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Living moments in family meetings

A process study in the family business context
Living moments in family meetings: A process study in the family business context

JIBS Dissertation Series No. 070

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ISSN 1403-0470

Printed by ARK Tryckaren AB, 2011
Acknowledgement

Though only my name appears on the cover of this dissertation, a great many people have contributed along the way. I owe my sincere gratitude to all those who have made my work with the dissertation such a wonderful experience.

First of all, I am indebted to my supervisors. My deepest gratitude to Leif Melin, my main supervisor, for continuously supporting me and having faith in this process. I have been fortunate to have an advisor who gave me the freedom to explore and at the same time provided guidance whenever needed. Leif, your presence makes every supervision meeting something special. Leona Achtenhagen, thank you for your hospitality in all various ways. I am also utterly thankful for how elegantly you have helped me formulate what I cannot articulate myself. Many thanks to Robert Chia. Your work has inspired me since the very start of this project. Your encouragement and guidance helped me bring it to an end.

I want to express my gratitude to Handelsbankens Forskningsstiftelser, Sparbankernas Forskningsstiftelse, FAS and Alfastiftelsen, which made this dissertation possible through their financial support.

I am particularly grateful to the families who generously opened their doors to me. I am indebted to the Stenson family for showing me the possibilities of family meetings. My warmest gratitude also to the Philipsson family who invited me into their home opening up for relationships unimagined, thereby proving how wonderfully enriching a research project can be.

I wish to thank Lars-Olof Nilsson who helped me develop the manuscript into a readable text. Your willingness to help when I needed it the most was invaluable. Likewise, Susanne Hansson’s caring and flexibility when putting the book together is most appreciated.

I also wish to thank friends and colleagues at Jönköping International Business School at Jönköping University for the flow of inspiring conversations in corridors and classrooms, at lunch and seminars. I am especially grateful to Anna Larsson, Leif Melin, Leona Achtenhagen, Lucia Naldi, Mona Ericsson and Olof Brunninge in the research project on continuous growth. I am also thankful to Anna Blombäck, Annika Hall, Cecilia Bjursell, Ethel Brundin, Karin Hellerstedt, Mattias Nordqvist and Tanja Andersson at the Centre for Family Enterprise and Ownership.

My thanks go to those who continue to show the potentiality of academic meetings beyond the expected. To Kenneth and Mary Gergen for the wonderful workshop in your home 2006. To Hari Tsoukas for arranging The International Symposium on Process Organization Studies, offering moments when we could fully explore processual ideas and when I have been fortunate
to engage in vibrant conversations with Frank Mueller, Robin Holt, Reut Livne-Tarandach, Tor Hernes and others. I am grateful to Alex Stewart who kindly offered me a place at Marquette University during autumn 2009 making it possible for me to write critical parts of this dissertation. Not to forget Denise Fletcher for insightful comments and a catalytic final seminar in November 2010.

Thanks also to the Hat Order, my intellectual sisters, for always being there sharing great laughs and offering strength. The promise of what we have together I value deeply. Anette Johansson, Benedikte Borgström, Elena Raviola, Kajsa Haag, Lisa Bäckvall, Maria Norbäck, you make my everyday much brighter.

I would like to express my warmest appreciation towards my family. To my wonderful parents, Lisen and Ola, for how you are a constant source of inspiration. Lisen, for your creativity and conviction to go with passion. Ola, for remembering that life is what happens here and now. I owe my sister Karin a lot for being such a treasure and always being there for me. Thanks also to Sara, Marina, Anna, Vera and Sven for how you grace our family every day.

Finally, to Anders for your love and positive spirit: I can’t express my gratitude for you in words. All those times, all those places where you have supported me to make this possible, I will never forget. Thanks also to our amazing children, Emilia and Amanda, for those special moments in our lives.

Visby, 7 April 2011.

Jenny Helin
Abstract

Top management meetings, board meetings, budget meetings, planning meetings, strategy retreats and weekly updates – the organisational world is certainly a world of organised meetings where various kinds of meeting practices are often focal points for people related to the organisation.

This dissertation studies meetings processually. Acknowledging the fluid, often uncertain and inherently open aspects of organisational phenomena is receiving increasing attention in organisation and management studies. Such an approach, which can be labelled ‘process organisation studies’ is promising in that it directs attention to social processes continuously in the making, something that is often neglected in mainstream organisation studies.

The thesis builds on the current development in process organisation studies in two ways. The first centres on an elaboration on key assumptions of approaching organisational life from a process perspective. I here bridge process organisation studies with Bakhtin’s work on dialogue into a dialogical becoming perspective. This perspective calls for a distinct way of understanding processes of becoming which makes it possible to explore meeting practices as situated, emerging and relational world-making activities.

The second is a comprehensive processual account based on a collaborative field study with two owner families. Organised meetings held in a family that owns a business (or several) has proved to be of importance for family business longevity in that the family members can help to develop strong family relations and a healthy business. In this setting, where people are dealing with that which is often most important to them in life, such as their identity, work, family relationships and future wealth, a process approach is useful since it helps to understand the emotionally loaded, complex and intertwined issues at stake.

What emerges as central in understanding movement and flow is the need to understand the here and now moments in meetings. I refer to these moments as ‘living moments’ as a reminder of the once-occurring, unique and momentary transformation that can take place between people in such encounters. Thus, the living moment is the moment of movement. In emphasizing the ‘livingness’ of meeting conversations this study gives voice to previously marginalised perspectives that complement existing research on meeting practices.
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Part I: Foundations
I. A need for conversations about what is yet to be

This study focuses on organised meetings in a family that owns a business. The importance of such meetings, as well as the complexity in this particular context, became clear to me in a previous research project about continuously growing firms. In this project I interviewed Judith Philipsson. At that time, Judith was the CEO of Brunnsala Sawmill, a company that had been rewarded for its profitable growth over an extended period of time. Brunnsala Sawmill was owned and managed by three brothers in the ninth generation. We came to talk about Judith’s situation as CEO since she is married to one of the owners of the business and they have three children together. One day, the family would like one or several of them, if they are interested, to take over the business. Back then, it was early in my dissertation process and I did not yet know where I would land in my studies. Even so, her sincere frustration about her situation struck me in such a way that I can still remember her words:

How shall I talk to my children about the firm? My son said to me the other day, “You and dad have never introduced me to the firm”. So, I asked myself, have we done wrong? We did not want to force them to take part. Maybe we should have given them shares when they became 10 years old. Would that have been a nice way to involve them? Business things are so difficult to talk about, because there are so many feelings involved. It is difficult to think strategically; emotions take over, since this firm is about the inherited land, the identity of the family and the roots from where it all originates [...]. My husband does not understand that I want to talk about these issues. To him, there is no separation between the family and the firm. It is the family and the firm, around the clock, always. He has grown up in this company in that way. It is difficult for me as a non-owner to bring up ownership-related issues for discussion. On the other hand, as CEO I would like to know more about the future of the firm. And, as a mother there is much to talk about (Judith, September 2005).

1 Ms Philipsson is a member of the Philipsson family, which is part of the field study in this dissertation. The names of the persons and the company are fictitious.
What Judith explains is how she lives in a net of relationships where family and business matters are intertwined in her everyday life. Describing the distinctiveness of the family business, Fletcher (2002:4) notes how family business managers not only “have to deal with day-to-day product/market/employee/growth/marketing/training issues” that managers in non-family firms are also occupied with, but, in addition, “they also have to carefully manage and negotiate a complex set of social and emotional relationships” with the members of the owner family. Hence, while managers in listed firms with dispersed ownership often do not know much about the owners, owners in family businesses are usually involved, present and highly visible in the context of the business.

Current family business research shows that Judith’s situation is common. Her experience of living in the midst of different roles, expectations and priorities is similar to that of many families that own businesses. Furthermore, the need for them, as owner families, to have conversations about their businesses as well as their family situations is well understood. At the same time, existing research shows the difficulties of engaging in those conversations in enriching ways (see, e.g. Dumas, 1989). Even though there are many possibilities for family members to talk to each other in their daily work as well as at home, there are issues that in many owner families, for some reason, are not addressed. Sometimes, these issues are too sensitive to talk about (such as succession), and family members can be afraid of creating conflict, which leaves these issues untouched (Lansberg, 1988).

One recommendation for family members to facilitate conversations about important issues that are forgotten in the humdrum of daily life is to create a specific arena – a family meeting – for such conversations (Lane et al., 2006). In those meetings, family members can discuss topics such as the owner family’s vision for its business and family, business strategy and issues regarding next-generation ownership and management, in short, conversations about how they can act as a family that owns businesses today, tomorrow and in the distant future.

**A process approach**

This dissertation explores such family meetings processually. Acknowledging the fluid, often uncertain and inherently open aspects of organisational phenomena is receiving increasing attention in organisation and management studies. Such an approach, which can labelled ‘process organisation studies’ (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010) is promising in that it directs attention to social processes continuously in the making, something that is often neglected in mainstream organisation studies as well as literature on family business.

Most often, research on family meetings still departs from a rather static, rational and linear worldview. This means that family members and their
meeting conversations are approached correspondingly. Thus, the fragile, emotional, unpredictable and unique elements of family conversations get lost because conversations are reduced to some sort of tool or method for information transmission, in short, a focus on end-states and entities rather than on processes and flow. In this thesis, I will refer to this way of thinking as a ‘being perspective’ of the world (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). That is why I think that even though the benefits as well as the use of specific family meetings are known, there is still need for studies that approach this phenomenon somewhat differently. What I suggest is a questioning and supplementing of the being perspective and an introduction of a becoming worldview. This approach questions the mechanical view of organisations as made of stable structures and instead depicts organisational life as an often uncertain and inherently open phenomenon (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). The becoming perspective, moreover, turns away from thinking about organisations in terms of ordered reality and opens up to noticing what is fleeting and still in the making. It thereby creates possibilities for understanding the living character of the intertwined realities that the owner family is facing. When I propose a process perspective, that is not to say that this is how it is. Rather, my aim is to offer the becoming perspective as a potentially fruitful way to look at family meetings and uncover what this perspective has to offer that has passed by unrecognised in previous studies.

**Point of departure and purpose of the study**

The family business literature does not commonly address the philosophical assumptions – the ontological premises2 – underpinning the research. That is a shortcoming of the field since awareness and questioning of established ontologies and research practices can help to construct different and richer understandings of the social worlds we study (Cunliffe, 2003:1000).

However, there are some critical examinations of current approaches where a discursive view (Budge & Janoff, 1991), social constructionism (Fletcher, 2002), anthropology (Stewart, 2003) and a socio-symbolic perspective (Nordqvist, 2005) have been suggested. There have also been some questioning of the rationally underpinned methods prevalent in family business studies where action research (Poza, Johnson & Alfred 1998) and interpretative approaches (Nordqvist, Hall & Melin, 2009) have been suggested as promising alternatives. This study follows the quest for a variety of approaches in family business research. The suggested shift from a being to a becoming perspective, or from ‘things made’ to ‘things in the making’, is my way of engaging in an ontological discussion and suggesting an alternative to that which is often taken for granted.

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2 Ontology is the philosophical study of the nature of reality, namely what exists in the world as well as our being in the world.
This shift in perspective forces me to depart differently in this research project compared with what is often the case. First, Shotter's (2005) suggestion to move from ‘aboutness’-thinking (making a study about something or someone) to ‘withness’-thinking (to fully engage with people) is fundamental for my departure. This move underlines the performative nature of social research and opens up for collaborative ways of engaging with the people in the field.

Second, I cannot take for granted that different kinds of meeting practices exist ‘out there’ ready for me to ‘discover’ and ‘examine’. Rather, as Chia (1995:597) has put it, “organization itself is a question and not yet a given”. In addition he underlines that “[w]e cannot begin by assuming the unproblematic existence of social entities such as ‘individuals’, ‘organizations’, or ‘society’. Instead, we should begin by assuming that all we have are actions, interactions and local orchestrations of relationships” (Chia, 1995:595). From this take on organisation studies it makes no sense to have, for instance, the family meeting as a starting point in my study. Instead, following this way of reasoning I need to depart from the processes at play when family members engage in meeting activities.

Third, Hernes’s (2008) processual view of organisational life has also guided me in the departure of the study. He suggests that “organizations are a result of how events have evolved over time, and therefore they ‘are’ the processes that have shaped them” (Hernes, 2008:3). Translating this process view into my research project offers an approach where the family meeting practices ‘are’ the conversations that family members have in, and around, the meeting room. Understood this way, the family meeting, as a social practice, can never be something that is completed, fixed and final, because it will always move on in the continuous processes of conversational transformation.

It is from these assumptions that I will continue to explore family meeting practices. Thus, rather than offering descriptions of what a family meeting is in a world of isolated elements, or reporting on the properties of the total body of meeting practices, the purpose is to inquire into the lived experiences of family meetings from ‘within’ and explore a processual understanding of this phenomenon.

**Intended contributions**

The aim is to contribute to organisation process studies generally and particularly the field of family business, in two ways. The first, by critically examining prevalent assumptions underpinning the being ontology and suggesting how these assumptions might be reinterpreted from a becoming perspective. I here bridge process organisation studies (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010) with Bakhtin’s work on dialogue (e.g. 1986) into a dialogical becoming perspective. This perspective opens up for a distinct way to understand how
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processes of becoming unfold in an on-going dialogic interplay between peoples’ utterances and responses to each other.

