the question, and were unable to provide any real evidence of reflection (Habermas in Mezirow, 1991: 104-111) upon the topic, either individually or collectively. This aspect was sharply highlighted in individual attempts, or rather the lack of it, to objectively reflect upon the aspect of *ubuntu* and its implications for the xenophobic incidents which were introduced into the discussion to crystallise participants' understanding of the concept.

Whilst David Kantor's "four player system" was again observed to be strongly in evidence among participants (Isaacs, 1999: 192-3), it was interesting to note that their emerging pattern suggested an inability to provide strong momentum and development beyond individual's being moved to contribute their views and thereby direct the flow of conversation, only to be repeatedly opposed and challenged. In failing to listen to one another, individuals were unable to establish a common thread or elicit an explicit and collective thinking pattern. In the final analysis the dialogue was unable to find its own inherent direction, and meaningful dialogue was not found to be in evidence.

4.2.4 Non-Reflective Action And Reflective Action:

4.2.4.1 Phase 1 Of Dialogue:

In the earlier dialogue sessions (prelude to dialogue) discussion was disoriented as participants strove to make their own perspectives more explicit through vigorous displays of advocacy. Initiatives were continuously disrupted by the failure of participants to listen to one another, which finally ended in bouts of incoherence and frustration. There was no real evidence of either non-reflective action or reflective action (Habermas quoted in Mezirow, 1991: 104-111).

In phase one of dialogue conversation focused on several attempts to validate or defend personal perspectives and theories, in the expression of alternative views through advocacy (telling, selling), questioning, breaking down concepts and ideas into their constituent parts, and plenty of challenge. Interaction gave rise to the display of significant evidence to corroborate and confirm the presence of the dynamic associated with Kantor's four-player system in action (move, follow, oppose and bystand), there was still no evidence to suggest any form of non-reflective action or reflective action had taken place.

4.2.4.2 Phase 2 Of Dialogue:

In phase two of dialogue the data collected evidenced two differing sets of behaviour by participants:-

In the first "sessions" which were conducted there was a string of evidence to support the emergence of non-reflective action and reflective action. Participants were engaged in conversations that not only required their own explicit thinking mixed with validation of personal and individual theory through advocacy, but also a collective discovery of aspects which were unknown, at least by some, stimulated by bouts of collective thinking, reflecting, talking together and learning. Individuals provided evidence that as a group they began to draw from their individual and collective learning (knowledge), which they were able to reflect upon and allow the group to

access their collective intelligence. An analysis of these findings, however, shows that only two forms of what Habermas refers to as “thoughtful action” (pg. 104) were in evidence:

1. Non-reflective action or thoughtful action applied to content presented within the group, which draws from prior knowledge or experience to confirm or refute additional points or aspects raised by participants, but which does NOT require any form of appraisal or re-appraisal of the ‘ground’ upon which to base one’s decision (no form of validity testing);
2. Reflective action which was applied to the content of the discussion on several occasions by the group, allowing them to reflect and question ways of doing things that ultimately led to questions around an action or series of actions performed within a particular process (EFT, ASTI, VPMS) in order to examine their effectiveness.

In subsequent sessions participants, disappointingly, quickly returned to their old familiar ways of doing things and the resulting conversation devolved into a period of deep self-reflection, individual advocacy, challenge and varying forms of incoherence and frustration. In large measure the group appeared to mirror the behaviour recorded in earlier sessions and would appear to indicate that the newly discovered principles or ‘best practice’ associated with meaning conversation and/or dialogue and been quickly unlearned. Frustratingly, evidence collected pointed to the reality that, given the appropriate opportunity and circumstance, the practice of reflection as portrayed in the works of Jürgen Habermas, would not, necessarily, be guaranteed.

4.3 The Conversations Outside The Room:

In tandem with the dialogues themselves it became apparent that groups of individuals were getting together at random to engage in conversations ‘outside the room’. The nature of these discourses is not documented and I was not invited to be part of their development. In later interviews with some of the participants I was able to establish that individuals met to discuss points of interest or to continue those conversations that were introduced ‘inside the room’. According to one account, corroborated to a large

extent by others, it quickly became apparent that the discussions within the room had stirred individuals into action:

> Nkuli: We realised that our situation at the office was of our own making … and so some of us started doing something about it. We realised that we could make the difference. And so we decided to work over weekends, sometimes overnight, and got rid of the backlog. It was as if something in the dialogue sessions had stirred us into action. We became aware of what we could do. (Interview, I20079).

