

Chapter 2

Organisational Perspectives on Schools and Change

Abstract The chapter builds on institutional theory and how it explains stability and change in organisations. Loose coupling is described as a common phenomenon to uphold a harmonious relationship between the demands of the external environment and the inner life of the organisation. Organisational development (OD) is presented as a framework to understand the work processes in school organisation when school leaders and teachers do improvement work. The concept of improvement capacity is defined in a socio-structural perspective, encompassing the infrastructure of the school organisation, the improvement processes, the improvement roles and the improvement history of the organisation. Finally, this is framed in a practice and sensemaking perspective. The organisational perspective is contrasted with the need to focus on the teaching situation. The concepts of means and goal-situated strategies are introduced, and four common means-situated strategies are described. We argue for the need for goal-situated strategies and underpin this with a social learning perspective.

Keywords Institutional theory • Change • Loose coupling • Organisational development • Infrastructure • Improvement process • Practice theory • Sensemaking • Goal-situated strategies

When analysing schools at the organisational level, different theoretical perspectives can be fruitful for understanding and discussing conditions for change. In this section, we will focus on institutional theory and organisational development (OD) theory. The combinations of those perspectives provide a structural as well as an agency perspective, which are needed when analysing local improvement capacity. Eventually, we frame this in a sensemaking and practice theory perspective.

There are pros and cons to using an organisational perspective to understand school improvement. One advantage is that it enables us to get hold of the more general and structural aspects that benefit change and which can be used in reform initiatives. A disadvantage is that local sensemaking and teachers' professional work could get lost. We have therefore, within the framework of schools'

improvement capacity, included a section on the need for focusing teaching practice and the concrete strategies teachers and their school leaders choose to improve the students' learning situations.

Instrumental and Institutional Perspectives on Organisations

From an *instrumental* or rational perspective, organisations can be seen as instruments designed to achieve specified goals through coordinated action (Scott 1987; Brunsson 1989). Individual members of organisations participate in the collective production of goods and services through formal systems of rules and authority. Organisational action is supposed to generate certain outcomes, and these outcomes can and should be evaluated and compared between organisations. Within this perspective, organisational change is understood as the result of conscious choice. The essence of OD and reform within the instrumental perspective would be to define the goals to be reached and then to choose the means best suited to achieve the desired results. Another basic assumption within the instrumental perspective is that organisations are able to learn from their own experiences. If the organisational outcomes or results are not in accordance with the specified goals, it is assumed that the organisations will be able to adjust their practices in order to obtain a better match between objectives and actual results in the future.

Another theoretical perspective is the *institutional* perspective. Within this perspective, it is assumed that every organisation has a distinct history. Over time, organisations develop a set of norms, rules and routines that play an important role in guiding everyday action. Organisational actions reflect values, interests, beliefs and expectations that are relatively stable and persistent (March and Olsen 1989). Over time, perceptions are also developed within the organisation regarding how various tasks should be solved and how good results can be achieved. The development of an institutional identity within an organisation could mean that some thoughts and actions are no longer being questioned or debated, but are more or less taken for granted by members of the organisation (Meyer and Scott 1983). Organisational structures and processes can be institutionalised in the sense that they are “infused with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand” (Selznick 1984, p. 17).

From an institutional perspective, one would expect that organisations develop an ability to resist organisational changes if these changes violate basic values, interests and beliefs that have been established within the organisation. This does not mean that changes do not happen. Organisations are capable of constant adaptation to policy signals, reactions and changes in the external environment. In general, these changes tend to be small and gradual, and they may not necessarily be given much explicit attention within the organisation (March 1981). Large and sudden changes that are in conflict with the institutional identity of the organisation would only be expected to take place in cases where

a considerable gap has developed between the results obtained by the organisation and the expectations of its constituencies (Cyert and March 1963).

In the case of Norway, in 2001, the country experienced a “PISA shock,” with student performance being well below the expected level, given the public resources spent on education. The PISA results, along with other international skills surveys, such as TIMSS, stimulated much public and political debate about the need for national school reform. The perceived crisis within the Norwegian educational system laid the foundations for comprehensive school reform with a strong focus on learning outcomes and the development of new assessment practices at the national level. Helge Ole Bergesen, who was state secretary in the Ministry of Education and Research in the conservative government from 2001 to 2005, wrote about the Norwegian “PISA shock”.

