# Deliberate dyslexia as a de-signing practice

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## Abstract

A strong focus on the need for crisis for change to happen can overshadow efforts to keep change processes joyful and continuous. This paper introduces the practice of "deliberate dyslexia": a deliberate misreading activity that creates new words and concepts. New concepts are explored through repetition through story and transformation to physical manifestation. This might be understood as a de-signing practice that treats language as an inexhaustible resource of inspiration – it is a sensemaking practice based on joy and abundance. The practice has multiple effects and may be discussed in several ways: the balance between exploration/exploitation, the difference between craziness and unproductiveness, and the transformation from initiative to institution.

## Introduction

In this paper I present a de-signing practice that uses language as an infinite resource of inspiration. Deliberate dyslexia might be understood as a de-signing practice that allows for the creation of new concepts, words and objects with a focus on joy instead of crisis. New dyslexic connections are tried out as a pastime, and ones that work are made into special objects that again become stories for use in inspirational lectures. Concepts are repeated and kept alive as stories and judged by their aesthetic qualities, until suddenly being imbued with new meanings and possibility for physical manifestation.

The tension between reality and possibility becomes a playground for signs and de-signs, while building of physical manifestations brings opportunity for transformation different forms that enhance possibility of reflection and creation of new meaning.

This is a type of sensemaking that is focused on joy, abundance and empowerment, far from the dissonance and risk that drives Weick's (1995) concept of sensemaking.

The necessity of crisis for change is rife in literature. Argyris and Schön (1978) claim that the bigger the gap between the intended outcome of an action, and the actual outcome, the better conditions are for organizational learning. Even more strongly, the popular Kotter (1995) advices to start any process of change by instilling a "sense of urgency" in people, so that they see that it is necessary and dedicate themselves to responding to the changing conditions of the outside world.

Changes and development from within, with joy as motivation, is that even possible? There are promising inflows from a pragmatic view on practice theory, where change is understood as a part of a natural cycle (Lave and Wenger,1991). Learning in communities of practice (ibid) gradually changes those communities as new elements are brought in from the periphery over time changes the practice as well as the people constituting the community. On the other hand, change might be understood as the natural state of being, where stability is the real accomplishment (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011). A process view turns attention to organizing as an on-going and emerging project where an illusion of stability is upheld by people working hard to keep it that way (cf. Tsoukas and Chia, 2002).

A combination of external pressure to change and existing practices are found in approaches that view the creative opportunities offered and taken as a consequence of outside demand.  Czarniawska (2008) shows how externally imposed change makes the organization transparent so that people take responsibility for making their own changes. Similarly, Hjorth (2003) shows how the shortcomings of imposed plans give rise to creativity as people see the opportunity to merge the plans with their own intentions. The simultaneous repetitiveness and novelty of practice might be shown in how intensions of the mind are transformed to extensions of the practices in the world (Antonacopoulou, 2008). This allows change to be continuous as well as disruptive, and in any practice there is a flux of possibilities between what is and what could become, between intensions and resulting extensions in the world.

However, these views on change still suffer from change being small until "something happens". How should we understand changes that rely on internal resources only

and people's ability to reach out? De-sign!? Can we change change by de-signing practices?

This paper proceeds according to the following structure – first I argue that de-signing is a practice with an ironic perspective on language and the world, before enriching Weick's (1995)  sensemaking theory with more senses and aesthetic ambiguity with Leach's (1976 anthopological structuralist theory. Then a short presentation of the field and my involvement with it before I present three clusters of word play that are the result of deliberate dyslexia. Finally a discussion giving some food for thought on what this paper will contribute.

## De-signing as a practice

Change cannot be planned in detail, but facilitation may aid a more flexible and sustainable use of resources. De-signing practices are in this context understood literally as practices deconstructing and reconstructing signs. The linguistic turn in organizational theory has mainly been concerned with researcher's challenges with language not being a mirror of reality claim Alvesson and Kärreman (2000). Here, the concern is with de-signing practices "in the wild", and the dissonance between categories and reality is a resource.  The importance of language as an organizing principle cannot be undervalued, as "we use language to cut up the visual continuum into meaningful objects and into persons filling distinguishable roles" (Leach, 1976, 33).