Several individuals sought to create opportunities for decisive action and working groups were formed to address some of the areas identified in the photographs that had been taken. The untidiness within the office was tackled, arrangements made to remove the storage boxes, individuals held to account for their absenteeism, some of the internal daily processes challenged and moderated or changed.

Some participants revealed how the sessions had affected what they thought they knew of themselves and others:

> Lerato: I realised something. That I was the only one who could give away my power to someone else. The discussion in the room made me think about the power that all of us had given away to our managers and supervisors; and to white people in general. I suddenly realised that I actually had the power now, but that somehow my perceptions were stuck in the past, in apartheid, in the belief that I was powerless. These sessions made me see that if I wanted to take control I could, and that I had to deal with the past. I saw that I would have to challenge more, do more to make my voice heard, and that it was okay for me to do so. (Interview, I20077).

The resulting conduct by Lerato and those who were engaging in similar lines of reasoning led to more overt challenges being directed at authority and greater participation in issues that affected the daily operations.

> Nkuli: We challenged ourselves and our supervisors in different ways. Sometimes this led to positive changes, other times it created greater division and animosity. What was important for us, however, is that we had found our voices. We felt liberated. (Interview, I20079).

What transpired led to what I have referred to as the 'outer conversations' initiated by those who were not part of the conversation inside the room, nor those 'outside the room', but who nevertheless held views about what was happening due to the fact that they had been affected by the dialogues.

4.4 The Outer Conversations:

These conversations were, in large measure, held by those directly affected by what was happening as a result of the dialogues, such as line managers and head office staff, and only became apparent much later during the process. I was unaware of them until it seemed that a decision had been taken to dissolve the dialogue groups. I was later able to interview one manager who had been involved in the decision-making process:

> Andre: The dialogues were starting to become contentious. It became apparent to us that they were developing into nothing more than 'gripe' sessions, where everyone just complained and criticized. Staff suddenly felt that they had the right to challenge everything without making the effort to understand the larger implications of what they were trying to do. In the end it was safer for all concerned to stop what was happening. (Interview, I20079).

Andre's perspective was not isolated and it became clear that a certain level of discomfort was being experienced by some who believed that the disadvantages of allowing the dialogues to continue outweighed the advantages.

In following this line of thought it became difficult to obtain a balanced picture of the reality that was being experienced 'on the ground'. Participants acknowledged that there had been changes to the way that some interacted with peers and immediate superiors, but felt that the changes were positive:

> Ntuli: People's comfort zones were definitely being challenged, and yes, sometimes confrontation might have gotten out of hand, but not because staff were unaware or unsure of the bigger picture. (Interview, I200711).

In "corridor conversations" in and around the floors, opinions were mixed and it was difficult trying to establish an exact version of events and of the wider perceptions from

management and others. I chose not to pursue this line of enquiry further, believing that there was no longer any merit in doing so when it became conclusive that the dialogue sessions would be withdrawn after mid November 2007.

4.5 Conclusion

In summation of the research findings I have chosen to rank the information through a simple information table by narrative and observation, shown by way of a yes **(**√**)**, no (**א**) and indeterminate (**±**) indicator. In this way it is possible to trace the various nuances of dialogue that were found to be present whilst at the same time provide a reliable estimate of the degree (percentage) to which the practice of dialogue was evident. In so doing it is not intended to reduce the significance of the findings into percentages, but rather to provide an insight into their arguable and recognisable presence during each session, albeit to a larger or lesser degree. The goal of the study was to explore and expose a particular model of dialogue which, in the words of Schein (1993) is "different from good face-to-face communication of the sort we learn in group dynamics and human relations workshops" (Schein, 1991: 30).

Thus I strive to show the unfolding nature of dialogue as observed to be present within each session, through a series of recognisable criteria which support the existence of an overarching theme or category of conversation identified as *the elements* of dialogue as proposed by Schein (1993) and Isaacs (1991). My hope, in doing so, is to acknowledge the nuances of conversation whose constituent elements make up the dialogic model proposed by Schein and Isaacs:-