With PISA, the debate climate changed abruptly, radically and irrevocably: mediocre school results and declining skills could no longer be dismissed as claims by campaigning conservative politicians or aging teachers in newspaper columns. The surveys revealed and documented that our students do not have particularly good skills at the end of lower secondary education. (Bergesen 2006, p. 42, our translation).

The orientation of the political climate towards change was supported by research-based findings. Evaluations of the previous education reform in primary and lower secondary schools, the Reform 97, documented that performance requirements in schools were vague, that teachers were reluctant to defining explicit learning goals, and that pupil feedback was rare (Haug 2004). Hence, there were several drivers pushing for change.

Within the Norwegian Parliament, there was broad political support for a new school reform and an increased focus on learning outcomes and quality assessment in education. An important question is to what extent the perception of an education crisis was shared by actors at the local level, creating a foundation for profound and lasting changes within each school.

Institutional theories about organisations emphasise the importance of the relationship between an organisation and its environment. Different actors, stakeholders or constituencies in the environment of the organisation may attempt to gain insight into the activities of the organisation and may try to influence organisational actions in various ways. As a consequence, the boundaries between an organisation and its environment might become blurred and contested. The relationship between an organisation and its constituencies can have a major impact on the efficacy of reform measures as well as change processes, both within and between organisations. However, actors in the external environment are not concerned only with the actual results achieved by the organisation. To some extent, the organisation will also be assessed in terms of the extent to which it applies models, practices and working methods that are perceived as rational, legitimate or modern by external actors. Such assessment could be viewed as particularly important if it is difficult for actors in the environment to assess the actual quality of work within the organisation. The same may be true if the relationship between the results obtained and the methods and work practices applied are uncertain or ambiguous (Meyer and Scott 1983).

When norms and perceptions in the environment do not correspond with established norms, values and beliefs within the organisation, an assumption according to institutional theory would be that organisations develop double sets of structures and processes. These two sets are not allowed to interfere with each other, but are kept separate, loosely coupled or decoupled (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Brunsson 1989; Weick 1976). Formal structures and processes can be designed primarily to comply with external requirements and expectations. Meanwhile, actual behaviour and core activities within the organisation may be governed by another set of structures and processes. The concept of loose coupling or decoupling in the organisational literature illustrates the inconsistency that may develop between organisational structures that are visible from the outside, and the structures and processes that actually control the internal operations of organisations. In schools, classroom instruction may be insulated from externally driven pressure for change. Teaching practices may be decoupled from administration and policy-making. When expected changes do not take place within schools, reforms tend to be repeated again and again (Cuban 1990).

Norwegian educational policy during the first decades since 2000 can be characterised as a series of reforms followed by research-based evaluations. The reform evaluations have shown that the changes in pedagogical practice have been modest. As is well documented in the international research literature, this story is in no way unique to Norway. One of the explanations offered by Norwegian evaluators has been that some of the political intentions behind the reforms would actually require profound changes in beliefs and values concerning education and learning, something that has not been reflected in the actual reform measures (Haug 2004). Researchers have also pointed out that there tend to be a number of unresolved tensions and dilemmas within the reforms. Some of these tensions are inherent in the pedagogical project itself and must to some extent be resolved at the local level, by school leaders, administrators and teachers, both collectively and individually (Karseth et al. 2013, p. 246). Some examples of such issues are the tensions between administrative control and professional autonomy, between collective and individual learning processes and between learning processes and learning outcomes.

Institutional theories point to the values and norms in the local school as important when it comes to making changes. OD delves still further into the inner life of the local school. OD provides for a structural perspective on organisations and at the same time makes the human interplay visible. OD theory depends on open-system theory and understands organisations metaphorically, as living organisms, where input, throughput, output and feedback are the notions that account for the information and working process in the organisation (Burke 2008). Miles (1965) was one of the first to apply this metaphor and proposed the concept of the healthy organisation model to explain the change process among school leaders and teachers. OD understands schools as systems of human beings, according to Schmuck (1995a, b). Those human beings work with different tasks and they move between different systems when they switch from one task to another. An important task for an OD leader is to make the different subsystems effective, which is, to a major extent, about enhancing the interpersonal competencies in the organisation.