I am describing a practice that extends meaning making to other media than language, and a The objective qualities of language and signs need to be emphasized when looking for practices of transforming between language and other sense-images. I'd like to return to the old definition of practice theory made by Sherry Ortner (1984). She claims that "practice theory... appear to be the only one to accept all three sides of the Berger and Luckman triangle: that society is a system, that the system is powerfully constraining and yet that the system can be made an unmade through human action and interaction" (1984, 159). The initially arbitrary relationship between language and the external world stabilize as the metonymical relationship between an object in the external world and a concept in the language merge over time.

Change is hence an interplay between individuals and the objective society, departing both from a view that societal structures impose themselves on humans (marxist theories or strain theories) or that change happen as intended by individuals (economics or interest theories). This allows choices within limits: Even though language is pliable, escaping the habitual meaning of words at large without facing a psychiatric diagnosis is difficult. Making new concepts meaningful therefore is a process of making new connections, turning signs into symbols and resuscitating dead metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). For de-signing practices to have impact in objective society one needs to connect one's ideas to existing practices and resonate with needs for new concepts.

The value of these new concepts is not judged by whether they are true, but whether they work according to a purpose (Rorty, 1989). Even rejecting the categories of language as absolute, it is possible to still believe that they are the best we have. Rorty advocates irony as an important quality for our age. One has to acknowledge categories as order imposed and created by people, but still those categories are purposeful in enabling us to act. Therefore a practice of deliberate dyslexia would have to be a balancing act between making new concepts and being able to place them within existing systems of understanding.

## Sensemaking and structural analysis

Weick's theory on sensemaking (1995) is a popular way of understanding the fluid relationship between the external world and the concepts we use to describe it. Sensemaking is the practice by which cues are noticed, discussed and placed into reality. Images of organization emerges through sensemaking (Weick et al, 2005), and in turn, the organization influences the sensemaking. For example will an understanding of the organization as closed, formalized goaldriven limit the extent of the sensemaking process as compared to an organization viewed as open, where more information has to be processed (Weick, 1995).

However, whilst Weick describes sensemaking as a process driven by a need to reduce dissonance between the environment and the understanding of it, it is also possible to see a use for amplifying dissonance (cf. Bjørkeng, 2010). We will need an

understanding of sensemaking that is able to generate dissonance, and keep the sensemaking process open for a long time.

Grantedly, Weick (1995) does offer advice to people who want to get better at sensemaking. He says that to keep an abundance of explanations at bay is good. When he explains how to do this, he does that in an evocative way, inspired by a William Meredith poem. Weick (1995) ends his book by saying - your best advice to sensemaking is to "keep your word hoard dry" (1995, 197). Later, Weick has turned his attention to mindfulness and high reliability organizations (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2001), where stakes are high and it is important that people focus on unexpected events to avoid risks. However, for the purpose of this paper I would rather move in the opposite direction – how sensemaking is enabled when stakes are (made) low, and people focus on unexpected events, not out of risk, but out of joy and fun.
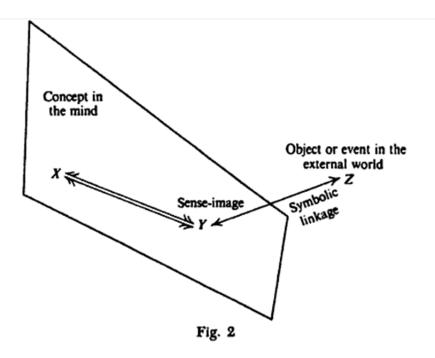
A note on the quality of humour is in order here – since the equivocality introduced by humour is part of amplifying dissonance. Westwood and Rhodes (2007) state that much of the focus on humour on the workplace has centered round the productive qualities of humour, and the ability to "sweeten the pill". This is not of interest here. It is the aesthetic qualities of humour that are interesting. Bateson's (1979) definition of aesthetics applies: responsive to a pattern that connects, and attentive to categorizations as order imposed and created by people.