Second, given that “the action implications of process philosophy remain underdeveloped” (Gergen, 2009:385) and the call for understanding the “microscopic” (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002) processes of becoming, I engage in an in-depth collaborative field study of two owner families’ efforts to organise themselves in various family meetings. In this setting where people are dealing with that which is often most important to them in life, such as their identity, work, family relationships and future wealth, a process approach is useful in that it helps to understand the emotionally loaded, complex and intertwined issues at stake.

To focus on everyday lived experience in a particular context can be understood as a way of narrowing down and zooming in on our inquiries. At the same time, the study illustrates how zooming in is actually a way of opening up and uncovering new dimensions of the phenomenon under study. A closer and more in-depth understanding of meeting processes makes it possible to recognise more of the unfinalisable ‘wholeness’ in this situation, the unique and momentary character of the living moment. For instance, it becomes possible to note how unforeseen entwined actions and incompleteness are also significant ingredients in meeting conversations, besides analytical thinking and agency-driven purposeful actions.

In sum, the ambition is to illustrate how it is possible to think, talk, write and act differently in regard to meeting practices. I want to offer an alternative to the mainstream approach, which in my view builds on a too limited repertoire rooted in analytical assumptions of the world. Hopefully, the approach taken can bring attention to aspects of meeting practices that are significant for a better understanding of everyday organisational life, but at the same time are most often so taken for granted that they pass by unrecognised.

Thesis outline

The dissertation is organised in three parts. In this first part I develop the ontological-theoretical arguments that underpin the study. Thereafter, the second part turns to the field study and the family meeting processes taking place in two enterprising families. The final part discusses the study as a whole and implications of understanding family meetings from a dialogical becoming perspective.

The purpose of the first part, labelled ‘Foundations’, is to create the philosophical-theoretical framework for the study. Since there are three avenues of literature that serve as key and that bind this dissertation together, the first part devotes one chapter to each strand of literature. Starting off with literature on family business and family meetings, Chapter two develops an understanding for the family business context and provides an introduction to
current research on family meetings with a focus on the assumptions that underpin much family business research today. The text is organised chronologically in that I look back upon the development over time, which leads me to the conclusion that there is a need to introduce yet unnoticed perspectives in studies about family business. Chapter three continues to set the tone for the ontological-theoretical premises that the thesis rests upon. The text introduces and discusses processual ideas from a becoming perspective. Based on literature from general management as well as organisational studies, the chapter discusses the shift from a being to a becoming perspective along five dimensions. The chapter ends with a brief note on the implications of such a shift for the study of family meetings. The fourth chapter continues to develop the understanding of a becoming perspective, although through a specific lens, through the heritage of Bakhtin’s work on dialogue. In bridging process thinking with Bakhtin’s work a dialogical becoming perspective is developed. This is a perspective that focuses on how processes of becoming unfold in an on-going dialogic interplay in-between people’s utterances and responses to each other.

In the second part, ‘Family meetings in practice’, I turn to the world of family meeting processes in two enterprising families. This part starts with Chapter five where I briefly introduce how the field study has evolved over time, in three phases. Chapter six turns to the field study with the Stenson family and how they have worked with family meetings for more than ten years. Their experiences are explored through an account of how their family conversations are dialogically shaped by the speech genre at play in the family meeting practices. Chapter seven introduces how I wanted to change mode and work more closely with the family members in the next phase of the field study. Here introduce “withness-thinking” (Shotter, 2005) as the guiding approach of studying family meeting processes from ‘within’. The chapter is still rather descriptive in nature, since I come back to a more reflexive discussion about research practices in the final part of the dissertation. Thereafter, Chapter eight is an exploration of meeting processes during the first year when the Philipsson family had family meetings. Since I took part in their meetings, I will offer a detailed account of how the family conversations unfolded, which gives an understanding of the inner becoming of family meetings. Chapter nine closes the second part of the dissertation with an illustration of how a family meeting practice can create possibilities for a process of wayfinding. This is a process that seems to make sense for understanding how the enterprising family can find a new direction as they are talking, listening and responding to each other in the family meetings.

The final part, ‘Understanding meetings from a dialogical becoming perspective’, draws attention to the need to acknowledge, and better understand, the ongoing ‘living moment’ in family meetings. It is based on the recognition that for us to better understand movement and flow, we have to understand the here and now moment. Chapter ten starts off by exploring
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some characteristics of the living moment and how an understanding of this moment can enlarge how it is possible to think and act in regards to family meetings. Chapter eleven moves on to discuss the implications of recognising the living moment and suggests some questions that can be of help for those working with family meetings in practice. Thereafter, chapter twelve focuses on research practices from within the living moment. I here explore everyday considerations of fieldwork, a discussion that goes beyond the choice of methods to employ and instead focuses on how it is possible to engage with people in the living moment. Chapter thirteen closes the dissertation with a note on writing academic texts and suggests that the contribution of such a text does not primarily have to do with what the text says per se, but rather how it makes the reader move and think beyond in the moment of reading.
2. Current research on family business and family meetings: assumptions and approaches

In current organisation and management studies there is surprisingly little attention paid to the most common type of organisation: the family business. One reason can be traced back to the heritage of Weber’s (1921, 1968) influential work. With his notion of the bureaucratic organisation, Weber searched for increased efficiency by introducing standards of rational, impersonal and professional work procedures. A key feature of these organisations, according to Weber, was the separation between ownership and management. Thus, he proclaimed a need to separate the owner family from management positions.

Since then, ownership and management have come to be seen as two separate and distinct spheres of economic and social life. In this separation, managers were depicted as active and development-oriented, while owners were pictured as passive suppliers of capital, with return on investment as the sole interest. With this divide between ownership and management, the management literature has flourished, while studies about ownership are more scarce and have mostly been conducted from juridical and financial points of view. Moreover, how ownership and management are intertwined, for instance in the context of a family business, is largely left untouched in general organisation and management literature.

However, there is a growing community of family business scholars devoted to better understanding the specifics of family businesses. Even though family business research is a relatively young field, a substantial literature has evolved over the past 30 years (Fletcher, 2002). In the preparation of this chapter, I have read scholarly work on family business in general but with a special emphasis on studies of family meetings. Based on that reading, this chapter will address three questions: ‘What makes the family business special?’, ‘How have family businesses and family meetings been studied?’ and ‘How can future studies contribute to a new understanding of family meetings?’ Primarily, the purpose is to provide an understanding of the context for this study and introduce some of the more prevalent assumptions and approaches that underpin research in this area.
What makes the family business special?

In addition to the insight that family businesses represent the most common type of organisation in historic and contemporary economies all over the world, this is a fascinating area of study for other reasons. To me, that fascination originates from the complex intertwinement of two of our most powerful institutions, the family and the business organisation. Just as the label ‘family firm’ connotes, it is the influence of the family in the firm that gives this otherwise heterogeneous group of organisations its distinguishing character (Gersick, Davis & McCollom, 1997). From the perspective of the owner family, this intertwinement means that the business it owns often holds essential parts of the life of the family such as its history, family relations, identity, occupation and future wealth. From the perspective of the business, this intertwinement means that the future of the business is often in the hands of the owner family.

In answer to the question of what it is that makes a family business special, Storey (2002) notes that family firms are often defined in terms of ownership, but what makes them special is not the ownership per se, but the implications of the ownership for the family and the business. He continues by arguing that the special quality is derived from the closeness that only the family can provide.

Based on an in-depth qualitative study of owners in listed as well as privately held family businesses, ‘family ownership logic’ is suggested as a construct for understanding the specifics of family-owned businesses (Brundin, Florin Samuelsson & Melin, 2008). This construct is built on seven characteristics that all together make up the family ownership logic. Active and visible ownership, the first characteristic, underlines how this type of organisation is often managed by a committed owner who is visible in the business.

Related to the first characteristic, stability in ownership and power underlines the continuity in ownership as well as management positions that is prevalent in family businesses. In this context, relationships have often been developed over generations, where the way of interacting and doing business has developed over time (James, 1999). In this setting, family conversations have a tendency to be ongoing and often topically complex where family members mix family and business matters, thereby implying that the boundaries between business and private life are blurred (Lundberg, 1994). Furthermore, this ongoing communication means that important issues do not necessarily need to be discussed in the top management team or the board, but can just as well be discussed in arenas that non-family members are not part of, such as the home (Nordqvist, 2005). This means that owner-managers tend to have strong decision-making power in the firm (Gallo & Sveen, 1991).

Against this background, where there is a strong and visible owner family, there is a tendency to have an organic flexibility in governance structures. Since the group of owners, the board of directors and the top management team can be composed of the same individuals, or at least individuals from the same family,
the decision-making processes about strategic issues are often carried out differently in family firms compared with non-family firms (Nordqvist & Melin, 2002). Here, the power in the organisation can be centralised to the inner core group of family members that can make decisions in an informal way (Gersick, Davis & McCollom, 1997). It has further been recognised that people who are not formally connected to the firm, such as in-laws, can play an important role in the family business.

Usually there is a strong identification between the business and the family. For family members this close connection can mean a simultaneous need for separation from and belonging to the family and the business. In this setting, Hall (2003) discusses how the business can serve as a means of, on the one hand, individuation and the wish to have an own identity and, on the other hand, as an extension of the family and its core values.

In this entwined milieu there tends to be multiple ownership goals, where a family business is often associated with a plenitude of priorities and objectives. In managing its business, the owner family often has a mix of (articulated or silent) goals, which means that non-financial values and goals, as well as the future aspirations of keeping the business in the family, can exist side by side with financially oriented ambitions. That “does not imply that family-controlled businesses are less profitability-oriented; they rather add other dimensions to their goals. The financial situation is prioritized for example in order to fulfil obligations to future generations. Maybe one can say that financial outcome is described as a means rather than an end” (Brundin et al., 2008:17).

The owner family often has an industrial and long-term focus. This comes through in the in-depth and hands-on experience from the industry in which their firm operates. It is moreover common that owners feel strongly for their products and are highly involved in product development. The final characteristic of family ownership logic underlines that, usually, there is a weak connection to capital markets where the owner family tends to rely on its own earnings for the development of its firm.

Before turning to the next question in this chapter I would just like to clarify that my reason for bringing up the above characteristics of the family business is not to say that other organisations (not owned by a family) are less emotional or complex organisations to manage or be employed in. Neither do I want to give the impression that all family businesses are the same. My aim is rather to point out some characteristics that current research has found to be more salient in the family business context. Furthermore, it is exactly those characteristics of the family business, the inherently complex setting where family and business life is intertwined and where conversations are often emotionally rich and boundary-crossing, that make the family business such an enriching context for understanding meeting practices processually.
How have family businesses and family meetings been studied?

In reading the current literature on family businesses and family meetings, it is striking how some discourses (some dominant themes and approaches) have set the tone for the development of family business as a field of research. In the following, I will discuss these discourses – what I call waves – of research. The first wave is heavily concerned with planning, the second with professionalisation and the third wave contains research about performance in the family business. Even though I describe the movement and development in the field through three waves, that is not to say that each wave has a clear chronological beginning and ending. My argument is rather that the first wave somehow flourished before the second, but at the same time these waves are not entirely linear, and they inform each other.

The first wave: Planning

*Family Business Review*, the first scholarly journal devoted to family business research, was launched in 1998. One of the characteristics of the early stream of literature is the authors’ close connections to, and feelings for, the owner family and the family business. Authors most often build their argumentations on their daily associations with the owner family as advisors or external directors on the board. Their closeness to everyday matters makes practical considerations about how to run the family business in a successful way a major theme in this literature that is directly targeted towards consultants and family business practitioners with hands-on suggestions for how to improve daily business life.

How to plan the business and the family is a topic that runs through in the recommendations offered to family business owners. Ivan Lansberg, who was the editor-in-chief during the launch of *Family Business Review*, wrote an article that is still the most cited article in *Family Business Review*. In the opening line of this article he wrote that “[t]he lack of succession planning has been identified as one of the most important reasons why many first-generation family firms do not survive their founders” (Lansberg, 1988:119). It is, however, not only Lansberg that claims family business longevity is correlated to formal planning. Other authors during this time have also argued in the same vein. For instance, Beckhard & Dyer (1983:10) concluded that family-owned businesses “would benefit considerably from some explicit planning process worked out by the founder with the family”.

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3 For an overview of illustrative work in the first wave, see Appendix 1.
Another theme that binds the first wave of literature together is the strong tendency to rely on a rational approach (just like management research in general at this point in time). In this stream of literature, the owner family is usually described in negative ways because of its emotional and irrational character (Hollander & Elman, 1988). There are rich descriptions of how the emotionally loaded family unit harms the business. At the same time, the meaning of rationality and the assumptions underpinning this notion are seldom discussed (Hall, 2002). It shines through, however, that the rational notion builds on the ideas behind the ‘economic man’ that originate in economic theories. Discussing the rationality discourse underpinning much family business literature, Hall (2002:32) notes how “this mode of rationality has its main focus on the outcome of action and requires an analytical, calculative agent who has consistent preferences, perfect information, is able to cope with extreme complexity, and who is not socialised into any traditions/norms but is totally free to act”. No wonder that articles that build on such assumptions conclude that family businesses are managed in an irrational way.