Ekholm (1971, 1989) developed the healthy organisation model from Miles (1965) to an infrastructure model consisting of eight subsystems. The eight systems indicate the living organism or the social life in the school organisation on a structural level. The systems are the grouping system, the communication system, the goal management system, the power and responsibility system, the decision-making system, the norm system, the reward system and the evaluation system. How teachers and students are grouped in a school, how curriculum goals are discussed and managed, how the power to make decisions as well as the responsibility to execute them is distributed, what teachers signal to each other that desirable behaviour should be, what behaviours are rewarded or punished by social attention, and finally how information about the status of the organisation are collected, put together and evaluated—all this makes up a kind of infrastructure in which the social working life takes place. The infrastructure is supposed to shape the daily work and can be very salient for a new teacher in a school. It exists before the teacher enters the school and makes certain actions possible and others impossible to execute.

A clear structure and strong communication system point to a social life in the school organisation where information feedback works and secures adaption to organisational needs and societal demands. The grouping system and also the communication system stand out as important in this respect, as they decide which teachers will meet in certain groups and communicate. This way of understanding school organisations has been used empirically in a longitudinal study of 35 schools from 1980 to 2001 in Sweden (Blossing 2004, 2008; Ekholm et al. 1987) and is also used in this study (as part of the improvement capacity).

An ontological question underlying both institutional and OD theory is the relationship between agency and structure. Traditionally, institutional theory has been involved in describing the influence of structure on organisations and their members, while OD has focused on agency. Much OD theory stems from the work of OD consultants and change agents working with schools and other organisations to instigate change. The change agents lead, in a very practical way, group work focusing on the values of the participants in order to make them visible and possible to unfreeze, in line with the legacy of Lewin (1947). Another core task in the OD manual is to gather data about the local organisation and review its norms and structures and their capacity to work in line with the goals of the organisation. In this way, one can assert that the OD consultant, in his or her practical work as an agent of change, tries to overcome the dualism between agency and structure.

OD theory is a good example of what is called practice theory. Nicolini (2013) describes practice theory as the engagement of a range of researchers and theorists, such as, for instance, Giddens, Marx, Wittgenstein, Bernstein and Schatzky, in overcoming the opposition of agency and structure and trying to understand social and human everyday practice. Introducing practice theory, Nicolini (2013, p. 3) lists five features: (1) the importance of activity and the characteristics of its processes, (2) the critical role of the body and material things, (3) individual agency, (4) knowledge as the capacity to carry out a social and material activity and (5) the importance of power and politics.

With the help of these points, we can centre our interest: we are interested in the practice of improvement work, and in the agency of teachers and school leaders and the kind of activities and processes they carry out while being physically located in their school organisation and framed in an institutional structure. Wenger (1998) states that “Practice is, first and foremost, a process by which we can experience the world and our engagement with it as meaningful” (p. 51). In our development of the analyses, we have used Weick’s (2001) theory of how sensemaking constitutes the work of an organisation. Weick’s views fit well into the framework of practice theory when he declares that “Reality is ongoing accomplishment: Sensemaking is about flows, a continually changing past, and variations in choice, irrevocability, and visibility that change the intensity of behavioural commitments” (p. 11). A fundamental feature of Weick’s theory is that sensemaking is a retrospective process: looking back and remembering, in line with the symbols and ideas that make the wider reality possible to grasp and can work as a rational reasoning which accounts for the actions of yesterday and also guides those of tomorrow.

Does the practice of improvement work differ from ordinary practice in any way? Yes, it does when it comes to schools that are successful in their improvement efforts. Research, which we will account for in the following chapters, shows that teachers and school leaders in these schools make their practice conscious, by looking back at their improvement history and by shaping new sensemade patterns which lay the basis for innovative actions that improve student learning. And no, because research shows that many schools fail in this process. They look back and restructure their sensemaking in terms of whatever evidence they can find to explain their students’ underachievement. It is the situation that this project aims to address: to develop an understanding of organisation as a practice and sense-making process in local schools, and finally also to address support issues which could help teachers and school leaders to look back and see conditions in their improvement work that they have not seen before and thus enable them to plan for new actions.