Humour alludes to possibilities of doing things differently than today – highlighting that which is taken for granted and giving a window for exploring parallel realities. The joke is subversive in that it plays with a parallel reality where things are different (Westwood, 2004). For a split second, until one understands the joke, the construction of the world is threatened. However, in the punch line the joke gives a sort of catharsis that point in two directions: a release that luckily the world is as it is, but also that there is an opening where the world could be changed into something different. The matter of the joke, wit, wordplay is in a way brought out of their taken-for-grantedness as a surprising – and acknowledging that something could be different is the first step in making sense of it differently.

Sensemaking theory needs to be enriched to take aesthetics into account. The extra senses involved in transforming concepts into physical objects and events are sought understood bu enlisting anthropological structuralist analysis (Leach, 1976). This type

of analysis originated in the need to explain phenomena that seem deviant to the external observer, such as magic, myth, sorcery and religion.These are normally boundary phenomena that have logics that work in particular spheres, and are deviant in all other spheres, i. e. they might be seen as having the properties of being made special. Originating from deSaussure's studies of the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signifieds, Levi-Strauss (1968) and then Leach (1976) departed from deSaussure's relativist perspective and sought to uncover the grammar of cultural expressions and their transformations between different sense-images, whether they be visual, auditory, tactile and so on. Whilst the previous section should make clear that I do not share their search for positive knowledge on the grammar of cultural expressions, the concepts terms for how metaphors become reified is relevant for understanding de-signing practices that seek to enhance and explore meaning through transformations.

Signals, signs and symbols refer to different relations between a signifier/sense-image that resides in our minds and a signified/objects or events in the world that are more or less abstract and tied to concrete objects (Leach, 1976). These are both part of the concept in the mind that is formed by these two.



Fig. 2

Figur 1 The arbitrary natue of the symbolic linkage between actuality and virtuality. Leach(1976:19)

The first and most significant part of figure 1 is that the concept that is formed in the mind is not similar to the sense-image that invokes it, and neither is it similar to the

object or event in the external world that it refers to. The linkage between the world and how we relate to it is always symbolic, but over time, the sense-image, the concept and the object become enmeshed, and for most practical purposes they are one.

The sign is hence metonymic of the concept, i. e. that the sign has become a part of the concept it signifies. The crown of England is both part of a ruling system, but also a representation of it. Most words used in common language are signs, and we rarely reflect on the relationships with the above elements. A symbol is only metaphorically linked to the external world, and the relationship inspires conscious relations to other sense-images.

Levi-Strauss (1968) saw different parts of a ritual as transformations of the same metaphor. Some parts are performed activity, others are special material objects or time frames in which the ritual takes place. Similarly, we may understand a concept having different transformations adding on layers of meaning into a richer experience, and requiring all senses to be a part of the sensemaking process.

The central principle of such analyisi is that the elements "do not have meaning as isolates, but as members of sets. A sign or symbol only acquires meaning when it is discriminated from some other contrary sign or symbol" (Leach, 1976, 49). Hence, a concept will relate to the different sense-images of which it is a transformation, but also other concepts that are close, inverted, juxtaposed or otherwise made to bear upon it.

To sum up, we are trying to understand sensemaking as an aesthetic, repetitive and reflective practice that could be made to develop from within.

## Empirical context and methodology

To find examples that may be useful for researchers to develop our concepts on change, we might need to step outside the familiar context of work organizations. In the researcher's quest for understanding, existing practices allows us to understand more than the possibility of change and the creativity within boundaries (Hjorth, 2004).

This paper presents empirical material from a creative work group called the Lifeworks, consisting of forty-some active members, many self-employed. Sixteen

make their living partly from facilitating development processes in communities and organizations. Geographically the group is dispersed all over Norway, primarily in the countryside. They work together on the development of both collaborative and individual projects.