		Prelude to dialogue		Phase One of dialogue	Phase Two of dialogue	
	Category -	Extracts from early dialogue	Extracts from dialogue around fear	Extracts of dialogue around technology	Extracts from dialogue around system problems	Extracts from dialogue around "Do I have a calling to be fully human?"
1	**Dialogue as language -**					
	The choice of language we use	✗	√	✗	√	✗
	The context in which the language is used -					
	- historical	✗	√	✗	√	✗
	- political	✗	√	✗	√	✗
	- social	✗	√	✗	√	✗
	The language of listening	✗	✗	✗	√	✗
2	**Dialogue as relationship**					
	I-IT relationship	✗	√	±	√	✗
	I-THOU relationship	✗	✗	±	√	✗
	Horizontal relationship					
	- mutual trust	✗	✗	✗	√	✗
	- humility	✗	✗	✗	√	✗
	- faith	✗	✗	✗	√	✗
3	**Dialogue as communally constructed -**					
	- thinking together	✗	✗	✗	√	✗
	- reflecting together	✗	✗	✗	√	✗
	- talking together	✗	✗	✗	√	✗
	(absence = incoherence)	√	√	√	✗	√
4	**Dialogue as consciousness of -**					
	- complexities of thinking	✗	✗	✗	±	✗
	- complexities of language	✗	✗	✗	±	✗
	- imperfections of bias	✗	✗	✗	±	✗
5	**Dialogue as reflective enquiry**					
	- balancing advocacy with inquiry	✗	✗	√	√	✗
	- explicit thinking	✗	√	√	√	√
4	**Dialogue as fellowship**					
	- Impersonal fellowship	✗	✗	±	√	✗
5	**Theories of action** (espoused)	✗	✗	✗	√	✗
	Theories in action (used)	√	√	✗	±	✗
6	**Self-reflection -**					
	Seeing one's own perceptions	√	√	√	√	√
	Seeing one's own assumptions	√	√	√	√	√
7	**Dialogue (characteristics)**					
	Seeing the whole among the parts	✗	✗	±	√	±
	Seeing the connection between the parts	✗	✗	±	√	±
	Inquiring into assumptions	✗	✗	±	√	✗
	Learning through enquiry and disclosure	✗	✗	✗	√	✗
	Creating shared meaning among many	✗	✗	✗	√	✗

8	**Discussion / debate (characteristics)**						
	Breaking issues / problems into parts		√	√	√	✗	√
	Seeing distinctions between the parts		√	√	√	✗	√
	Justifying / defending assumptions		√	√	√	✗	√
	Persuading, selling, telling		√	√	√	✗	√
	Gaining agreement on one meaning		√	√	√	✗	√
9	**David Kantor's four-player system**	- move	√	√	√	√	√
		- follow	✗	√	√	√	√
		- oppose	✗	✗	√	√	√
		- bystand	✗	✗	√	√	√
	Observable traces of dialogue encountered during the dialogue sessions (expressed in percentages)		14%	34%	46%	85%	26%

These findings suggest that the company's current understanding and practice of dialogue is inadequate when measured against the standards and criteria of 'best practice' enunciated by the models of Isaacs (1999) and Schein (1993), and therefore 'unsuccessful'.

On the other hand they provide evidence of an emerging dialogue which can be learned and which holds encouraging possibilities for its future implementation and 'success'.

In the final analysis, however, the data must of necessity be viewed together, and when seen from this perspective, the evidence points overwhelmingly to several determining factors which have successfully thwarted the implementation of the dialogue process.

Chapter Five
Discussion And Comment

5.1 Introduction

The results of the case study are not entirely unexpected. They reveal a composite picture, albeit a disparate one, of dialogue as practiced within the organisation, which shows that effective and meaningful communication is currently being hampered by several barriers. These barriers serve to immunise the organisation against successfully tapping into their collective potential and, moreover, prevent it from arriving at a common platform of working and engaging with one another.

5.2 Organisational Barriers To Dialogue:

5.2.1 The Historical Legacy Of The Past:

During the dialogue sessions it became apparent that participants were unable to interact with one another without unwittingly becoming embroiled in the "social discourses" of the past. It was as if the "discursive tensions", spoken of by Bakhtin (Bakhtin quoted in Hamston, 2006: 57), naturally arose, and were appropriated, internalised and adopted by individuals during the dialogue process. It became necessary to allow the group to express their feelings, however real or imagined, and to create opportunities for a change in consciousness and perspectives, through self-reflection and interaction with others within the group, before making any further progress. As an observer of this unfolding dynamic I was made aware of the need of some participants to deal with the 'social debris' borne of apartheid, and that failing to do so would impair the quality of any continued interaction within the group.

Equally apparent, however, was the sad reality that participants were not given the necessary platform or opportunity to comprehensively tackle the issues which they knowingly or unknowingly associated with the legacy of the past, without appearing to others as being overly contentious or critical. And it remains inconclusive as to

whether this perception may or may not have contributed to a management decision to terminate the sessions.