Schools’ Improvement Capacity

In this chapter, we move on to the rationale of learning in and between organisations. It is important to understand this since the decentralisation and local accountability presuppose that schools are characterised by a culture which has the capacity to take on requirements from the central education system and adjust these to the local culture. Newmann et al. (2000) define school organisations’ learning capacity by using the notion of improvement capacity. This is understood as the self-renewing ability that constitutes the collective competence of a school aiming at effective improvement. They propose that this ability consists of four components that can be summarised as follows:

- The knowledge, skills and dispositions of individual staff members.
- A professional learning community.

- Curriculum coherence: the coordination of the school's curriculum for student and staff learning.
- Technical resources: high quality curriculum, instructional material, assessment instruments, technology, workspace, etc.

The theorising of learning organisations, and also of school improvement, leans heavily on the assumption that schools need to strengthen the parts of the organisation that make up their improvement capacity, in order to improve student outcomes. When these parts are strong, the school possesses a “development department” which can take on deficiencies, develop procedures and conduct improvements. Since Newmann, King and Young's work, the literature on improvement capacity and building capacity has grown considerably, especially through the development of the concept of professional learning communities (Hord 2004, Stoll et al. 2006) and the theory of community of practice (Wenger 1998, Wenger et al. 2002). In the Norwegian context, Oterkiil and Ertesvåg (2012) have combined school-based theories with the Burke and Litwin (1992) model of organisational change in order to assess schools' readiness or capacity to implement an anti-bullying programme. With the same goal, Roland (2012) has used Domitrovich et al. (2008) on implementation quality as a measure of improvement capacity.

Harris (2001a), and also Stoll (2009), conclude that building capacity is all about learning. Stoll develops the capacity concept to encompass a “generic and holistic concept; the power to engage in and sustain continuous learning of teachers and the school itself for the purpose of enhancing student learning, influenced by individual teachers within a school; the school's social and structural learning context; and the external context” (Stoll 2009, pp. 116–117). She widens the concept by addressing seven issues and their importance for capacity building, including context dependency, the broader aims of schooling, focusing on the present as well as the future, distributed leadership and networking and systemic capacity. However, the seventh issue, and the one that is important for sustainability, is developing a “habit of mind” in those involved in building capacity for continuous learning.

A Socio-structural Perspective

In this book, our intention is to hold onto the social and organisational perspective of change and not reduce it to a habit of mind. This implies that we pursue a methodological aim of maintaining an organisational and socio-structural perspective on improvement capacity and moreover, as we have described above, a focus on practice and agency. We use a framework developed by Blossing (2008) which has its roots in organisation development theories (Burke 2008). It can be summarised in the following four points:

- Infrastructure of the school organisation.
- Improvement processes.
- Improvement roles.
- Improvement history of the organisation.

The first aspect deals with the question of how to describe an organisation in terms of a somewhat more overall structure. Schlechty (1976) developed a structure to describe the position of the students in different types of school organisations. He classifies schools as bureaucratic or professional, based on the ways these organisations manage their students. Morgan (1986) uses metaphors to explore possible structures in an organisation. He imagines organisations as brains, organisms or even prisons.

The best model to choose in order to describe the structure of an organisation depends on what aspects of the organisation are of interest and which functions and processes are in focus. In this case, we are interested in a local organisation normally consisting of between 20 and 60 adults, and we are interested in capturing the daily working processes or the social working life, mainly between teachers and school leaders. We use a model called “the infrastructure of the local organisation,” originally put forward by Miles (1965) and developed further by Ekholm (1989). Hopkins et al. (2013) use the infrastructure concept to describe the formal structure of a school organisation and apply it in a study of instructional reform in mathematics. They refer to institutional theory but otherwise give a rather vague definition of infrastructure. It turns out to refer to the social networks among teachers and especially the positioning of teacher leadership and the importance of this when it comes to advice and information seeking for improving instruction. We argue that a more comprehensive model of the organisational infrastructure is needed, which captures the situation of the organisation as well as the functions of social life in the local organisation.