The lifeworks evolved with their common interest in universally human qualities. The name Lifeworks turns attention to a whole spectrum of life: To thrive, work life activity has to be balanced with family life and community life. It also connects to artwork: a lifework is unique, and the expression of an individual is seen as a legacy. The Lifeworks are "an initiative-based inspiration- and development alliance" that anyone can join; most activities are for everybody, and anyone can decide to host a lifework-event. Success is based on managing to engage the other members in one's own ideas and initiatives.

The Lifeworks provide services on the margins of work life, and the practice of deliberate dyslexia is marginal to their production. There are several reasons to focus on the anomalies, deviances and the marginal. On the one hand, I believe with Starbuck (1993) that prominent features in the exceptional are also to be found in typical situations, maybe in a more subtle version. On the other hand, the account of the marginal also opens for a possibility to critique and comment on the practices of the majority (Marcus and Fischer, 1986).

Most importantly, however, is that the marginal helps inform mysteries that have to be resolved though abduction (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007). In abduction one has to make do with the best explanations we have, and they cannot be logically coherent since we need to make inferences that are on a higher level of abstraction than we can account for (Bateson, 1979). And then, through testing out our connections, we end up with a consolidated theoretical framework that works according to whether it is sensible, not true.

In this case, the mystery has been refined through a prolonged interaction with the field, from 2008 to 2012. As my fieldwork has gone through different phases, the Lifeworks have been continually evolving. Collins (2001) advises that the researcher should not have more fixed categories than the informants. As initiatives have come and left, what is constant is the future orientation of the central actors, and the belief they have that they are onto something truly important. Within the totality of the

different discussions I have been a part of, the practice that I've dubbed deliberate dyslexia has been a mainstay, even if the particular dyslexic examples have had varying success and lifetimes.

The data presented here is part of the anthropological fieldwork that is the basis for my PhD, and it consists of a range of qualitative data. Participant observation is the grounds for thick description. Document analysis and analysis of participation in social networks on the internet provide found data. Interviews serve to get a narrative of the trajectories of interactions that lead to the understanding and implementation of the new concepts. Together, this provides grounds for making a collection of concepts, and following them over time.

From collecting puns and word play into lists I started to group some into clusters where some concepts have had more successive extensions and manifestations. When I've chosen three clusters to present here, it is because many people have been involved in evolving them, and they have persisted over several years, being repeated over and over again, in different media and by different people.

In the beginning, I was interested in getting to the backstage, getting behind the staged performances of the inspirational speakers to something real, something more authentic than the audience gets. After asking questions of the origins, the thoughts behind a particular wordplay, I have so often realized that what I am told is something that is rehearsed already, or otherwise, that I become an audience to rehearse to, and that my question might give reflections that are an opportunity to repeat a story in a new setting with a new point. The same goes for listening to others inquiring into the dyslectic clusters. And then suddenly, a new idea funnels the dyslectic cluster in a new direction and my joy of hearing parallels the joy of the Lifeworks having made a new connection.

Geertz (1973) makes the point that the interpretation performed by the researcher is the same activity that people do themselves, however, he further contends that by practicing to make explicit the assumptions one does, one may become a proficient researcher. The repetition of the practice that has intrigued me in the field, has a parallel in the research process. For example Kleinsasser (2000) highlights the importance of writing and rewriting as a way of developing the researcher's analysis

and unlearning. There is hence a parallel development: of the phenomenon of the deliberate dyslexia "in the wild", and as it is portrayed and bounded in writing.

## Sensemaking through repetition and novelty

Deliberate dyslexia entails not taking language at face value, instead looking for new meanings in deliberate misreading and juxtapositions of concepts that habitually don't mix. The emic term is self-declared dyslexia. Every new word is the object of immediate scrutiny – taking it further than puns-as-usual. Instead of humour being a part of practice, the deliberate dyslexia is a practice in itself, as puns are explored for potential manifestations and further puns. Developing questions are asked: What is that word? Can it be built? And further on: Can it be sold? The building of manifestations and alternative meaning is essential: giving words a physical manifestation strengthens it as a concept, and allows for further reflection as to its possible use.