5.2.2 The Equality Dynamic:

Participants were affected by what could be described as a collective form of disassociation through the perception, however formed or created, that they were somehow 'less than' others. The disparity between employees with positional power (supervisors and managers) as opposed to those without (administrators) was tangible and its existence led to further divisions. Sometimes participants identified the same division between those with knowledge and those who were regarded as being without knowledge, which served as a powerful differentiator among participants, leading to the need to examine the ground upon which such perceptions had been based so as to vouchsafe their validity or otherwise. The effect that this was having upon the "conversation within the room" was that participants appeared immobilised to the extent that they were silenced and restricted from engaging with one another, and thereby exhibited a disproportionate amount of passivity. Dialogue within this framework was laboured and required continual coaxing and encouragement from the facilitator.

Sadly, the further exploration of this issue was curtailed, once again, by managements' ending of the dialogue sessions. The feeling of inequality by participants of extemporaneous or organised dialogue raises far-reaching concerns that ought to be explored and challenged. Adam Kahane, in his work with political movements throughout Africa and South America, draws a significant parallel between dictatorships and organisational authoritarianism which include "silence and subservience, through coercion, seduction and corruption" (Kahane, 2004: 48).

One of the ways in which Kahane argues that this becomes apparent is by virtue of the fact that in a dictatorship or authoritarian style of management the dictator/authoritarian "does not listen, and the people are afraid to talk" (Kahane, 2004: 47). He goes on to explain "The root of not listening is knowing. If you already know the truth, why do I need to listen to you? Perhaps out of politeness or guile I should pretend to listen, but what I really need to do is to tell you what I know, and if you don't listen, to tell you

again, more forcefully. All authoritarian systems rest on the assumption that the boss can and does know the one right answer" (pg. 47).

Enough evidence in the dialogue sessions (cf extracts in the prelude to dialogue, dialogue on fear and others) suggest that an unseen dynamic holding the tenure and fabric of the conversation was, undoubtedly, at play. Further, the subdued and polite manner in which several conversations were conducted lend themselves to another corollary of authoritarianism referred to by Kahane as politeness which is seen as a way of not talking, "When we are being polite, we say what we think we should say… We do not say what we are really thinking because we are afraid of a social rupture" (pg. 56).

This aspect of the research findings are incomplete in the sense that they are uncorroborated by further engagement with the participants themselves due to the premature and untimely cessation of the dialogue sessions.

5.2.3 The Effects Of Over-Performativity:

Individuals appeared to have become 'paralysed' in that their interaction with one another was prevented from functioning effectively, due to a perception that they were being continually measured against levels of productivity or standards of quality that were unattainable; the net effect of which set in motion the ground for a plethora of internal struggles of self-worth and self-worth that impacted directly upon an individual's ability to interact with others. Stephen Bell (2003) describes perfomativity as "a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based upon rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic)" (Bell, 2003: 216). The sense that I, as an observer, gained by examining participants' behaviour within the group, was that an over-emphasis on levels of so-called 'desired' performance had had the effect of debilitating individual's perceptions of themselves to the point that they felt unable to engage feely with each other.

The very idea that there exists a series of overt standards by which to gauge performance can also be viewed as a subtle form of brutality and echoes another of

Kahane's findings within authoritarian contexts where the CEO of a Fortune 100 company was seen as a brilliant man and a 'bully' (Kahane, 2004: 48), whose senior managers admired and *feared* him, spending their time "looking over their shoulders, worrying about how to keep him happy" (pg. 49). Kahane likens this form of 'control' as "the corporate version of the apartheid syndrome: management of a complex system by force and fear" (pg. 49).

Is this, perhaps, what was being experienced by participants? A form of control that was experienced as an overt paralysis brought about by a perceived inability to contribute meaningfully to a series of imposed standards? A fuller investigation of the phenomenon is required, however tenuously suggestive the idea appears to be that it was and, possibly, still is.

5.2.4 The Strictures Of A Particular Management Style:

It became fairly obvious throughout the dialogue process that participants were feeling the effects of an over-bearing authoritarian style of management which made it difficult for them to engage with others.

In my own observation participants found it difficult to engage within a framework of possibility that allowed for individual expressions of perspective, knowledge, understanding, and influence. Their 'right to be heard' (voice) was overshadowed by their perceptions of the need for control and domination from those in positions of management and leadership. This latter aspect has already received some attention (above) and emphasises the destabilising effects upon individuals "within the room", whose interaction became "closed" and "guarded" until they were suitably convinced through practice that the current initiative was pointing to a different dynamic, which encouraged their participation.