The description of the infrastructure of the local school that we use derives from Miles (1965) and Ekholm (1971, 1989) and consists of eight systems (see p. 10). The infrastructure shapes the daily work and can be very salient for a new teacher in a school, but it can also be influenced and changed by the teachers and school leaders. The grouping system in a school, together with the goal management system, constitutes basic parts of the practice when building a functioning organisational infrastructure. When the goals of the organisation are discussed and worked on and when this process is conducted in groups where the members of the organisation have possibilities to meet, the coupling between the school’s goals and the practical work is strengthened.

The second aspect, the improvement processes, focuses on important events or situations which drive the improvement work forward, for example evaluations, making an inventory of problems to deal with, peer tutoring, school site visits or literature reading. In relation to our interest in structure and agency, the improvement processes focus on the agency dimension. In the frame of OD, Schmuck and Runkel (1994) define processes as shorter so-called micro processes, being the parts that make up the longer and more complex macroprocesses. The macroprocesses of a whole school improvement process are described in several phases, as initiation, implementation, institutionalisation and diffusion (Miles et al. 1987). These phases do not follow each other rectilinearly, but rather they overlap with each other. Fullan (2001) describes them as themes. Other researchers, such as Miles and Louis (1990), talk about a growing or evolutionary planning and

identify phases such as vision building, pressure, empowerment, resourcing, assistance and problem solving. In terms of time, these processes can last from 5 to 8 years, which is therefore the time it takes for an innovation to become a routine in a local school (Ekholm 1990).

Results from this research show that many schools have developed a talent for performing intensive initiating or introductory phases when new ideas are presented to the teachers in the school. These schools plan introductory periods during which teachers are sent to courses or in which teacher teams study literature and maybe also visit other schools in which a certain teaching model has already been implemented. Experts also visit those schools and give lectures about the knowledge in the area requested. Moreover, the schools may have conducted a school-based evaluation which illuminates the school's improvement capacity, and thus they hope to use this evaluation as a basis for improvement.

A problem, as we understand it, is that the school leaders and teachers in these schools perceive the introductory phase as the whole of the improvement process and that they understand the process to be complete after maybe only one year of effort in the initial phase. However, to transform this initial learning into practical work, the implementation process is the most critical phase in the improvement process. In this phase, opposition to the innovative ideas is common and needs to be communicated. Moreover, real changes with practical consequences only take place when teachers and students implement the new ideas together. In this phase, it is important for the principal and other school leaders to be consistent and continues to support teachers by facilitating an exchange of experiences as teachers try out the new ideas in practice. If teachers and school leaders persist for a longer time, maybe 3–5 years, the process eventually moves into an institutionalising phase when the new ideas become practical routines in the daily work of the school.

The third aspect deals with which roles it is possible to take on in the infrastructure and how they vary in importance during an improvement process. Miles and Ekholm (1985), who developed the infrastructure model, have also indicated that the work of implementing new ideas into daily routines is promoted by certain roles in the organisation. The different roles are to be understood as an extended leadership for change, although they were described decades before distributed leadership made its entrance in the research literature (see, for instance, Gronn 2002; Timperley 2005; Harris 2009). We use an adjusted set of the roles applied by Blossing (2000) in his study of practical school improvement in five Swedish schools.

In the initiating phase, the *visionary* has the important function of communicating the broader aim of the improvement work and thereby creating a basic understanding. In the implementing phase, when concrete action is required, it is important that the *inventor* can communicate how to put the visions and goals into practice at the local school. It is thereafter important to let *early applicers* go ahead and try out the concrete proposals. The *driver* is needed in the implementing phase when defence mechanisms are starting to work. The driver's work consists of speeding up the practical work. When courage is lost, the

goal keeper performs an important function in reminding people of the aim of the new ideas. The *inspector* gathers information about the work and proposes actions to keep the improvement process on track. It is also important that the *preserver* gets space in the school organisation. He or she keeps in mind which routines actually work and are good and makes sure that these do not vanish amid the flow of new ideas. The visionary eventually returns and follows up what has happened in the improvement work and reviews whether steps have been taken to achieve the vision.