The concepts are kept open without dedicated or exact meanings for a prolonged time, then they might be revisited and propelled forwards by new manifestations or by new people hearing the story and latching on their own meaning. Some of them even change from playful activity to for profit production as part of services. When manifestations of words are built as sculptures, their main function is just to have done it. Building of physical manifestations are done according to the following "guidelines": "If it is not fun, it is not working" and "The worst that can happen if this doesn't bring us further, is that we only had a good time together". A side effect is that it allows reflection on the concept they are said to represent or that they reference to, in a non-threatening manner.

Amongst an abundance of concepts, three well-developed concepts are chosen here. These three concepts have all attained a productive value, and they have spin-off effects where several people have engaged in the process, if not as active contributors, then as people keeping the concepts alive as story. All three of these concepts are developed over a long time-period alongside other productive activities.

## The whining range complex

The whining concept arose from natural dyslexia, but has been used to illustrate how one may use this mild handicap to one's advantage. A founding member of the

lifeworks, a farmer, misread a road sign for "Skytevesen" as "Sytevesen": instead of "the voluntary target shooting league," he read it as "the voluntary whining league". Deciding that this must be a group for people that were experts in whining, he went home and made the first manifestation on his own farm: a sytometer (whinometer) that measured proficiency in whining. People's reaction to the sytometer led to the idea of a physical sytebane (whining range) on his field instead of the more familiar skytebane (firing range).

Visitors to his farm during his annual "Two-wheel tractor festival" got to try out the whinometer, and this story was told in lectures by the originator of the concept, but also other central members of the Lifeworks.

An abandoned military shooting range in the local community of two other members of the Lifeworks triggered the next step. Answering a call from the municipality for new use for the shooting range, the "Crazyators[1]" filed an application to get the shooting range re-regulated as Norway's first (and only) official sytebane/whining range. The application was made in a municipality meeting. The total process took about six minutes, was made available on youtube, and is possibly the reason why the whining range got mention on the national news.

One member was inspired to create "Det frivillige syteforbund" (The voluntary whining league) and created a Facebook group for the league. The following excerpt is the description of the group, from November, 2010:

*Whining can be stressful. Almost daily, whining episodes in both public and private sectors are reported. Some become sick. Many become afraid. More feel uncomfortable and would like to ban whining. On the other hand, whining has a long, but not proud, tradition in Norway. For several hundred years, interacting with displeasure passed on from generation to generation, political parties has occurred and what about whining in self-defense?*

*The solution is whining in an orderly fashion. Harmless and controllable. As for example, ensure whining patches or whining fields. When marked "whining in progress", people can keep at a safe distance. The same principle applies to this*

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[1] Galskaperne – alluding to creation and craziness.

*group - The Voluntary Whining League. The goal is to have a dynamic membership. People can join in, and not least leave, depending on their day-to-day whining profile. Are you enrolled one day, family and colleagues stay away and avoid getting hurt. Are you resigned, they may safely approach.*

*Remember the National Whining Games in April!*

The group was a sudden hit, with more than 50 members added the first week, and a steady supply of posts. Some are updates from the owners of the National Whining Range, some are whining posts about dislikes, but the forum is also a playground for new uses of the syto/whino-prefix and other concepts that are close in meaning or sound.

The first "Landssyterstevne" (National whining games) were held in 2011, with two local politicians running around the field posing as moving targets. Here the first manifestation that exploited the concept in monetary terms surfaced, namely small, hand-blown "Sytekopper"[2], made by the member who is also a glass blower. These cups have been popular, and are only sold with the story on the side. The whining games received direct live coverage on regional television, as well as several newspaper articles.



2 Handblown "sytekopper" with engraved complaints

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[2] «Sytekopp,» literally "whining cup," is a familiar term for people who whine.

The next turn of events was a formal foundation of local "Voluntary Whining Leagues". The idea came about as two attendees at the National Whining Games came from different villages in the same municipality found that they could use the whining league to promote contact between enthusiasts within municipalities. One of them made a logo, and then this logo was adjusted to several local leagues in the localities of the lifeworks nationally. There was a synchronous national foundation meeting in May 2011, and after that, irregular meetings to spend time together. This excerpt is from September 2011.