Based on the irrationality argument, it is suggested that family businesses are not ‘real’ businesses because they are infused with emotionally loaded family values (Hollander & Elman, 1988). Authors who subscribe to the rational tradition try to identify the symptoms of such irrationality, such as emotionalism and conflict, “and use that symptom as evidence of the disabling effect on the business of the inclusion of the family” (Hollander & Elman, 1988:146). Furthermore, the missions of the consultants (who often authored the texts) were to increase rationality in the family business by eliminating the family influence:

The recommended solutions were to excise the family. Business and family were treated as polar opposites, in conflict with one another (Hollander & Elman, 1988:146).

As a basis for understanding the contradiction between the value-free and rational business organisation and the value-laden and emotionally bounded entity of the family, authors were inclined to rely on systems theory. In this way, they could explain these contradictory forces by the idea that the family business consists of two different, incompatible entities. As noted by Beckhard and Dyer (1983:6), the family business can be looked upon as a system containing subsystems where each of these “has an identity and culture of its own, and they often have competing needs and values”.

However, the battle for rationality and for separating the business from the family was not without resistance. Not only Hollander and Elman (1988) dismissed this view. Alderfer (1988:250) too was dissatisfied with the recurring quest for rationality and objectivity, which he thought was utterly wrong in that “[i]t seems as if some experts on organisations believe that families alone carry
feelings and thus that they lack rationality and objectivity”. He further noted that it would be fiction to think that non-family firms operate without emotional forces. For the study of family businesses, he suggested another approach where family forces, including feelings, are part of the vital fabric of this most common type of organization. Family feelings are not to be overlooked, denied or demeaned. Rather, they are to be observed, accepted and respected (Alderfer, 1988:250).

The role of family meetings

The subject of family meetings was introduced among the very first texts about family business. In those texts, family meetings are suggested as a means for engaging in planning activities where “formal planning meetings and reviews help to promote the healthy, open, shared decision making so often needed in the family enterprise” (Ward, 1988:106). Furthermore, it was noted that family “dialogues can aid in manpower planning and in managing the transitions. The question is how to develop such dialogues so as to include all the relevant perspectives” (Barnes & Hershon, 1994:391). In short, family communication is regarded as crucial for the longevity of the family business in that it directly influences family relationships:

There are several important tasks that need to be accomplished for the transition of ownership to achieve the owners’ goal. The most important of these tasks is communication (Weiser, Brody & Quarrey, 1988:34).

Likewise, Handler (1991) notes that communication between family members is important for healthy family relationships. In this vein of reasoning, different kinds of meeting practices, or “mechanisms for dialogue” (Barnes & Hershon, 1994:391), are suggested as a solution for how to get communication started. In this discussion, the notion of a family council is introduced as a way for family members to come together and discuss issues that originate from being an owner family.

In summary, communication is noted as a key factor and the family meeting as a potential arena for having enriching conversations. At the same time, the rational position also runs through in the understanding of communication, and there is a transmission view of language in use. For instance, in their article about father-son relationships, Davis and Tagiuri (1989:50) note that the quality of work relationships is influenced by “the ability and willingness of each party to send and receive messages and the costs and benefits that each person perceives in the relationship measured against his expectations and possible alternative work relationships”. Hence, the calculative, mechanic way of
thinking influences how family members and communication processes are approached and understood.

**The second wave: Professionalisation**

In line with the call for more rational behaviour in the family business in the first wave of literature comes the quest for professionalisation during wave two. Some early authors laid the foundations for this wave of research that grew stronger in the mid-1990s. As early as 1971, Levinson wrote in the *Harvard Business Review* that “in general, the wisest course for any business, family or non-family, is to move to professional management as quickly as possible” (p. 98). In his argumentation, as well as in that of many others, professional management equals non-family management. The professional managers are supposed to have developed the following characteristics:

1. Their actions are driven by a set of general principles or propositions independent of a particular case under consideration,
2. they are deemed to be ‘experts’ in the field of management and to know what is ‘good’ for the client,
3. their relationships with clients are considered helpful and objective,
4. they gain status by accomplishment as opposed to status based on ties to the family, and
5. they belong to voluntary associations of fellow professionals (Dyer, 1989:221, drawing on Schein, 1968).

Hence, the quest for professionalisation is based on the same rational approach in which family members are supposed to act emotionally while non-family executives are portrayed in line with the theory of the ‘economic man’. In this way, the dichotomy between family and business that was initiated in the first wave of literature is further corroborated by another dichotomy, namely that between family management and professional management.

With the call for professionalisation came the discussion about professional governance practices (see, among others, Craig & Moores, 2002). Scheduled family meetings are described as one important ingredient in those professional practices, together with, for instance, a board with non-family board members. One example of a study about the usage of these kinds of practices is Astrachan and Kolenko’s (1994) survey of human resource management and governance practices. The three questions asked about governance practices were: ‘Do you hold regularly scheduled meetings with family members involved in the business?’, ‘Do you have a written business plan?’ and ‘Do you hold regular board meetings?’ Based on the yes or no answers to these three questions in addition to answers to questions regarding human resource practices, the authors conclude that the “practical implications of this research point to the

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5 For an overview of illustrative work in the second wave, see Appendix 2.
need for family firms to implement the HRMPs [human resource management practices] and governance practices studied here. [...] Ignoring the importance of these sound management practices could provide other firms in one's industry with an opportunity to gain competitive advantage (Astrachan & Kolenko, 1994:260).

Just as the study by Astrachan and Kolenko (1994), there is a tendency among authors in the second wave of research to rely on more scientific ideal and large-scale quantitative studies compared with the studies in the first wave of research. This means that a more distant approach to family business studies in comparison to the studies performed in wave one, where the authors often draw on their own experiences of being close to the owner family, is developed. There is also a change in focus from everyday problems in the family business towards a greater emphasis on scholarly issues in the development of family business theories. This way of engaging in the studies, together with the language introduced in wave two with notions such as ‘professionalisation’, ‘professional governance practices’ and ‘family governance’, further refines and manifests the rational approach that was introduced in the first wave of literature.

However, the plea for professionalisation, when it equals non-family executives, is not without its opponents. Hall and Nordqvist (2008) bring attention to the fact that the call for professionalisation is too one-sided since there is a lack of sensitivity to the sociocultural complexity in the family business. Aronoff (1998:183) argues that this whole debate is “increasingly seen as irrelevant, at best, and dangerous, at worst”. In 1994, *Family Business Review* republished Barnes and Hershon’s classic article that first appeared in the *Harvard Business Review* in 1976. In this article, they call it a myth that owner families need to take in a non-family CEO as the company grows. They say it is almost an academic question to suggest the owner family to step out of its business, because as we see over and over again, families stay:

Thus there is something more deeply rooted in transfers of power than impersonal business interests. The human tradition of passing on heritage, possessions, and name from one generation to the next leads both parents and children to seek continuity in the family business. In this light, the question whether a business should stay in the family seems less important, we suspect, than learning more about how these businesses and their family owners make the transition from one generation to the next (Barnes & Hershon, 1994:380).

Therefore, they suggest it is pointless to argue for the family to leave the business, and it seems more productive to learn more about how the family can stay in the business in rewarding ways. Similarly, Dyer (1989) wrote about professionalising which, according to him, can mean to recruit a non-family
member, to train a non-family member that already works in the business or to train family members. Such training for family members often includes entering a university, gaining work experience outside the family business and/or specific executive training once family members enter the business.

**The role of family meetings**

In the focus on professionalisation and professional governance practices, the notion of family governance is introduced. Family governance can be defined as “the set of institutions and mechanisms whose aim is to order the relationships occurring within the family context and between the family and the business. These mechanisms may be both formal and informal and will vary over time” (Suáre & Santana-Martin, 2004:146). In this discussion, it is recognised that family businesses have a particularly challenging task because of the complex and longstanding structure of stakeholders where family members often have multiple roles and where there is a duality of non-financial as well as financial goals (Mustakallio, Autio & Zahra, 2002). Therefore, it is argued that in addition to the more traditional governance practices of the board of directors and top management team, the family business needs to develop specific governance structures (Mustakallio, Autio & Zahra, 2002).

According to Hauser (2002:16), the family governance system should make each family member feel “consulted, respected, and treated fairly”. Along a similar vein of thinking, Martin (2001) outlined a six-stage process for creating a family governance structure. For this process, he argues that open communication among family members is a key ingredient for establishing long-lasting family governance processes, and family meetings are one essential way to establish such a communication. He concludes by emphasising that the process of developing family governance processes “demands enormous commitment, patience, and hard work from the family” (Martin, 2001:59).

One article that stands out in the literature about professionalisation in the sense that it gives an in-depth portrayal of the processes of professionalisation is Craig and Moores (2002). This is based on an interview with Bert Dennis, one of the family members and owners of a family business in Australia. In the interview, Dennis tells his own experience of professionalising the family business and what it meant for his family. According to him, they started to work with a family council as an initiative in their succession process. Today, this is a forum where the family addresses matters such as the appointment of directors, dividends policy, archiving family history and philanthropy and investment strategy. According to Dennis, this new way of working together has made a difference in his daily life because “when an issue arises now, it’s not that you don’t have to deal with the issue, but it’s hell of a lot easier to deal with when you know that you can deal with it in an appropriate forum, with the appropriate people” (Craig & Moores, 2002:67). The interview offers a sense of understanding of the complexity of engaging in professionalisation. Furthermore, it shows how interrelated professionalisation is with other
processes in the family as well as in the business. The article thereby contributes to a deeper understanding of what professionalisation can mean for the owner family.

The third wave: Performance

In 2012, Family Business Review will celebrate 25 years in press. The editors have made a call for two special issues during that year; one is for review articles in general, the other for “Value Creation and Performance in Private Family Firms: Measurement and Methodological Issues”. This call for papers summarises nicely the general theme in the third wave of literature – family and firm performance – where there is a quest to further refine the scientific status of the field and where measurement is the key factor. One of the landmark articles in the third wave of research is a review article by Sharma, Chrisman and Chua (1997:1) in which they argue that “[c]urrently, family-business research is largely descriptive rather than prescriptive. Most of the literature that has taken a prescriptive approach has done so from the perspective of how to improve family relationships rather than business performance”. It was noted that family as well as business performance need to be better understood (Sharma, 2004). A stream of articles has followed the call for performance where the resource-based view and agency theory are the most common theoretical frameworks (Chrisman et al., 2010). In addition, systems theory, with the idea that family and business are made of two separate and incompatible systems, still underpins much research. A noted difference, though, is that the idea of separating the business and the family has been reconsidered and the family business is no longer looked upon as out of date:

After decades of being viewed as obsolete and problem ridden, recent research has begun to show that major, publicly traded family-controlled businesses (FCBs) actually outperform other types of businesses (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2006:73).

Studies in wave three further acknowledge that family values and culture can contribute greatly to the family business (Chua, Chrisman & Sharma, 2003). In relation to family business performance, it is argued that this kind of influence and interaction between the family and the business can develop a specific resource, ‘familiness’, which is “the unique bundle of resources a particular firm has because of the systems interaction between the family, its individual members, and the business” (Habbershon & Williams, 1999:11). Depending on how a family’s familiness is managed, it has the potential to develop a unique competitive advantage (Habbershon, Williams & MacMillan, 2003). Another notion introduced to better understand the sustained competitive advantage

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6 For an overview of illustrative work in the third wave, see Appendix 3.
that some family businesses develop is ‘family capital’, which is a kind of social capital developed from the family’s relational and structural involvement in the business (Hoffman, Hoelscher & Sorenson, 2006). However, as further research about family capital underlines, it cannot be taken for granted that the resources per se make a difference, because how the family manages the resources is essential for understanding how certain advantages may be created and maintained (Salvato & Melin, 2008).

Another difference in the third wave of literature compared with preceding waves is the emerging understanding that family businesses should not always replicate general best management practices developed for non-family businesses (Dana & Smyrnios, 2010). In contrast to the first wave of literature, where it was suggested that family businesses should be managed like non-family businesses, the request nowadays goes in the reverse direction; that it is precisely because of the unorthodox way of managing the family businesses that family businesses develop their long-term success. For instance, in their book Managing for the Long Run: Lessons in Competitive Advantage from Great Family Businesses, Miller and Le Breton-Miller (2005) started to unpack some of the intertwined practices that make family businesses outperform their competitors in a number of industries and markets. They found that "because of their family control, successful FCBs [family-controlled businesses] have embraced very different ownership, business, and social philosophies – distinctive approaches to leadership, strategy, organisation, and relations with the environment that contrast sharply with the conventional wisdom and practices of many public, nonfamily-controlled businesses (non-FCBs)” (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2005:16).

Hence, it is recognised that the reason family businesses can outperform non-family organisations is their unique resources because of owner family involvement in combination with unconventional ways of working. This insight has had implications for how to conduct studies about family business performance. For instance, Astrachan, editor-in-chief of the Journal of Family Business Strategy, the second academic journal devoted to family business studies launched in early 2010, writes that performance needs to be considered along multiple dimensions such as “financial performance, firm survival, family financial benefit, family non-financial benefit, and societal benefit” (Astrachan, 2010:5).