In a survey of five schools, Blossing (2000, 2003) shows how these roles can vary between schools. In the survey, the teachers stated who took on these roles within their schools. In two schools, the principals appeared as clear goal keepers, visionaries and drivers. The principals made clear what goals were important for the schools in the coming year and pushed for the work to start in different groups. The team leaders, or special needs teachers, appeared as inventors and appliers. In some of the other schools, the principals were not very apparent in the improvement work, and in some, not at all, according to the statements of the teachers. It is interesting to observe that it was in schools where the principals appeared most clearly, that other leaders, for example team leaders, also executed a visible leadership for development. The preserver appeared to be a role that really did not work in any of the schools. When voices in favour of preserving old and well functioning routines were heard, they were often perceived as opposition to school development and were reduced to silence.

The process of improvement work in a school is closely linked to the history of the organisation and especially its improvement history, which is the fourth aspect in the organisational perspective we have put forward. In a review of research on strategic organisational change, Pettigrew (1985) concludes that in most cases, research on change is impaired by three problems: it does not pay attention to the whole of the situation, nor the orientation of the process and it is lacking in its historical connection. By using the infrastructure model, we think we meet the requirement to pay attention to the whole of the organisational situation. The model captures the social working life of the organisation concerning the obvious routines as well as more cultural and unconscious aspects. By using this four phase model in improvement work, we also focus on the process. According to Pettigrew (1985), historical connections are made neither with regard to the development of the local organisation nor to the history of the surrounding society. These connections are of major importance in understanding changes, for instance in organisational culture, and how these changes affect the improvement work.

Since improvement work is a long process, it is important for schools to keep the improvement history alive through documentation and communication (Blossing 2008). In this way, the organisation will continuously adapt the improvement works that have been decided upon. An adaptation already takes place in the actual choice of improvement work within the frame of the school's goal orientation. Through such adaptation processes, a strong connection is manifested to the social working life of school, which has been shown to be of major importance for the progress of improvement work.

The Need for Focusing on Teaching Practices

Despite intensive reform initiative, we can, in conformity with Hopkins (2007), conclude that an improvement in teaching and learning which also raises student outcomes often fails to happen. Or as we noticed in our evaluation of the Knowledge Promotion Reform—From Word to Deed, improved results may be reached initially and then decline (Blossing et al. 2010). As we have described earlier, this could be explained from an institutional perspective by a loose coupling between external reform demands and the internal needs of the local school. Schools might seem to implement the changes, but the changes may only be superficial while the core activities remain unchanged.

In our evaluation of the Knowledge Reform (Blossing et al. 2010), we could see that the teaching situation was seldom clearly emphasised in the project plans, despite the overarching goal in the programme being to improve both the academic and the social development of the students. One possible explanation for this may be that the Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, in their presentation of the programme, stressed the importance of the internal organisational processes of the local schools, that is the learning organisation, as a means of improving teaching practices. In our evaluation, we concluded that teachers and principals had indeed understood the chosen improvement strategies as a means of improving student outcomes, but often without clearly mapping the steps in the process and without appreciating the role that improved teaching practices would have in this process.

An effort to strengthen a school's internal organisational processes and improvement capacity is important, but we would like to emphasise that it is necessary to keep a focus on the teaching situation and the roles of the teachers and students in this situation, in order to improve student learning. This has been extensively emphasised in the research literature both on school effectiveness (Reynolds et al. 2000) and school improvement (Harris 2001b). Timperley (2011) places the teaching situation at the core of improvement work by describing teacher team work as being of the utmost importance in schools where (learning how to adapt teaching to) the learning needs of the children are in focus. Timperley sharply stresses that improvement work that does not have this focus is not worth mentioning as an improvement effort. In the Swedish context, Larsson (2004) argues that in order to improve teaching, teachers have to see each other in action. This however was something that rarely occurred in the schools he investigated.