The Voluntary Whining League aims to increase the solidarity between the hamlets and villages in Norway. The vision is "Whining in controlled circumstances." Take a look at our website to see pictures from the Synchronous Foundation we had in May. Recommend everyone to invite neighbors and neighbor's neighbor and arrange a meeting around the coffee pot. Drinking coffee together in their own and others' villages does something to the feeling of unity. There is a great risk of there being little complaining and mostly enjoyment :)

From being simply a symbol not very closely connected to a concept, the whining concept has been developed as a way of talking about untargeted complaints in organizations and communities, in such a way that it tends towards humour, and therefore becomes acceptable. Like shooting is a dangerous activity that needs to be controlled, whining takes on the same properties by being close in sound and experimenting with the sense-images normally associated with shooting.

The whining range is still mentioned in several members' lectures. The appropriation of the term to promote voluntary activity may have deferred further possibilities for income-generating use, but the Facebook group and the league are still active.

### The encouragement administration complex

Although not a dyslexic wordplay per se, the encouragement administration complex is a juxtaposition of two concepts that normally don't go together. Two of the founding members of the Lifeworks in fact first met through their interest for encouragement, today defined as a fundamental quality that is about seeing and attending to people and aid them towards fulfilling their own goals through putting courage into them.

The humorous farmer[3], GS, was well on his way to making a business out of his farmerology concepts when he in 2004 first heard a lecture by TÅM where a part was on the importance of encouragement and the general lack of it at work. He said: "Have you ever met someone who has gone to his boss and asked to leave early because they've had too much encouragement at work and they couldn't take it anymore? Have you ever heard about someone going to the chiropractor with a skewed spine due to too many pats on the back?" The humorous farmer was inspired, and thought that in this he had found a cause worth working for.

GS attended a course in change management at the time, and was learning about principal/agent theory. Very soon the idea formed that he and TÅM would be the encouragement survey, and responsible for educating people in encouragement, making them into encouragement agents, being responsible for encouragement in their surroundings. They held "encouragement agent courses", mostly in rural villages, whilst the encouragement survey remained a story to be told in lectures. For lectures GS said he worked for the encouragement survey, since when he started up his firm he got a lot of visits – from different representatives of the state checking that he had all the paperwork in order. Not one public instance did anything to encourage him as he established his own work place, and that was a responsibility he was willing to take

In 2007 the two discussed the encouragement survey with yet another member, TI. He suggested that a logo and some jackets would take the encouragement survey to a new level.  Jackets were made for all the members of the Lifeworks, with Encouragement Survey (Oppmuntringstilsynet) in huge letters. GS describes this as a major breakthrough, as they were now wearing the concept, and people often came up to them when they were out travelling to ask about the concept.

The encouragement survey took on tasks fitting for an authority. They made encouragement plans based on open space technology, and Encouragement cards were to be filled out when one "catches someone red-handed doing good deeds". This was a very concrete manifestation of a tool for encouragement.

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[3] Registered trademark

The idea of an encouragement certification came us as a fitting task for the encouragement survey, following the ISO-standard. (International Standard of Oppmuntring/Encouragement). This was mentioned in lectures until a public organization decided they wanted a certification process. Now, several organizations have gone through "Encouragement Certification processes»: development processes focussing on bringing forth positivity and courage for action. At least seven of the Lifeworks members now provide encouragement for profit. Encouragement has hence become a source of income, and has transformed from being simply playful to also being profitable. The concept has been through numerous iterations, and now it is the single most successful concept created by the Lifeworks.

## The Worstshop – part of the Con-worker cluster

New concepts do not always start with a new sense-image. Sometimes they start with a new definition of an existing object/event in the world. This is the case with the Worstshop, which is one example of a larger cluster around conwork and inverting the meaning of familiar organizational concepts.

HH uses his title Con-worker (motarbeider) as an inversion of the more pleasant and common co-worker (medarbeider). The "co-worker performance appraisal interview" (medarbeidersamtale) is a common management tool, but the opposite is rarely heard of, namely the "con-worker performance appraisal interview" (motarbeidersamtale). The name originally emerged in a pub conversation, and has retrospectively been given an important part in the story of the con-worker's business.