Another contribution of the third wave of research is the recognition that family businesses are heterogeneous in nature. One example of research in this direction is the launch of the F-PEC scale, which is a continuous scale of family involvement in the business along the three dimensions of power, experience and culture, which makes it possible to discuss various kinds of family businesses. The definitions of family businesses are thereby no longer reduced to either being a family business or not; rather, family businesses are depicted as a heterogeneous group of organisations with varying degrees of family influence and involvement (Astrachan, Klein & Smyrnios, 2002).
The role of family meetings

In the third wave of literature, it is acknowledged that “family meetings, retreats, and family councils can play an important role in family-owned businesses’ effectiveness and continuity” (Poza, Hanlon & Kishida, 2004:114). It is further recognised that a unique family culture and values can be essential for family business performance. To develop and maintain those values, various kinds of family meetings are suggested. In this wave of research, there is also a growing insight that no kind of family meeting fits all purposes just as there is no recipe about family meetings that fits all owner families. Rather, a variety of different kinds of family meetings is suggested, and it is recognised that every family has to find its own way of working in every given situation. One contribution in this direction is Jaffe and Lane’s (2004) article in which they discuss how a family firm can grow and develop into a dynasty. They discuss the challenge of how to maintain family values when the family and the business grow and family members are no longer involved in daily management operations. In addition, they bring attention to the fact that governance structures cannot be considered fixed and final because they have to respond to the specific needs of each generation. In their conclusion of what has made some family dynasties develop and last over generations, they find that “[t]here are some key features of the structures that they create – the existence of family councils and boards, for example – but in fact each successful family creates a unique and special set of institutions, depending on its family style, values, and type of financial and business structure” (Jaffe & Lane, 2004:98). Further, they underline that the prime function of the family organisation (family council, family assembly, ownership group, taskforces, etc.) is to establish “a formal method to give voice to the family-oriented concerns of the shareholders, and a process to mediate the complex preferences and cross-currents that make up such families, while ensuring effective continuity and profitability of the core business” (Jaffe & Lane, 2004: 93). Hence, in this way, the family organisation can communicate with the board of directors and bring the voice of the family into the business. Similarly, in his dissertation about how ownership matters in strategy work, Nordqvist (2005) notes how the owner family can develop different kinds of informal (e.g. dinner table conversations) and formal (e.g. board work) arenas in which the family can influence the strategic direction of the business. In a later publication, Nordqvist (2011) introduces the term ‘hybrid arenas’ to describe those arenas that build on a combination of formal and informal elements. Sauna gatherings, away days and family management courses for the owner family are given as examples of such hybrid arenas. Nordqvist (2011) emphasises the need to find a balance between different types of arenas as well as a balance of family and non-family people represented. As he suggests, too much reliance on formal arenas may end up in work that is too structured, which can reduce flexibility and thereby slow down decision making. At the same time, too much reliance on more informal arenas can lead to the exclusion of some people that do not have the ‘entrance ticket’ to those
kinds of meetings. In addition, it can lead to a risk of undermining the legitimacy of formal arenas such as the family council or board. In terms of participation, too much family involvement might lead to a lack of new ideas. By contrast, too little family involvement can end up in a situation where the uniqueness of being an owner family might not get utilised.

Figure 2.1 A categorisation of arenas in strategic work in family firms (source: Nordqvist, 2011).

**Summarising the three waves of research**

In the establishment of family business as a distinct field of research during the 1980s, there were voices arguing for more rational behaviour in the family business, mainly through formal planning. Family meetings were suggested as arenas where planning could take place, and various kinds of planning methods were suggested. Hollander and Elman (1988), in their review of the early literature, commented on the taken-for-granted ‘rational approach’ that, according to them, has taken the literature in certain directions where the “[p]urpose, function, and structural properties of the organization formed the unit of analysis for this approach” (Hollander & Elman, 1988:146).

One of the main contributions of the first wave of literature is that it elaborates on what gives a family business its unique character. The answer centres on the involvement of the family in the business (Chua, Chrisman &
Sharma, 1999). However, there is widespread pessimism around what the family does for the business, which has left a legacy of family businesses being unprofessional. The literature is rich in tragic stories discussing various kinds of problems and struggles believed to be inherent in this specific form of organisation, because of the intertwinement between the family and the business. The logic of systems theory is used in this discussion. Although the work on systems theory has contributed to a better understanding of the family in business, this literature simultaneously tends to picture a dualistic worldview that supports opposition and polarisation (Hollander & Elman, 1988). This has led to discussions where some authors have suggested that each system needs its own forum so that the business can be run without too much disturbance from the family, and it was therefore suggested that owner families could discuss family issues in family meetings and business matters in business-oriented meetings such as the top management team and board meetings. Additionally, the troublesome family communication around issues such as rivalry, jealousy and power is implicitly assumed to be avoided if people come together in those forums.

What surprises me with the second wave of literature is that the underlying assumptions about rationality and the problems with the emotionally loaded family unit are not challenged. Instead, they are further established, which pictures family businesses as less capable than non-family businesses. In this discussion, the call for professional management evolves, where professionalisation equals non-family management. In this wave, governance becomes of great interest, and family meetings are suggested as part of these professional governance practices.

It is apparent that the third wave has a legacy from the previous two in regard to underlying assumptions about rationality and the belief in systems theory. The rationality approach is even further developed in the general call for a more scientific approach to research. In this wave there is a tendency to rely on de-contextualised and large-scale empirical studies. Hence, over time, it is (unfortunately) possible to note how the close connection between research and practice that the field once took off from is going in the opposite direction with greater distance from daily family business life.

The third wave differs from the previous two in that it represents a more positive view of the involvement of the family in business, and it is argued that it is the unique family values and culture that give the family business its competitive advantage. There is a recognition that no recipe of family meetings fits all businesses, but that rather each family needs to find its own way of working that has to develop together with the needs and wants of the family and the business (Jaffe & Lane, 2004).
Table 2.1. Three waves of scholarly work on family business and family meetings

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<tr>
<th>Wave</th>
<th>General theme</th>
<th>Family meetings</th>
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<tr>
<td>1)</td>
<td>Planning The involvement of the family makes the family business emotional and</td>
<td>The involvement of the family makes the family business emotional and irrational. Planning is needed for family business longevity. Family meetings, such as a family council, can be an arena where planning can take place. The family meeting can also enhance communication between family members.</td>
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<td>2) Professionalisation Family businesses need to be more professional through</td>
<td>Family councils, next-generation meetings and ownership meetings are examples of family meeting practices under the umbrella term of professional family governance practices.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>non-family management and/or through the creation of professional governance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>practices.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3)</td>
<td>Performance The involvement of the family can give the business a unique</td>
<td>Different kinds of family meetings can be of significance for maintaining family values and goals and in that way contribute to family and business performance.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>competitive advantage.</td>
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How can future studies contribute to a new understanding of family meetings?

Scholars in the family business community have been successful in establishing a distinct field of research that has evolved over the past 30 years. In this literature, family meetings are suggested to be essential for members of the enterprising family as a way for them to contribute with their unique resource of being a family that jointly owns a business (or several businesses). It is underlined that family meetings are crucial for handling sensitive issues such as rivalry, jealousy and strained communication between family members as well.
as next-generation training and the vision of the family and the business. In that way, it has been noted how family meeting practices can contribute to the longevity and performance of the family business. Furthermore, it is suggested that every family needs to find its own way of working that is appropriate for its unique way of being.

Hence, current research has underlined that family meetings can be of great importance for the owner family and its business(es). Additionally, it has been noted how these meetings are often emotionally intense because of the close relationships between family members where much of what is important for people in life is to be dealt with in the meetings. Even so, current research still offers limited insights into the social interplay taking place in the family meeting as well as little guidance on how family members can go on in their work in, and around, the meeting room. One reason is that detailed studies about the processes and procedures of what happens in the family meeting are scarce (Nordqvist, 2011). My tentative answer to why current literature is sparse when it comes to the processual understanding of family meetings is that even though the studies in this area have developed over time, they are still largely rooted in the same view of reality. As it seems, the functional/rational approach from the first wave of research is largely still flourishing. In this thesis, I refer to this taken-for-granted approach as a being perspective of the world (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). The being perspective has led to knowledge claims about objective and universal truths concerned with planning, professionalism and performance and less focus on a contextualised, deeply embedded understanding about the processes at play when ‘things’ are in the making in family meeting practices.

In reviewing current family business studies it is possible to notice five assumptions that underpin the being perspective and that are common in these texts. First, there is a tendency to think in finalised entities. The strong reliance on systems theory and its powerful rhetoric about the family and the business as two separate and incompatible entities has led to a vocabulary that creates boundaries around concepts such as the family, the founder and the family meeting. Furthermore, these entities are believed to be stable and do not change unless powerful change forces set them in motion. Hence, the family meeting is pictured as a stable entity that either exists or not. This way of creating boxes with certain labels is also intertwined with thinking in detached individuality. With that I mean the assumption that these entities (people, meetings, organisations) can be constructed as isolated and not in any important sense intertwined with each other. This assumption shines through in studies where, for instance, the founder of a family business is portrayed as purposefully driven by inner mental maps that influence his or her actions and where social interplay is not taken into consideration. That is also correlated with the principle of sameness, which underpins the rational thinking in which the ultimate corporate governance model – the one-size-fits-all best practice – is searched for. This principle, together with the view of time as mechanical, which means that life is understood in clockwise, linear terms where development
happens in unidirectional steps, makes it possible to understand why the literature is so rich in studies that depart from different kinds of stage models. Moreover, even though communication is understood as a key factor, *language as representational* is the dominant mode of thinking about language in use. That means a view where language is understood as a carrier of predefined meanings, and where the family meeting is suggested to be the container for transmitting those meanings.

These (most often implicit and unquestioned) assumptions have led to a predominant mode of conducting research about family meetings in terms of input-output models. With that I mean that some variables, such as family/non-family representatives in the meeting, represent input into the meeting and yet another variable, such as revenue in the business, represents the output. Meanwhile, what is happening in the meeting is not paid attention to. Hence, all those qualities that the family meeting is supposed to enhance, be it family relationships, communication or fostering of the family culture and vision, are exactly those things that are not better understood. What I think is most problematic is that the scientific paradigm of the being worldview is so taken for granted that its underlying assumptions and how it influences what is studied and what counts as valid knowledge are not questioned or discussed. The lack of awareness as well as the lack of the articulation of alternative perspectives is a major shortcoming of the field, which has led to a situation where current state-of-the-art family business literature suffers from a too narrow repertoire with a dominant discourse about what a family business is and how it should be studied.

It therefore seems to be timely to open up different paradigms of thought that can resist some of the institutional forces that lead to a homogenisation of the understanding of the family business, the enterprising family and the family meeting (Melin & Nordqvist, 2007). As noticed in the previous chapter, there are some suggestions for alternative research perspectives. For instance, Fletcher (2002) has suggested social constructionism approaches and Stewart (2003) has recommended that there is much to learn from anthropology. Hall (2003) illustrated the contribution of an interpretative approach and Nordqvist (2005) employed a socio-symbolic perspective in the family business context. What initiatives as these have in common is an opening up for different ways of understanding the family business that can disclose yet unexplored insights.

Against this background, I am utterly sceptical towards ideas such as those expressed by Wortman (1994:3), who suggests the family business is in need of a "unified paradigm for the field”. Likewise, the proposal that “the ultimate goal in family business research is the development of a distinct theory on family firms” (Pieper & Klein, 2007:304) seems to take the field in the wrong direction. Surprisingly little criticism has been levelled at these ideas. One notable exception is Fletcher (2002:1), who states that “a unified paradigm, which might privilege common methodologies and ways of theorizing the family business, is unhelpful for a dynamic and growing area of study”. In
addition, she addresses the concern that a unified paradigm risks closing off new perspectives and insights.

In opening up to other worldviews, however, just as Budge and Janoff suggested as early as 1991, there is a need to carefully discuss how we approach research about the enterprising family and from there try to “listen differently” so that yet unexplored themes can be further explored. That is important because “[u]nless we listen differently or with renewed focus, we may inadvertently contribute to the larger societal problem of not listening to family needs, and thereby contribute to partial and confusing ideas about the world of family business as practiced” (Budge & Janoff, 1991:78). However, they continue, a prerequisite for being able to listen differently is that we examine our own assumptions that we draw upon since “[w]e will not hear what is being told us if we have left our own stories, discourses, and rhetorical strategies unexamined” (Budge & Janoff, 1991:379).

In the next chapter, I will attempt to listen differently by discussing the five assumptions underpinning the being perspective (introduced above) and contrasting those with the becoming perspective. When elaborating on these assumptions, my point is not that they are wrong or false or should be dismissed. My point is rather that if family businesses should continue to be a lively, developing and enriching field of study that can contribute to the understanding of family businesses in research and practice, then there is a need for alternatives that open up greater plurality of the phenomenon we study.
3. Introducing becoming

In the elaboration of how the field of family business research has evolved over time, the previous chapter drew attention to how much of this research still departs from a being perspective of the world. I further claimed that for us to continue developing family business as a lively field of research that can respond to the multifaceted needs of family business life, there is a need to open up different perspectives that can enlarge the research agenda.