An authoritarian style of management guarantees speaking in a closed and guarded fashion which ultimately "obscures the problem and keeps it stuck' (Kahane, 2004: 57) because there is no basis upon which the conversation can, of its own volition, find ways of deepening. Kahane contends that this inability to deepen conversations causes individuals and teams alike to avoid exploring and discovering the mutual

ground which they hold in common (pg. 57) and this in turn leads to “polite conversations” (see above) that serve to steer away from sensitive topics or people so as to maintain a veneer of control and ensure the status quo within organisations (pg. 57).

Paulo Freire (1970) attributes the lack of dialogue to a deliberate form of oppression that seeks to ensure the status quo by denying individuals the right to reflection and action. He contends that “In order to dominate, the dominator has no choice but to deny true praxis to the people, deny them the right to say their own word and think their own thoughts. He or she cannot act dialogically; for to do so would mean that they had relinquished their power to dominate” (Freire, 1970: 107). For Freire, it was absolutely necessary for individuals to *participate* through a process of engagement and critique which he saw as a necessary corollary to the mere act of being human, the absence of which was a form of dehumanisation leading to an existential dichotomy and duality imposed by those in authority or ‘oppressors.

These are weighty concepts and they deserve further examination and exploration.

5.3 Practical Hindrances To Successful Implementation:

In addition to the observed barriers to dialogue, participants provided enough evidence to suggest that their ability to provide a sustained practice of dialogue was questionable. The data collected in subsequent dialogue sessions appear to corroborate the notion that, once learned, an understanding of best practice dialogue principles was not enough to guarantee success. Something more was required and I have isolated a few of my own suggestions to the observable barriers to dialogue based upon my own experience of the dialogue encounters themselves:-

5.3.1 The Rules Of Protocol:

The dialogue process or, in simpler terms, the rules of engagement that allow for positive interaction to take place among participants, needed to be learned and developed; they were neither instinctive nor natural for dialoguers. It became clear that for dialogue to be considered successful a framework for participation was required;

the tenets of which needed to be continually and successively lifted up for participants to be reminded of and held accountable to. Without this, subsequent attempts at dialogue were fraught with potential for failure, as corroborated in later sessions.

5.3.2 The Role Of Facilitation:

The use of an experienced and informed practitioner of the dialogue process appears to become salient if dialogue is to succeed within organisations. The data collected suggests that throughout the dialogue encounters, participants required continual support and direction in terms of realising and understanding how they were expected to engage with each other and what was required of them to ensure that the dialogue encounter was successful. A facilitator acts as a neutral enabler of the interactive process and is continuously needed and required to smooth the progress of the conversation that takes place "within the room".

5.3.3 The Creation Of Opportunity:

In order for dialogue ultimately to thrive and to take root within organisations, the data collected appears to support the view that its success, in large measure, is proportionate to its practice. In other words, the only way to become experienced and knowledgeable about the tenets and principles of best practice, is to create the contact and the context for regular dialogue encounters to take place. In this respect the old adage that 'practice makes perfect' is, indeed, true.

5.4. Closing Thoughts:

The publisher's foreword to Paulo Freire's treatise on "Pedagogy of The Oppressed" (1970) states simply that "The methodology Paulo Freire developed, once considered such a threat to the established order that he was forced to leave Brazil for some twenty years before returning to Sao Paulo" (Freire, 1970: 9).

I cannot help but become drawn to these words in the aftermath of witnessing the closure of the dialogue sessions by management, in spite of evidence which seemed to suggest that their ongoing development was and held the continued promise of some

worthwhile benefits. I would have valued the opportunity to explore issues relating to gender relations, which received scant attention, and the power-political relations, which were decidedly evident and which seemed to dominate proceedings, whilst, in the end, appearing somewhat limp against the eventual findings of the research due to the loss of opportunity and clarity by means of further investigation and exploration.

I feel, somehow, cheated, and am still left, therefore, with a keen sense of the possibilities that the use of dialogue in any context can provide. Freire's voice continues to echo in my mind and, if nothing else, his belief "that every human being, no matter how "ignorant" or submerged in the "culture of silence" he or she may be is capable of looking critically at the world in a dialogical encounter with others" (pg. 14) causes me to remain optimistic and buoyed by the prospect that a significant amount of exploration still needs to be carried out around this topic, and I hold out for the prospect that this research report does enough justice to serve as a torch-bearer for future researchers to take up the challenge.

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Annexure A:

			
Untidiness	Untidiness	Untidiness	Untidiness
			
Systems	Systems	Systems	Technology
			
Technology	Processes	Processes	Filing
			
Workstation	Workflow	Absenteeism	Understaffed
			
Understaffed	Lack of Resources	Lack of Leadership	Technical Support