*We celebrated that we were done with a giant project, and we were sitting in a pub … when we decided that we should have a co-worker performance appraisal interview (medarbeidersamtale), possibly also because we are such good friends. But it turned out to be very embarrassing. Maybe we should have taken a con-worker performance appraisal interview (motarbeidersamtale) instead, that sounded like it was more fun. So we wrote it [as a sketch] right away, in that pub, and then we entertained ourselves and 13 co-workers from the Danish Railway that were there by chance.*


The con-worker's approach to inspirational talks is to start with a well-known managerial tool, in this case the performance appraisal interview, and then interpreting it in the most spiteful way.

*My experience of the performance appraisal interview is that it is a very unnatural situation where two people are together because they have to. When I've talked about this I've had a lot of feedback that this matches people's experience of it. In con-worker (motarbeider) we have introduced quite a few products – amongst other things we collect a bunch of people who agree on quite a few things, and nobody intends to do anything about it. We call that a strategy seminar. The teeny tiny variety of this is a meeting.*

The new sense-image con-worker came first, and then he elaborated on its use after many retellings of the story. The concept is interesting because it the wordplay gives immediate associations to concrete situations, and especially the practice of the appraisal interview, where the spiteful definition rings true for many listeners. This does not mean that everybody agrees, but his scenario is plausible, and not least, well presented.

In the case of the strategy seminar, it evolved in the similar fashion as the definition of the performance appraisal interview, only that there was no alternative concept on offer. I met HH in September 2010 whilst he was playing around with the notion of strategy seminar, looking for a name that could fit – categorized with other products where "we do what you could have done yourself, only it's worse and very expensive". This is also a plausible definition of badly performed consultancy work. However, for the sake of the homepage, it was desirable to have a more specific name for the service.

HH explains that most of the time puns emerge suddenly, but in this case they sat down and doodled deliberately, looking for good puns. In one session they got two product names, one of them became the name for the strategy seminar, namely the Worstshop. Now, on the home page of motarbeider.no is the following description of Worstshop:

*These are good discussions where the participants agree on a lot of things that no one has any intention of doing. Some argue that this is very similar to traditional strategy seminars, but we have our own pianist and everyone gets to bring yellow post-it notes home. ([http://www.motarbeider.no/index.php?s=worstshops](http://www.motarbeider.no/index.php?s=worstshops), 15.05.2012)*

Whilst this definition would have been possible also without the term of worst-shop, HH thinks that he's had an incredible luck in securing the name for himself. "Sometimes", he says, "you are so lucky to get a concept that is both memorable and to the point, as well as being easily recognizable as being part of my type of products. Worstshop is such a term".

In this case we see that this is a deliberate search for a term that is missing. The sense-images used as also a part of the identity of the product, and even though Worstshop has not evolved beyond this single term, it is recognizable as part of a larger cluster.

## Discussion

The clusters shown here muddle the discrimination of a playful and a serious context, they literally balance between them. There are several balancing acts that keep the clusters in suspension between different contexts, and in this discussion I would like to look closer at a few of them that I find most intriguing.

If signs are to be understood in relation to each other, then firstly we have to ask, in relation to which other signs should they be understood? What Bateson (1979) calls the *metamessage* is normally inherent in the context, but in the deliberate dyslexia the habit of asking the developing questions on behalf of an original pun serves to change, or at least muddle, the context.

There might be confusion as to whether this is something that does exist or is just a pun, but in this case it is unclear and the audience have to constantly calibrate between playful and serious. The physical manifestations and their extensions serve to reify the concepts, but also add to the confusion: Yes, there exists a national whining field.  It is located at a particular place in Norway. It is approved by the municipal council and now the municipal planners are left with the task of finding a colour that should designate a whining range in the municipal sector plan – a map which is a very official document discerning what should be done in certain areas. Like the simple joke it is balanced between actual and possible, and the catharsis is never final due to the repetitions.