In this chapter, I will suggest the becoming ontology as one such promising alternative. The chapter is structured in three parts. The first part briefly introduces the becoming ontology in general and how this orientation has made its way into organisation and management studies. The main body of the chapter thereafter focuses on the five assumptions introduced in the previous chapter and discusses how they might be reinterpreted from a becoming perspective. The chapter ends with a discussion about the main implications of a becoming perspective for the study of family meetings.

Rooted in process philosophy

An examination of the becoming ontology and how it differs from the more widespread being ontology is an elusive task. Considering that the differences in the being and becoming ontologies go back to Greek and Roman philosophers’ disagreements over whether the world was made of static entities or continuous flow, there is a long tradition of scholarly work to delve into.

A becoming ontology is rooted in process philosophy. In contrast to a being ontology, where substances are portrayed as stable and timeless, the becoming ontology holds transformation as fundamental. In short, a shift from being to becoming is a shift in focus from ‘things made’ to ‘things in the making’. In his introduction to process metaphysics, the American philosopher Rescher (1996:7) suggests:

The guiding idea of this approach is that natural existence consists in and is best understood in terms of processes rather than things – of modes of change rather than fixed stabilities. For processists, change of every sort – physical, organic, physiological – is the pervasive and predominant feature of the real.

Thus, process thinking prioritises activity over substance, process over product, change over persistence and novelty over continuity (Rescher, 1996). That does

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7 The notion of ‘process philosophy’ will be used interchangeably with ‘becoming ontology’.
not mean that process scholars deny the existence of substances, states or entities but view them as manifolds of processes. A process scholar therefore “insists in unpacking them to reveal the complex activities and transactions that take place and contribute to their constitution” (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010:2-3). That is how process thinking acknowledges rather than reduces the complexity of the world.

Heraclitus, who is known for having said, “all things flow”, is claimed to be the founder of the Western philosophy of process thought. In his book *On Nature*, he depicted a world in manifold where opposing forces are “joined in mutual rivalry, interlocked in constant strife and conflict”, which leads to the conclusion that “one cannot step twice into the same river” (Heraclitus, as cited in Rescher, 1996:9).

Later on, Leibniz is understood as the bearer of modern process philosophy. He elaborates on the idea that what are often understood as substances or things are in fact clusters of processes that are ”bundles of activities” or ”centres of force” (Leibniz, as cited in Rescher, 1996:12). Other prominent process scholars who have all taken on the process school of thought in different ways are James, Bergson and Whitehead, to name a few.

Importantly, a becoming ontology is not a specific theory or method, but an orientation and way of understanding life. Therefore, there is nothing like the becoming perspective and just like other perspectives this is an orientation that grows and develops over time. There are also different variations within the process orientation fuelled by different schools of thought. One way to categorise different variations is to separate ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ process orientations. In this respect, strong-process scholars hold that process thinking is an ontological quest where the world is processual and ‘things’ or substances are constituted by process. By contrast, weak-process scholars hold that processes are fundamental, yet subordinated to substance. Hence, processes take place within existing entities (Rescher, 1996). In practice, these distinctions are blurred, and organisation researchers tend to mix and blend weak and strong process orientations (Langley, 2009). My ambition in this study is to explore a strong process orientation in relation to meeting practices.

**Process organisation studies**

In reference to organisation and management studies, there has long been an interest in understanding process⁸. In this respect, Mintzberg’s (1973) early work laid the platform for opening up the ‘black box’ of organisations by suggesting a process-oriented approach to management studies. Weick’s (1979) suggestion to shift from the study of ‘organisation’ to ‘organising’ (from noun

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⁸ For further reading, Understanding Organization as Process (Hernes, 2008) as well as Process, Sensemaking & Organizing (Hernes & Maitlis, 2010) provides introductions to how organisation process studies have developed.
to verb), which implies a change in focus from what an organisation is to how organising processes come about, has been highly influential. In his study of the Mann Gulch disaster, Weick (1993) beautifully illustrates how a process orientation opens up new ways of understanding organisational life. Pettigrew’s (1985) work has also been important for acknowledging the daily micro-processes of politically informed organisational reality, for instance in his book about strategy making in a chemical firm. Another initiative is the ‘activity-based view’, where there is a quest to move deeper into the organisation by focusing on everyday activities and social practices (Johnson, Melin, & Whittington, 2003).

A recurring theme in the process-oriented management and organisation literature is the quest for alternative fieldwork approaches and methods that can offer a more holistic view and give an account of the ambiguous nature of organisational life, in contrast to more rational and analytical approaches. For instance, Pettigrew (1992) has been active in developing research practices for understanding management where in-depth, contextual and longitudinal field studies have been suggested to get to grips with processual data. Likewise, Melin (1992:114) proposed a process perspective to understand firm internationalisation. Based on his critical reading of current texts as being based on cross-sectional and decontextualised studies, he suggested different research practices such as the ethnographic and interpretative fieldwork approaches. A further conceptualisation of process research was introduced by Langley (1999). She draws on Mohr (1982) to make a distinction between ‘variance theory’ and ‘process theory’ where she also suggests seven different strategies for making sense of process data. Van de Ven and Poole (2005) further elaborate on the terminology of variance and process theory in their discussion of four different approaches to process studies.

Hence, there is a tradition of emphasising movement, change and process in organisation and management studies and knowledge about how to engage in those studies. Nevertheless, one of the shortcomings with some of this process-oriented work is that processes as such are not clearly conceptualised. In those cases process simply means “the movement from one set of ‘things’ to another; however, on the basis of this assumption the moment as such cannot be appropriately grasped” (Seidl, 2009:124). Sometimes, as Hernes (2008) points out, a ‘processual twist’ is performed by emphasising nouns in talking about ‘organising’ rather than ‘organisation’ or similar. In Styhre’s (2002b) discussion about the contribution of a process perspective to Strategic Management, he points out that previous process-oriented work in the field should not be confused with a process perspective (or becoming perspective) that departs from process philosophy. Since some of current work does not embrace process thinking ontologically, “mainstream writings within organization theory have tended to view processes as flows occurring within the confines of organizational goals and structures instead of organizations as constituted by process” (Hernes, 2008:19, my emphasis). Against this background, there have
3 Introducing becoming

been calls to move from a being to a becoming ontology in the study of organisational life; in other words, a call to complement the ‘weak’ process orientation in organisation and management research with a ‘strong’ process orientation (Hernes, 2008).

A shift from being to becoming is a shift in many dimensions

The becoming perspective in organisation studies grew out of the dissatisfaction with the dominant being ontology that underpins much of current organisation and management literature (Chia, 1995, 1996, 1997). As previously mentioned, a being perspective depicts organisations and their members as identifiable things or entities that can be represented in terms of static attributes and sequential events in taxonomies or other predefined models of the world. A becoming ontology, by contrast, offers an alternative view that holds organisational life as something that is continuously emerging. This perspective thereby implies a rather dramatic shift in organisational research because of its “entirely different set of ontological commitments, epistemological priorities and theoretical foci” (Chia, 1996:34). For scholars interested in understanding organisational life, the shift from being to becoming therefore calls for new directions on how to approach the phenomenon under study.

However, like Chia (1995), I do not view thinking in terms of ‘being’ or ‘becoming’ as an excluding dichotomy. Rather, these notions are interconnected and supplement each other. Moreover, as is often the case in philosophical investigations, a becoming perspective is best understood in terms of what it opposes (Rescher, 1996). Or, as Bakhtin, whom I will introduce more closely in the next chapter would have put it; they both need to be contrasted in the ‘other’ for a fuller understanding of what they stand for. That is why this chapter will continue to develop a becoming perspective by reflecting on how this worldview differs from the being perspective in the study of organisational phenomena in general and family meetings in particular. One of the benefits of putting different paradigms against each other, echoing Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008:483), is that we can use the “tensions among different perspectives to expose different assumptions and open up new ways of thinking”, and “by getting up and moving to another theoretical place, we can see things differently”.

In the following, the difference between being and becoming will be elaborated along five dimensions: from stable entities to entities as patterns of interactions, from detached individuality to relationality, from the principle of sameness to preparing for difference, from time as mechanical to time as experienced and from language as representational to language as performative. These five dimensions build on the
assumptions that were briefly introduced at the end of the previous chapter. I have chosen them primarily because I think they represent fundamental differences in the assumptions underpinning these two ontologies. Hence, rather than discussing different becoming scholars and how they differ or not from each other I will create boundaries around what I mean by a becoming perspective by departing from these fundamental assumptions. The discussion of each dimension is rounded off with a brief note on its significance for studying family meetings.

From stable entities to entities as patterns of interactions

This dimension deals with the problem that arises from the taken-for-granted thinking about the world as consisting of definable and isolated entities such as people, families, organisations and, in the context of this study, family meetings.

In her keynote speech at the annual conference of the European Academy of Management in 2009, Barbara Czarniawska reported that students of organisations usually claim that they will study a specific organisation such as, for instance, the Swedish car manufacturer Volvo. She wondered where they would go to find Volvo. What she questions, I think, is the taken-for-granted view that there exists some kind of organisation ‘out there’, which the researcher can use as a departure point for his or her research project. This entitative view implies thinking about organisations in a unified way, as if the organisation were one thing with one identity, the organisation. In addition, from this view, the organisation is approached as something that is closed and stable, a finalised whole. According to Cooper (2005), the discourse about organisational boundaries, which makes it possible to distinguish what is inside and outside of the organisation and the separation between the organisation and its environment, originates from entitative thinking. The being perspective thereby presupposes and claims that entities such as organisations, people or technologies exist independent of each other. Such a view shines through in the family business literature that argues that the family business (as an organisation) can be clearly separated from the family. In addition, this view supposes that entities exist independent of processes (Steyaert, 2007). Consequently, processes are pictured as interactions taking place within stable entities (Bakken & Hernes, 2006). Understood in this way, entities remain rather intact irrespective of the interactions going on internally because of the stable divide between processes and entities (Hernes & Weik, 2007a). One of the shortcomings of this view, since it assumes that organisations exist ontologically prior to process, is that it makes it impossible to understand the processes of how an entity – for instance, a family meeting – is incepted.

According to Cooper (2005:1689), this outlook on the human world says more about our institutional way of thinking than how structures are experienced in the “processual minutiae of daily life”. In addition, here lies one of the main differences between a being and a becoming perspective. Where
the being perspective sees processes as something that moves within rather stable frames, such as an organisation, the becoming perspective holds that it is the processes themselves that make up the entity (Hernes, 2008). The becoming perspective thereby denies that organisations can be approached as something detached from their organisational members and their practices because it rests on the premise that it is the hurly-burly of everyday organisational life that makes up the very thing called an organisation. Furthermore, the interconnectedness between the activities carried out by organisational members and the organisation itself makes the organisation continuously move along with the flow of activities, thereby questioning whether organisations are stable and finalised in nature. In summary, from a becoming perspective, the organisation and its processes cannot be separated, as they are two sides of the same coin; they are entangled (Hernes, 2008).

The work by Linstead and Thanem (2007) provides food for thought along the same line of reasoning. Drawing on Bergson’s (1911) and Deleuze’s (1988) process philosophy, they suggest two essential tendencies of organisations, organisation as life and organisation as formalisation. The former is an organic view in which the organisation with its association with life brings forward notions such as movement, transformation and connection. This follows the recognition that “[w]herever we find an organism we find it organizing itself and its environment – taking this, leaving that, reproducing, transforming and excreating, evolving, connecting and even socializing” (Linstead & Thanem, 2007:1486). Hence, organisation as a sign of life connotes thinking about organisations as processes that are lively, surprising and social in nature. The formal aspect of organisation, again, involves “the ordering, measuring, abreacting, differentiating and acting at a distance” (Linstead & Thanem, 2007:1486). Importantly, as the authors underline, there is a reciprocal relationship between these two tendencies of organisations in that they are engaged in an ongoing conversation with each other, a conversation that keeps the organisation moving (Linstead & Thanem, 2007).

Hernes & Weik’s (2007b) discussion goes in the same direction. They draw on Whitehead’s (1929) process thinking when they suggest that organisations cannot be located in a specific time-space because they are stretched out in a tension between what is (actuality) and what might become (potentiality) and between concrete experience and abstraction. Thus, an organisation is not something that is ever fully present. The most tangible elements of organisations from this perspective are budgets, organisational charts, annual reports and similar artefacts created by organisational members in their organising processes. However, importantly, these artefacts, even though they are attempts to create some sort of direction, stability, predictability and order in the ongoing flow of becomingness, cannot be said to be the organisation (Hernes & Weik, 2007b).

Even though an organisation cannot be found ’out there’ as a finalised and ordered entity, that does not mean order is not significant. On the contrary,
order as an idea, “as a basis for intervening in a reality that is essentially fluid”, is important (Hernes & Weik, 2007b:90). At the same time, organisations do not seem to be created only for the reason of reducing uncertainty and creating order. Returning to Linstead and Thanem (2007), a more open approach to organisations emerges. Similarly, Clegg, Kornberger and Rhodes (2005) in their survey of organisations as processes of becoming found that organisations are to be found between chaos and predictability, order and disorder. It is the tensions between those forces that make an organisation continuously move. In the space in-between, when these forces rub against each other in their simultaneous multiplicity, some of them initiate locomotion while others create forces of restriction (Melin, 1987). Importantly, there needs to be some sort of balance:

Too much order, rule and harmony, and the system implodes; too much chaos, disorder and noise, and the system explodes.