The Need to Consider Means- Versus Goal-Situated Strategies

The absence of a teaching focus in the improvement work of a school is clearly a major deficiency. Another possible weakness has to do with the type of improvement strategy chosen. Sarason (1971), an early and clear-sighted observer of the

inner life of schools, concludes that what starts out as a means in school improvement work often tends to be transformed into an end in itself during the improvement process. This provides an interesting perspective on why the Norwegian schools participating in the programme often avoided focusing on the teaching situation. In Norwegian as well in Swedish schools, we find a dominant improvement strategy where teachers talk to each other in groups with a view to developing their pedagogical understanding. The idea is that these insights will cause the teachers to reflect on their own teaching practices in turn and thereby improve their instruction.

But according to Sarason, this means-oriented strategy will not necessarily lead to an improvement in student learning in the classroom. The rational assumption that the means should lead to the desired ends does not seem to be correct. Teachers experience these group talks as positive and this seems to promote a need to continue with these group discussions. As a consequence, the means becomes the end. The teachers want more positive time together—and this probably also contributes to the learning of the teachers—but the intention that the learning should transfer to the learning situation and to the students remains in the distance. Instead, the group discussion itself appears to be the major goal to be achieved.

We would like to link the improvement strategies schools use to the situations in which these strategies are used. We propose that the situation chosen makes a difference to the result. The situations can be of two different kinds: means situations and goal situations, which imply that improvement strategies are either means or goal situated. The means-situated strategies aim at working through means. Concerning the goal of improving student learning outcomes, one such means strategy could be to improve the collaboration in the teacher teams with the aim of improving instruction, with the hope that improved teaching methods will eventually improve student learning outcomes. A goal-situated strategy, on the other hand, aims at working in or very close to the situation that is intended to be improved. One example could be action learning in order to improve the teaching approach in mathematics, where people with external competence observe lessons and give feedback to teachers who, based on these responses, develop new strategies to try out in the classroom.

Four Means-Situated Strategies

To summarise, in the evaluation of the Knowledge Reform—from word to deed, we found four means-situated strategies that were often used. We have formulated these as assumptions that teachers and school leaders in schools make, with reference to different means that are expected to have an effect on student learning outcomes.

- The assumption that an improvement in teacher collaboration, and the teachers' way of talking about teaching, will improve teaching practices and student outcomes.
- The assumption that the development of planning and follow-up activities, for example goal syllabuses and matrices and student development plans, will improve teaching practices and student outcomes.

- The assumption that an improvement in the well-being of the students during the school day will improve their will and ability to perform better and thus improve student outcomes.
- The assumption that an investment in creating order and discipline will improve the learning environment and thus improve student outcomes.

The first assumption, we claim, is a very common supposition for organising improvement projects. The Norwegian reform we investigated was based on this assumption when talking about developing schools as learning organisations. In the participating schools, we saw an effort to organise teachers in groups to discuss their teaching. Organising the teachers in different groups was presumed to lead to a dissemination of best practice. We did not see any major effect of this strategy in the Norwegian case, and we argue that this strategy by itself is not successful (Blossing et al. 2010). However, if this strategy is combined with other strategies, such as goal-situated strategies like action learning, it might contribute to success.

The second assumption is a reform requirement in Norwegian schools and originates from a rational belief in the benefits of documentation and planning. We visited schools that had put a lot of effort into creating templates to monitor students' performance by identifying student learning and planning follow-up lessons. There were a lot of schools where teachers' energy was spent on documenting properly. Intense documentation threatens to shift the focus away from the actual work of teaching students. Teachers often stated that they already knew about student learning and achievement and that documenting reduced instruction time. Systematically learning how to do documentation and planning is good, but of course has to be balanced against teaching and learning activities. It should help teachers to promote all students' learning and not be an aim in itself.

The third assumption often forms the basis of quality control in schools. The underlying logic is that if students feel good, the school and its teaching are good. In our evaluation, we visited a school that had made considerable investment in lunch break activities, such as theatre and playing guitar. The intention was that the students could do these activities during lunch break. The teachers and school leaders thought this would strengthen the students' motivation and self-confidence and would eventually lead to orderliness in the classroom, an improved learning environment and thus would also raise student outcomes. No improvement to teaching routines occurred during this time, but instead the teachers kept closely to their old habits. The students did enjoy the lunch breaks more, but they still disliked the traditional teaching.