### Balancing entertainment and learning

By repeating the concepts in stories, they are protected from being judged for their efficiency. However, since the lectures are often in a work context, and about a work context, it is relevant to ask what the intended learning outcome should be. The members of the lifeworks themselves are adamant that they want to share their knowledge, not serve as simple stand-up comedians. The topics that the clusters address are all serious matters that are of interest to people in their work life context, and that the Lifeworks see a requirement for treating in a different manner than at the moment. The Worstshop literally takes its definition from a badly performed strategy seminar, and aims to improve it by adding music and improvised lyrics that give the content of the Worstshop a memorable packaging.

However, like in a joke, there is a danger that the learning is instant, or else absent. The content of a Worstshop might lead to instant improvements since it provides a forum for reflection on work as normal and opportunity for self-examination. But if learning is in the doing (Lave and Wenger, 1991), the out-of-work context may prevent the topic from being treated in context.

## Balancing practice and products

Of the clusters described, the Worstshop and the Encouragement certification are available as separate services that the Lifeworks deliver. Whereas the names of the products, Worstshop and Encouragement certification are powerful as evocative words, they also influence the content. In the Worstshop, participants play with how they can make things worse at work, in the encouragement certification they get to set themselves separate goals for encouragement and then following them up, and in both cases the participants are encouraged to play with language.

The Lifeworks create concepts because it is an on-going and encouraged practice, and at any time there are stories being tested out that someone may latch onto, or the creators themselves find new opportunities by revisiting a story. The result of searching through language ends up in many more wordplays than are presented here. Most are short-lived and never make it out of context. This goes for the Lifeworks' own practice of deliberate dyslexia, and also for the participants in activities they arrange.

It takes time to fine-tune and develop a new wordplay. Often their clients prefer to lift one of their inventions instead of spending time to develop their own skills of deliberate dyslexia. We might see the products and longer lived clusters as sediments of the practice. Then it is the possibly the process of repetition that is important, not the precision and actuality of a single concept. Therefore the transformation to a new context, a new organization could give less output than wanted, simply because the wrong approach is adopted.

## Balancing between initiative and institution

The Lifeworks are in the margins of work life, trying to inspire others to adapt their ways of thinking – but their empowerment of having invented their own solutions might be lost in translation. These concepts are told by people who have partaken in developing them, and they themselves see the benefit of for example using

encouragement cards. They challenge each other to be attentive in order to give out as many encouragement cards that move the receiver as possible. In working with organizations they are sometimes met with scepticism, but even worse is appropriation of the tools in ways that diminish the empowerment issue. The encouragement card could be useful in an institutionalized way, but one could imagine that a rule that every employee should write two encouragement cards would kill any fun associated with it. This is not a trivial question, high reliability organizations with a requirement for filing reports on unwanted incidents, also encourage positive reports as part of their HME work.

Similarly, physical whining fields have been made in collaborating work organizations as part of the encouragement certification process, with signs, tape on the floor to designate the area and so forth. As an instant of empowerment this might work well, and jokes about whining can pull attention to how difficult it is to come through with something new. However, if referred to by someone in power, the concept might become another tool for exerting power. This could indeed turn into a problem for the Lifeworks, that when they work with organizations the latter are more eager to copy their solutions than to copy their practices, and hence, much of the developing potential is lost.

## Concluding remarks

The clusters presented here are fun to come up with, fun to play with and fun to present to others. The practice of deliberate dyslexia provides the Lifeworks with a constant supply of fun, and the grounds of a development process based on sensemaking by playfulness, which is very different from the sensemaking out of attentiveness that Weick et al (2005) describe. In this, the deliberate dyslexia is closer to what Barry and Meisiek (2010) dub "seeing differently" instead of just "seeing closer".

The processes described here are by necessity non-linear, and therefore the ability to keep concepts in development as a side activity to normal production is crucial, because there is no way to predict either which concepts will catch on or when it will happen. The dual contribution of this paper is that deliberate dyslexia might be an opportunity to create theory on change and development, but even more, it could

inspire new practices. Attention needs to be focussed on the possible transformations to more traditional work organizations, and the balances between different contexts.

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