Organizational creativity is in between – metaphorically littoral (Clegg, Kornberger and Rhodes, 2005:154).

For the researcher, the outlook on an entity as something continuously in the making has some challenging implications. Although this outlook does not mean to dismiss the existence of entities, but insists on unpacking the multiplicity of how they are unfolding in the making, takes other ways of approaching organisational life.

Altogether, in relation to the study of family meetings, the shift from approaching entities as finalised to entities as patterns of interactions invites us to approach family meetings as family members’ joint efforts to get together in a fluid world in such a way that it opens up chaos and order, closings and openings, predictability and novel thinking. From this view, there cannot be any separation between the processes at work and the family meeting because the very meeting itself is made up of the processes that create it. Thus, the family meeting can be understood as a desire and an idea of a stabilised space for family members; a space that helps them cope in a fluid world by facilitating conversations about what is (actuality) and what their future might become (potentiality).

**From detached individuality to relationality**

One of the implications of the discussion above, in which organisational life is understood as processes of chaos and order, closings and openings, is the need to turn away from the individual premise so widespread in organisation studies and instead step into a relational realm. In their critique of methodological individualism, Chia and MacKay (2007) question the idea that every individual is a discrete, bounded entity. What is problematic with methodological individualism is not primarily the focus on the individual over the collective but
the assumption associated that characterises a human being as a "self-contained, self-motivating human agent who acts on its external environment" (Chia & MacKay, 2007:226). In this way, it is the individual and his or her agency that are given ontological primacy over processes and practices, which limits how organisational processes are construed. Another downside is that a unified discourse about organisational activities as something initiated and driven by purposeful individuals is created.

The alternative to methodological individualism is neither collectivism nor holism since these are based on the same assumption about human agents and thereby understand the collective to be the aggregate of individuals. Relationality, by contrast, stands for an entire shift in that it acknowledges relations continuously in the making rather than the individual or the organisation as separate entities. Going back to the original double meaning of the word 'individual' as both separated and connected, divided and undivided, implies thinking of the individual as a human agent that acts in a tension between itself and its environment. This is not in terms of self-bounded independence, but in terms of mutable relations where "[i]ndividual and environment become complexly mixed together as a field of dynamic interchanges in which locatable terms lose themselves in a dense interspace of relations" (Cooper, 2005:1690). Therefore, relationality understands human agency and actions as something happening in the space in-between, in entangled trans-individual connections and disconnections.

This understanding challenges the view of the individual mind as separate and apart from others. Therefore, mental states (such as beliefs, expectations and emotions) are not construed as something hidden within humans. Relationality rather brings forward how mental states are understood as features of social practices that individuals acquire when learning how to engage in social life (Schatzki, 2005). Hence, we have to turn the classic idea of the human mind upside down and realise that it is not separate individual minds that come together to form relationships but the other way around; who we become is a function of our relationships (Gergen, 2009). What follows from this argumentation is that human beings are constituted by their relational acts rather than their inner subjectivities. Cooper (2005:1691) makes the association between becoming and relationality very clear:

Since everything is relative to everything else, nothing [and no one] is complete in itself but is part of the continuous movement and interaction between things.

To go beyond detached individuality and towards entangled relationality is a fundamental move in that it suggests that researchers stop searching for individuals’ true selves and inner thoughts as some kind of isolated and individual belonging. This does not imply that human beings as such are unimportant. On the contrary, what this points out is that human beings have
to be understood in their relations with others and otherness around them. It thereby puts ‘relational forming’ to the fore (Gergen, 2010).

Altogether, in relation to the study of family meetings, the shift from detached individuality to entangled relationality invites us to focus on the trans-individual, the in-between as the guiding principle for understanding the processes of how family meetings unfold. This can be achieved by focusing on the ongoing interactions between family members and other people related to their family meeting practices.

**From the principle of sameness to preparing for difference**

As introduced in the discussion about entities as finalised, one of the assumptions of a being ontology is that organisations remain partially unchanged even though processes of transformation take place within the organisation (Bakken & Hernes, 2006). According to Durand and Calori (2006), this thinking in continuity is related to what they call ‘the sameness principle’. One feature of this principle is the tradition to look for general features of organisational life, such as regularities and recurring behaviour among people and organisations. As they see it, focusing on sameness only has certain backdrops that can be found in much current literature (Durand & Calori, 2006). For instance, a one-sided emphasis on ‘sameness’ leaves organisations and individuals with a limited repertoire to choose from. Another limitation is that the conception of the other ends up with mimics of me, like another me. In short, the orientation towards sameness limits what is possible to see and apprehend.

One way to overcome this one-sidedness and open up simultaneous multiplicity, which is fundamental for a process understanding, is to acknowledge ‘difference’ and be sensitive to “the difference that makes a difference” (Bateson, 1972:459). When emphasising not only sameness and similarities but also what is supplementary, different and unique, it becomes possible to better understand how processes of becoming evolve in the tensions between ‘the one’ and ‘the other’. One of the reasons why difference is important is that we cannot see things only in themselves because “nothing can be perceived except against the perspective of something else” (Holquist, 2002:22). Following this line of argument, as well as the argumentation brought forward earlier that entities are in the making between chaos and order, it may be that it is the continuous oscillation between sameness and difference that fabricates entities in an otherwise undifferentiated and fluxing reality.

As preparing for difference underlines, processes of becoming are a continuous interplay of different tensions played out in human interactions, where the evolving of these processes and the meaning they create are settled in time-space by the people involved. The recognition of difference thereby makes it possible to understand how processes of becoming are always heterogeneous in nature. Moreover, since every situation has its own specific time-place
Introducing becoming

The next situation will always turn into something else where things will be made ‘for another first time’ (Garfinkel, 1967). Thus, an inclination towards ‘difference’ underlines that processes of becoming are not linear, progressive and homogeneous; quite the opposite, they consist of an infinite variety of unique moments in continuous transformation. Therefore, the recognition of difference opens up studying family meetings in yet unexplored ways where that which is novel and unique can also be acknowledged and where “formlessness, nothingness, ambiguity, surprise, and otherness are in the fundamental nature of things” (Chia, 2002:866).

Altogether, in relation to the study of family meetings, the shift from the principle of sameness to preparing for difference invites us to come close to the phenomenon at hand so that it becomes possible to recognise and explore the uniqueness in that particular situation. It further emphasises the need to think in multiplicity, ‘thinking with AND’, as Styhre (2002a) puts it. However, for that to be possible there is a need to prepare ourselves to take in the otherness around us. In doing so, it becomes possible to acknowledge aspects of family meeting practices that have previously passed by unrecognised when students of organisations have mainly been occupied with generalised patterns of ‘sameness’ on an abstract level.

From time as mechanical to time as experienced

The emphasis on movement in the becoming perspective brings the notion of time to the fore. An often implicit assumption in organisation studies is to approach time in a clockwise, linear manner. This is an understanding of time as something that moves forward in a unidirectional and mechanical way where time is clearly definable, linear and made up of discrete entities such as minutes and seconds (Styhre, 2003). Inherent in this perspective on time is the idea that it is possible to freeze the world in a specific moment in time to investigate exactly what is happening at that very moment. However, from a becoming perspective, where processes are understood as ceaseless, heterogeneous and always in the flow of making, this view of time becomes problematic. Freezing reality is impossible when all there is around is movement and when there is no being in time:

Time has no being since the future is not yet, the past is no longer, and the present does not remain (Ricoeur, 1984:262).

A perspective on time without a being, as suggested by Ricoeur in the quote above, implies that the way to get hold of time is through experience. Thus it comes about that “we experience duration in the moment, the moment just passed, and the anticipated moment to come” (Cunliffe, Luhman, & Boje, 2004:266). In suggesting a more dynamic perspective of time, Ericson (2006)
brings forward the idea that the past can be seen as a “communicative partner” that ‘speaks’ again and again. In that way:

The past is a living tradition and is always in the process of reconstruction. The past is not a pre-given context, a cause of a factor that determines present and future activity, and there is no need to identify a historical object because we belong to a tradition, which constantly influences what we are in the process of becoming (Ericson, 2007:129).

Similarly, in Nayak’s (2008:178) words “consciousness is not an aggregation of discrete entities, but an ever-changing past and future that flows”. Such an experience-based, non-linear and fluid view of time is what Bergson calls ‘durée’ (Mullarkey, 1999). Durée is the lived experience of time and therefore not made up of discrete entities but in continuous process of becoming, a perspective on time that emphasises the qualitative, heterogeneous and dynamic dimensions of time (Mullarkey, 1999).

To acknowledge ‘durée’ does not mean that chronological timing is unimportant in organisational life. Many strategic practices in organisations are organised according to a chronological schedule. For instance, annual budgeting practices, monthly reports and Monday planning meetings are often of great importance. Still, as Czarniawska (2004b) points out, it is the interplay between lived time and chronological timing that needs to be addressed for a better understanding of organising processes. In the field of family business, this is fundamental since this is a field of practice that clearly weaves together the two institutions of business and family, which makes it all even more complex (Budge & Janoff, 1991). Although the institution of business draws on the tradition of measuring time in the techno-rational view described above where ‘time is money’, family time, by contrast, does not originate from a clock-based view of time. In the sphere of family, for instance, we are children to our parents all our life. As an illustration, Budge and Janoff (1991:370) write that “[s]econd-generation CEOs can still be defining themselves in agreement or disagreement with their fathers twenty years after the father has died”. Moreover, they continue, in the family, in contrast to business, there is a “temporality of larger cycles of birth, marriage, death, and other developmental milestones” (Budge and Janoff, 1991:370).

Still, it is the chronological timing that is most often addressed in studies of organisations in general, as well as in the family business literature, even though that probably leaves us with a partial understanding of how time matters. The recognition and inclusion of lived time leads to two implications that are of interest here. First, since time is made sense of as we experience it, it is problematic to generalise how people relate to time. Second, what follows from the first is that it is from within this experience that it is possible to gain some kind of understanding of what is going on. Interestingly, once we are there in
the moment – in the ‘within’ – a more dynamic time perspective opens up to us in that we can take part in people’s conversations in which they naturally relate to their pasts, presents and expected futures.

Altogether, in relation to the study of family meetings, the shift from time as mechanical to time as experienced invites us to understand time from within the flow of experience. We can thereby notice a more dynamic view of time that also recognises the ceaseless elements of how time matters and is played out in everyday organisational worlds.

From language as representational to language as performative

Finally, a shift from being to becoming calls for a greater awareness about and a shift in how we approach language in use. Even though most people in academia probably know intuitively that language is not a window into people’s inner lives such as cognitions, values and feelings, they still often act and write as if that were the case (Cunliffe, 2002). There seems to be an unfortunate lagging behind in the translation of how language works to the research practices used, which makes old ways of approaching language still common among organisation scholars. Or, as Alvesson and Kärreman (2000:153) straightforwardly put it: “Despite the various linguistic turns, the great majority of empirical studies treat language in a simplistic, uncritical, and misleading way”.

For instance, consistent with a being ontology, where organisations are approached as identifiable objects in an externalised world, is the belief that organisational life can be captured and represented through the use of a correct scientific language (Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996). This outlook departs from the idea that language in use is a representational medium of communication, in which a proper linguistic description has the possibility to mirror a ‘true’ organisational reality. Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) call this stance a ‘language-as-mirror’ practice. According to Hernes and Weik (2007b:75-76), this view shines through in literature, where “an essentially fluid and complex reality is sliced and curtailed into pieces for analytical convenience, in order to be put together again as the ‘total reality’”. The tendency to use classification schemes, typologies and hierarchies as if they were the organisations under study also signifies representationalism (Chia & Tsoukas, 2003).

Unfortunately, the representative view of language is not limited to descriptions about organisations but is to be found in the literature where people are externalised and objectified, too. For instance, phrases such as ‘how strategy practitioners are best produced’ echo how human qualities are downplayed in favour of mechanical, dead representations of human nature. Field accounts of human interaction in which researchers report what people actually do, in order to be able to tell how organisational work really happens reflects the idea that ‘naturally occurring interactions’ exist ‘out there’ in the ‘real’ world. In addition, this is an idea that takes for granted a singular and all-
encompassing reality which is far from the multiple and heterogeneous reality discussed in this chapter. From these assumptions, consequently, the task of the researcher is to describe these pre-made, fixed and finalised patterns of interaction. Language, from this perspective, is the tool by which researchers accurately “describe the realities of others, from an outside, expert stance” (Cunliffe, 2002:128). This way of approaching, theorising and writing about organisational life seems to be far away from organisational everydayness where “[l]ived experience, however, is not just changeful, but inextricably complex, heterogeneous, multiple and surprisingly novel at every turn” (Chia, 1999: 214). From a becoming perspective it is needed to leave this restricting view of language and rather make use of the full potential of language. This has to be a view of language that does not reduce fluidity and complexity in the world of organisations. What I am referring to is a perspective where language is not limited to a passive medium of information but rather understood as active and life-enriching in itself, or, in Shotter’s (2008b:505) words,

‘Language as performative’, as I have labelled this view, points towards the insight that words and sentences do not state facts, but rather that utterances in their unfolding do things (Austin, 1962; Garfinkel, 1967). In other words, just as we shape the words uttered, they in turn shape social worlds and ourselves (Holman & Thorpe, 2003). In this way, language is essential for developing an understanding of how organisations are created and shaped by people through interactions because this emphasises how language is a significant means for organising social worlds (Holman & Thorpe, 2003). This insight, furthermore, implies that moral acts of what and how local realities are created in language need to be considered (Shotter, 1993). Hence, this relational and performative nature of language calls for careful reflexivity regarding language in use.

Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) suggest that language can be understood as a ‘shaping force’ which implies that the same word, even the same statement, may have different meanings depending on the local context of when, where, by whom and to whom words are uttered. They bring forward the example ‘It is 9 o’clock’ and how this utterance can mean, for instance, ‘You are late’ or act as a signal to start a meeting or work as a response to a question (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000:142). The example is simple but nevertheless illustrates that meaning-making is local and situated. It also offers the possibility to understand better how the processes of becoming unfold uniquely in that people respond

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9 In the next chapter I will further discuss how the meanings of words uttered evolve in the dialogic interplay between speaking subjects.
to each other in a specific conversational moment (Shotter, 2008b). An immediate consequence is the rejection of abstract definitions and generalisations beyond the local context. A related implication is the problems related to comparing or aggregating meanings that have evolved in different contexts (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000).

Altogether, in relation to the study of family meetings, the shift from language as representational to language as performative invites us to remember that language in use is active, ongoing, ambiguous, novel and it does things; it is in language that family members do their family and business work. Equipped with this insight, it becomes crucial to find new ways of engaging with and writing about family meeting practices.

The five dimensions viewed together

In closing this chapter I will reflect on what these five dimensions offer when viewed together. To be clear, the message I want to convey in the suggested shift from being to becoming is not to stop researching from a being perspective. Neither do I want to convey that those two perspectives are the only perspectives available to us nor that the becoming perspective suggested here is the only one that is relevant for a process study of family meetings. My intention is rather to underline that this is an ontological shift and, therefore, it has implications on how organisations, organisational life, social practices, people and language are approached, understood and constructed. What I also want to bring forward is that a being perspective is overrepresented and (unconsciously) privileged in organisation studies in general as well as in the family business literature. For that reason, I think it is timely to acknowledge the becoming ontology and better understand what this perspective has to offer.

The table below provides a summary of the dimensions addressed above and presents the invitations that the dimensions hold for studying family meetings from a becoming perspective.
Table 3.1 A shift from a being to a becoming ontology along five dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From a being to a becoming ontology ...</th>
<th>... and the invitation for studying family meetings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From stable entities to entities as patterns of interactions ...</td>
<td>... invites us to approach family meetings as family members’ joint efforts to get together in a fluid world in such a way that it opens up for chaos and order, closings and openings, predictability and novel thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From detached individuality to relationality ...</td>
<td>... invites us to focus on the trans-individual, the ‘in-between’ as the guiding principle for understanding how social realities are formed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the principle of sameness to preparing for difference ...</td>
<td>... invites us to come close to the phenomenon at hand so that it becomes possible to recognise and explore the uniqueness in that particular situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From time as mechanical to time as experienced ...</td>
<td>... invites us to understand time from within the flow of experience. We can thereby open up a more dynamic view of time that also recognises the ceaseless elements of how time matters and is played out in everyday organisational worlds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From language as representational to language as performative ...</td>
<td>... invites us to remember that language in use is active, ongoing, ambiguous, novel and it does things; it is in language that family members go on doing their family work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When viewed together it is possible to note how interrelated the five dimensions are. They cannot be clearly separated and they need each other for a fuller understanding of the becoming perspective. One immediate implication of the becoming perspective that has thus far only been implicitly dealt with in this chapter is the need to overcome the unproductive dualisms prevalent in organisation studies: organisation and environment, subject and object, micro and macro, structure and process, self and other, past and future as well as, in the context of family business studies, family and business. Yet another dualism that is in need of further clarification is stability and change. As addressed...
Introducing becoming

previously in this chapter, process studies from a traditional being perspective most often approach organisations as stable entities that only move from time to time between periods of stability. From this view, the focus has been on how to make change happen and how organisational change develops from one state to another along separately existing steps or phases. That is one of the reasons why (‘weak’) process studies have traditionally focused on understanding change in organisations. In these types of studies, the key concern is first to understand how those steps or phases of change can be initiated and managed in an (externally forced) intervention (by some change agent) and second how the entity (e.g. the organisation, the manager) ‘comes out’ and is restabilised after a period of change. Hence, those studies rest on the assumption that process is something that can be studied and measured in linear, discrete and sequential ways. Therefore, “when it tries to theorize ‘process’ it treats the latter as an already determined ‘state’” (Chia, 1995:600). Furthermore, these studies tend to either ignore the role of language or treat language from a representative view in which language in use is reduced to a tool for managers when they are pushing the organisation from one phase to another (Anderson, 2005). However, from a becoming perspective, which holds that entities are continuously in transformation and never accomplished in a final stage, the whole logic turns upside down with the implication that forces of stabilisation also needs to be focused on (Chia & Tsoukas, 2003; Hernes, 2008). To not only focus on how to bring about change but also to understand stabilising movements helps to dismantle the unfortunate but well-established misconception that processes of change and stability are dichotomies and rather embrace them as constitutive of each other.

Relationality is helpful in this respect. Since relationality acknowledges the mutually constituting relationship between ‘things’ and the insight that everything exists in relation to other ‘things’, it transcends dualism thinking. In other words, the idea that ‘part’ and ‘whole’ constitute each other in an intertwined way leads to the conclusion that there cannot be any clear-cut division between singular or plural, individual or group, you and me. Additionally, the recognition of difference calls for appreciations of how these seemingly oppositional forces contribute to the richness of everyday life rather than reducing them to something that is either/or. Time as experienced underlines how this happens in the flow of the processes of becoming. Moreover, the view suggested here in which language in use is understood as performative illustrates why language is not a mere tool but rather the means itself by which organisational realities are constructed (Anderson, 2005).

To think beyond dualisms calls for research practices that are sensitive to multiplicity, such as organisational order and surprise, and how the tensions between these forces are played out. For us to get to grips with how these processes unfold there is also a need for a process perspective that is instructive for understanding the ‘microscopic’ processes of becoming (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). In the next chapter, I will continue to develop such a perspective by

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drawing on Bakhtin’s work of life and existence as dialogic in nature. As we will see, his work is of great importance since it focuses on how processes of becoming evolve in an unfinalisable dialogic interplay between centripetal and centrifugal forces. It thereby has the possibility of developing a more distinct perspective on becoming as well as putting some more flesh on the bones in terms of understanding processes of becoming as they unfold in mundane organisational life.
4. Towards a dialogical becoming perspective

The previous chapter introduced a shift from a being to a becoming ontology and outlined what such a shift implies for the study of family meetings. In making this shift, I pointed out the need to approach organisational life in such a way that it allows a move beyond the focus on discrete entities and methodological individualism, to challenge the habit of unthinkingly searching for regularities, to complement the chronological understanding of time and to stop treating language in use as a representative medium. This is, to say the least, a challenging quest.

In this chapter, I will continue to develop the becoming perspective by offering an answer to the question ‘What happens if I approach the becoming ontology from a dialogic point of view?’. What will soon be noticed, thanks to the impressive heritage of Bakhtin’s scholarly work on dialogue, is how that allows for a more detailed understanding of the five dimensions introduced in the preceding chapter and how that can contribute to an in-depth understanding of how ‘microscopic’ (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002) processes of becoming evolve.

Why Bakhtin? When I came across the becoming perspective in organisation studies, I found it helpful in pointing out a direction of where I wanted to go in my studies. Even so, I lacked the more micro-oriented foundation that can unpack the detailed aspects of how processes of becoming unfold. In my search for processual alternatives, it was when reading Cunliffe’s (e.g. 2001, 2002), Shotter’s (e.g. 2008a, 2008b) as well as their joint (Shotter and Cunliffe, 2003) thought-provoking work that my curiosity for Bakhtin was aroused. In the field of organisation studies, they have drawn on Bakhtin in texts about philosophy, research practices, leadership, management and learning. To me, they opened up a distinctive way of understanding how social life comes into being when people relate to and interact with each other.

In addition, other scholars have contributed to the organisational literature from a Bakhtinian perspective. Among other topics, knowledge creation (Tsoukas, 2009), identity (Jabri, 2004), entrepreneurial processes (Steyaert, 2004), the polyphonic organisation (Hazen, 1993), dialogue in organisations (Gergen, Gergen & Barrett, 2004) and organisational change (Anderson, 2005) have been addressed10. In addition to those, others have made direct connections between the micro-processes of becoming and Bakhtin (e.g. Boutaiba, 2004; Carlsen, 2006). Further, in their text “The inspiration for

10 Other references can be found in the special issue on Bakhtin in Organization Studies 2008 (Belova, King & Sliwa, 2008).
process organization studies”, Langley and Tsoukas (2010:3) bring forward Bakhtin’s work on dialogue.

Inspired by this literature, as well as Bakhtinian literature from other fields such as communication, education and family therapy, I11 decided to stay focused on Bakhtin’s work to see how it can contribute to a more distinct understanding of becoming.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline and offer a first introduction to some of Bakhtin’s work on dialogue and explore how this contributes to a becoming perspective. At the same time, the chapter should primarily be looked upon as my first invitation to this perspective, where the basics will be laid out, since I will continue to explore this perspective in the chapters to come.

The chapter is organised as follows. It begins with a short discussion of various meanings of dialogue and a positioning of dialogue in this study. I thereafter move on to introduce some of Bakhtin’s key notions. That will be followed by an elaboration on the five dimensions introduced in the previous chapter and a discussion of how Bakhtin’s notions contribute to a greater understanding of these dimensions.

**Positioning dialogue in this thesis**

In an etymological reading, dialogue comes from the Greek word *dialogos*. *Diá* is related to ‘inter’, ‘through’ and ‘across’ and *légein* means ‘to deliberate’ as well as ‘to assemble’ or ‘speak’. Hence, the origin of dialogue reminds us that ‘dialogue’ is not an abstract thing, but a process and a social practice (Linell, 2009).

In his extensive book about dialogue research, Linell (2009) brings up the myriads of meanings often connected with the word ‘dialogue’ and suggests three senses of dialogue. In this categorisation, the first and most down-to-earth meaning is the simply observable, direct encounter between two or more individuals. He refers to this kind of face-to-face interaction as an empirical or externalist sense of dialogue. Although this understanding may be useful in everyday talk, it is not sufficient for me here since it gives a too limited view of dialogue.

Another sense of dialogue, which is also often referred to in everyday life, is a normative take on dialogue, where dialogue is some kind of ‘true’ or ‘ideal’ kind of interaction between speaking subjects. The problem with this take on dialogue is that while it stresses “clarity, symmetry, egalitarianism, mutuality, harmony, empathy, openness, consensus, and agreement”, it simultaneously

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11 It was noted earlier that the field of family therapy has much to offer the family business literature (e.g. Handler, 1994). Since this dissertation is written from the perspective of the owner family, I clearly see a point in widening my reading to encompass family therapy literature that draws on Bakhtin’s work. John Shotter, who is one of the scholars I read extensively, has published in both the field of organisation studies and family therapy.
leaves aside the other side of the coin, such as “power, domination, the struggle for social recognition, concealment (non-disclosure), as well as conflicting interests, opposition, misunderstandings, fragmentation and negotiation of meaning” (Linell, 2009:5). Therefore, the normative sense of dialogue is too one-sided to be appropriate for me here.

In the third sense, the abstract sense, dialogue is referred to in a more comprehensive way. The third sense, represented by, among others, Bakhtin, sees “existence as dialogue” (Holquist, 2002:14) and includes all kinds of “human sense-making, semiotic practice, action, interaction, thinking or communication, as long as these phenomena are ‘dialogically’ understood” (Linell, 2009:5). In this third sense, which is the basis of understanding that I take off from in this dissertation, dialogue is about a meta-theoretical, ontological framework that addresses human thinking, being and sense-making in general.

In another categorisation, and positioning of Bakhtin’s work vis-à-vis other dialogue scholars, it has been suggested that literature on dialogue can be broadly grouped into two schools, the prescriptive approach and the process approach (Jabri, 2004). Although the prescriptive approach, mainly influenced by scholars such as Bohm and Buber, concentrates on the methodology and epistemology of dialogue, the process school, represented by, among others, Bakhtin, asserts the ontological and linguistic aspects of dialogue (Jabri, 2004). Hence, while the prescriptive school sees dialogue as a technique to consciously make use of in conversations (corresponding to sense two in the categorisation above), Bakhtin sees dialogue as something embedded in people through language. Discussing the differences between these two perspectives, Stewart and Zediker (2000:227) argue that the prescriptive approach treats dialogue “as an ideal to be striven toward or a goal to be achieved as an outcome of considered and ethically-freighted choices [...] rather than just acknowledging the already-given ‘dialogic’ nature of human reality”. This is in sharp contrast to the process approach, in which life is understood as inherently dialogic and “grounded in a dialogic ontology that is a description of the universal human condition as relational” (Stewart & Zediker, 2000:226).