Point four also focuses on peace and quiet in the classroom. The logic here is that if one can first create peace and quiet, for example by informing the students of rules about when to go to the school's recreation hall, as well as how to behave there, this will also affect orderliness in the classroom and thus again leads to an improved learning environment. We visited a school where this assumption was the basis for the entire improvement project. Teachers worked purposefully to create common rules for the entire school. Each rule was associated with a

consequence if not followed. The teachers described the effectiveness of having common rules and consequences, but they also described how following up the rules took a lot of energy. Students described how the teachers' efforts to set up rules and try to be consistent in getting the students to respect them had created a greater sense of peace in the classroom. But students also described vividly how they spent a lot of energy circumventing rules they considered stupid and unnecessary. It is of course good to have rules for how youngsters and adults should handle their social relationships, but the problem with this assumption, as with the other three, is that many schools employ these strategies as what we call means-situated strategies. In this example, one may ask whether the serenity in the classroom could also have been created by focusing on creating a teaching which felt meaningful to the students.

We argue that teachers and school leaders, through the ways in which they approach their improvement activities, will create more or less successful structures for improvement. The case studies in our evaluation show that schools have been goal situated and successful when it comes to the teachers' learning environment but less successful when it comes to the students' learning environment.

A Social Learning Perspective

Blossing and Ertesvåg (2011) have elaborated on individual learning beliefs versus a social learning perspective when it comes to organising improvement work. The social learning perspective is characterised by learning taking place in the dialogue between teachers, while the individual perspective is characterised by a belief in learning as something that only happens in the brain of the individual and that is also stored there. In such a perspective, the reliance on means-situated strategies could be understood as an expression of an individual learning belief, where the individual teacher is supposed to store the acquired knowledge in the brain and take it from the group discussion to the classroom. Goal-situated strategies, on the other hand, could be understood as an expression of a social learning perspective. In our evaluation, we conclude that schools often start out from a social learning perspective, for example by collaborating in groups, but soon lose this perspective and switch to an individual learning perspective. In the organisation of improvement work, Blossing and Ertesvåg (2011) argue that the individual perspective will, over time, come to dominate teachers' and school leaders' understanding. As a consequence, they fail to organise the work in a way that provides for the social side of learning. Besides the orientation aspect, the social side of learning will appear in three more situations that appear to be just as critical in successful improvement work. In sum, the four situations are as follows:

- the situating
- the conditions for teacher participation
- the frequency of meetings
- the leadership.

As we have already discussed the situating aspect, we now address the conditions for participation. In many cases, it was voluntary for teachers to participate in the improvement work. From an individual perspective, it is up to each teacher to decide on his or her participation, since it is only the teacher who can decide what knowledge he or she possesses. Thus, it is only the individual person who can decide if he or she already has or needs the new knowledge. From a social perspective, this individual decision is not enough, since the starting point is that the knowledge that is created from the dialogue in the group is greater than the sum of the individuals' knowledge. Thus, it is only by participating in the group and in group dialogue that the individual can get access to the knowledge that he or she has to relate to.

We also found that the frequency of meetings in many cases decreased from a rather high level in the initial phase. From a social perspective, quite frequent meetings shaping a close dialogue are needed in order for the individual to assimilate the knowledge created in the group. If the meetings become too infrequent, it becomes difficult to maintain continuity in the knowledge creation, as one has to start from the beginning every time.

If we look at learning from a social perspective, the language and the dialogue appear as the medium in which knowledge is created. The task for the team leader, in this respect, is to grasp the picture of knowledge which is developing within the dialogue, to put this into words and to share it with the group. In the dialogue, each member is concerned with communicating their thoughts and feelings, as well as listening to the other members of the group. It is very difficult for each individual to integrate all the different knowledge elements into a coherent knowledge picture. This is an important task for the leader. However, in many cases, there was no leader in the teacher teams. When there were leaders, they often lacked the necessary expertise in acting as leaders in relation to knowledge creation and OD.

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