Likewise, when Cunliffe (2002:129) discusses the differences between what she calls ‘language as epistemology’ and ‘language as ontology’, she suggests that in the former scholars assume that language is an empirical phenomenon and thereby “something to be studied that helps us decipher already-made significations and relatively fixed meanings”. Hence, language is used as a method where discourse analysis, conversational analysis and narrative analysis are used to study language structures to explain the world. This can be contrasted with language as ontology where it is in language, in the conversations themselves, that social worlds are created as “language plays through us, as words, sounds, rhythm, and gestures evoke verbal and emotional responses” (Cunliffe, 2002:129). My stance in this dissertation is to embrace language as process, or, in the words of Cunliffe (2002), as ontology.
Bakhtin and dialogue

The Russian scholar Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, who lived between 1895 and 1975, has proven to be one of the major thinkers of the 20th century (Clark & Holquist, 1984). His scholarly heritage is impressively wide in scope and encompasses “linguistics, psychoanalysis, theology, social theory, historical poetics, axiology, and philosophy of the person” (Clark & Holquist, 1984: preface). But how did he look upon his own contribution? When as an old man he looked back upon his work, he wrote:

[O]ur analysis must be called philosophical mainly because of what it is not: it is not a linguistic, philological, literary or any other particular kind of analysis.... On the one hand, a positive feature of our study is this: [it moves] in spheres that are liminal, i.e., on the borders of all the aforementioned disciplines, at their junctures and points of intersection (Bakhtin, in *Estetika*, as cited in Holquist (2002:14).

Just as Bakhtin’s philosophical endeavour transcends boundaries between traditional disciplines, his philosophy of dialogue is also difficult to get hold of and impossible to package and define in a straightforward way. He uses the notion of dialogue in many different ways and contexts. In the broadest sense, he sees dialogue as a “model of the world” (Morson & Emerson, 1990:49). Reading Dostoevsky’s novels, he claimed that dialogue is about relationships:

Dialogic relationships are a much broader phenomenon than mere rejoinders in a dialogue, laid out compositionally in the text; they are an almost universal phenomenon, permeating all human speech and all relationships and manifestations of human life – in general, everything that has meaning and significance (Bakhtin, 1984:40).

He further pointed out that as living human beings we cannot resist being in dialogue:

Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to hear, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium (Bakhtin, 1984:293).
Hence, we are our conversations, and dialogue is itself the starting point for our being in the world (Morson & Emerson, 1990). That is why it is inaccurate to say we are “entering into dialogue, as if the components that do so could exist in any other way” (Morson & Emerson, 1990:50). In this world-making process, dialogue is not an idealised and smooth output of a specific way of relating to each other. Rather, dialogue is an ongoing struggle in which utterances rub against each other in such a way that “[t]he word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgements and accents, weaves in an out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group” (Bakhtin, 1981:276). It is in these processes that becoming evolves. Bakhtin (1986) is especially interested in everyday dialogic processes, which he refers to as ‘real-life’, or prosaic, dialogues.

**Ongoing forces at play**

What has probably become clear by now is how, for Bakhtin, conversations are dialogic in nature (Barge & Little, 2002). He thereby keeps out of an idealised view of dialogue as a specific kind of conversation that can be described as an opposition to monologue (Rober, 2005). That is so, because in every conversation there is a dynamic tension between monologic and dialogic components. Thus, it is not a question of either monologue or dialogue; it is rather a simultaneous process of both. Bakhtin (1981) refers to these forces as centripetal and centrifugal. While centripetal forces move towards unity, closings and centralisation (and monologue), centrifugal forces move towards movement, openness and decentralisation (and dialogue). Since centripetal forces aim at centralising and unifying meaning, they are necessary for sharing social life. At the same time, the stratifying and fragmenting processes of the centrifugal forces incline towards multiplicity and fragmentation, which are needed for new perspectives to evolve. In every utterance of a speaking subject, these forces are at play against each other, creating the unique dialogic dynamics of this particular utterance (Bakhtin, 1981). Importantly, it is impossible for dialogue participants to be neutral to those forces, and the forces do not end up in an ultimate resolution or equilibrium. Steyaert (2004) uses the metaphor of language as a sea where the centripetal and centrifugal forces are like ebb and flow, creating the ongoing flux and movement in life. However, monologism at its extreme is to end the dialogue in that it turns the other into an object to which a response is neither expected nor possible (Bakhtin, 1984).

**To focus on utterances in a chain rather than sentences or words**

In his criticism of linguistic studies, Bakhtin (1986) argued that one shortcoming of these studies is the focus on separate words or sentences rather
than utterances in their unfolding. He regards this as problematic since the individual word or sentence is not connected to ‘the other’ or to the extra verbal context (situation, setting, history, previous utterances, speech genre at play), which thereby takes away all the relational and situational dynamics inherited in dialogue. When focusing on words or sentences,

[Language is regarded from the speaker’s standpoint as if there were only one speaker who does not have any necessary relation to other participants in speech communication. If the role of the other is taken into account at all, it is the role of a listener, who understands the speaker only passively (Bakhtin, 1986:67, emphasis in original).]

Since a Bakhtinian view of dialogue is truly relational, which holds that the listener too has an active role because all understanding is actively responsive in nature, where the speaker himself or herself expects a response to follow, the focus on words or sentences obviously becomes too limited. Thus, in studying real-life dialogue, it is utterances in their unfolding that one necessarily needs to pay attention to since that is what the addressee responds to. Additionally, the context and speech genre is already inherited in the utterance but not in singular words or sentences.

So, what is an utterance? In short, it is any unit of language and the “real unit of speech communication” (Bakhtin, 1986:71). It can be a word, a sentence or a long text; it can actually be silence. It can be spoken or written. Importantly, it is the basic building block of any dialogue. The utterance is bounded by the “change of speaking subjects, that is a change of speakers” (Bakhtin, 1986:71). Thus, an utterance has a beginning that is marked by the preceded utterance of another and an ending that is marked by the listener’s response to the utterance. In this way, an utterance ends when the speaker makes room for an active responsive understanding to be developed. This is why a response does not necessarily need to be in the form of spoken words; it can well be silence or something else that passes as an appropriate response in the dialogic moment.

Another essential dimension of utterances is that they are performed in a specific situation, expressed from a specific point of view, addressed to a specific other, and with an inherent intention (Jabri, 2004). Bakhtin (1986) says every utterance is chronotopic in nature, which means that it is located in a unique time and space. What is important in this take on the chronotope is that it insists on time and space as inseparable, simultaneous and always filled with value. That is, the understanding of a specific utterance is always understood from a specific position rooted in time-space, which means that understanding can never be value-free since it is understood from a specific point of view (Bakhtin, 1986).
When someone utters something, then that is in response towards previous utterances. At the same time there is always an expectation of a response to follow from one’s own utterance too. That is how our utterances are uttered towards a specific someone with an expectation of what is yet to come. Of course, there is not always an immediate response, but if the utterance is understood, sooner or later a response will follow. According to Bakhtin (1986:91) we cannot not respond and that is why “[u]tterances are not indifferent to one another, and are not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another [...]”. The term ‘utterance chain’ is used to give account for how any “utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances” (Bakhtin, 1986:69).

**Voice**

To Bakhtin, utterances are inseparable from the voices that utter them and voicing is more than a vocal flow of words. Voice has to do with the speaking subject’s personality; the speaker’s consciousness as it comes through in the utterance. That is why a voice has a will or desire, since it can be nothing like an empty voice:

> The definition of voice. This includes height, range, timbre, aesthetic category (lyric, dramatic, etc.). It also includes a person’s worldview and fate. A person enters into dialogue as an integral voice. He participates in it not only with his thoughts, but with his fate and with his entire individuality (Bakhtin, 1984:293).

At the same time, “there are no voiceless words that belong to no one” (Bakhtin, 1986:124) because,

> [w]hen a member of a speaking collective comes upon a word, it is not as a neutral word of language, not as a word free from the aspirations and evaluations of others, uninhabited by others’ voices. No, he receives the word from another’s voice and filled with that other voice. The word enters his context from another context, permeated with the interpretations of others. His own thought finds the word already inhabited (Bakhtin, 1984:202).

One of the cornerstones of Bakhtin’s thinking is the idea that every human occupies a specific time-space position. This position is unique and cannot be totally shared with someone else. A voice, then, is always voiced from a specific body in a specific time-space. When someone is uttering something, he or she is filling his or her language with life and meaning, both with the words used and, importantly, also with his or her way of speaking in terms of intonation, tone of voice, rhythm and so on (Linell, 2009). In this way, our voice is a means...
to reach out beyond our physical body in such a way that others as well as we can hear our own voice. Another characteristic of voice, in contrast to visual possibilities, is the capacity to be heard in the dark and through closed doors (Linell, 2009).

Bakhtin also noted how dialogues are polyphonic in nature. He explored this notion in reading Dostoyevsky, where he found that the author allowed for a multiplicity of voices in his novels. That is, how different voices – different consciousneses – come through in dialogic interplay. What is important in this respect is that voice, in the sense of uttering a perspective, is not a one-to-one correspondence between person and voice, since “one perspective can be voiced by many persons, and one person can house several perspectives” (Linell, 2009:117).

**Dialogic meaning-making and the creation of once-occurring events**

According to Shotter (2010), the basis of Bakhtin’s dialogism is that when two or more people meet in a dialogical moment, something unique is created; a collective life with its own voice pointing towards the future in its own, distinctive way. The understanding of what is happening at this moment is a process in which the addressee and the addressee are involved. Thus, the meaning-making process is a joint effort in which the meaning of what the speaker just said is shaped by the intention of the speaker as well as the response from the listener (Rober, 2005). Emphasising the active stance not only of the speaker but also of the listener distinguishes Bakhtin’s relational/responsive view of language from the traditional referential/representational way of understanding language (Shotter, 2008a). The break with the representational view is important in that it underlines that the other (the listener) is not duplicating the intention offered by the speaker. That is not possible, since the core of the other is that he or she can never be in the same time-space that I occupy. Therefore, he or she will always see (feel, know, understand) something that to some degree differs from what I think, feel, know. The difference – the surplus of seeing – is a prerequisite for dialogic encounters to evolve. In the offering of difference to each other, the meaning of a word uttered is shaped by the intention of the speaker and the understanding of the listener from their unique positions (Rober, 2005). In this way, the meaning of an uttered word is not predefined by the speaker and neither is meaning-making a mental process taking place entirely in the head of the listener, but rather a dialogic process taking place in the space between speaking subjects. Thus, meaning-making is a joint process by the one and the other in the unfolding of utterances where “the word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant” (Clark & Holquist 1984:15). Bakhtin (1981:428) also coined the notion of heteroglossia, which means that in “any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of
conditions – social, historical, meteorological, physiological – that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions”. In short, this is how the greater contextual atmosphere influences the process of meaning-making. Since every utterance is heteroglot in nature, which means that it has its unique combination of forces at play at that time-place, this becomes a combination that is impossible to recoup. That is why the meaning-making process involved in the development of a dialogic understanding creates something unique, something that has never before been, and never will be in the future, exactly the same. Consequently, it is not possible to repeat a dialogue. As Rober (2005) notes, how bizarre it might sound, even an exact (in terms of words uttered) repetition of a dialogue would be something new and thereby different. This helps us see why processes of becoming are always novel and unique.

A multitude of possible meanings, but not in any arbitrary direction

Bakhtin (1984) noticed how utterances are linked together in a polyphonic manner. These many voices contribute to the multitude of possible meanings in that these voices are not “fitted harmoniously or systematically and integrated into some kind of neatly whole, but rather combined but not merged, in the unity of the event” (Shotter, 2008b:516). However, just as dialogic interaction has the possibility to develop many meanings, that does not always happen. For instance, in organisational literature the notion of polyphony has been used for theorising about power relations at play, where some voices may pass by unrecognised or silenced by a dominant discourse (Kornberger, Clegg & Carter, 2006). Additionally, it is not possible for a dialogue to go in any arbitrary direction since it not possible to utter just anything. In every dialogic situation, a specific speech genre is always at play. Speech genres are enormously heterogeneous (for instance, from everyday single-word rejoinders to a multivolume novel); they are relatively stable and give directions about what is possible to utter and how to interpret the offered utterances. This is so because human life is shaped, a shaping that is ritualistic in nature (Bakhtin, 1986).

To remember embracing not only what is, but also what might become

Reading Bakhtin opens up for a distinct way to embrace future-looking instances of processes in becoming. While existing organisation and management studies employing a (weak) process perspective usually emphasise the importance of recognising the past when understanding the present (which is also of great significance to Bakhtin), they have not satisfactorily dealt with
how the present is also in continuous interplay with that which is not yet; how the expectations of what is yet to come are ingrained in processes of becoming.

I would especially like to point at the recognition of dialogic processes as unfinalisable for this matter. The unfinalisable aspect of dialogue underlines Bakhtin’s (1986) conviction that the world is open – it is still in becoming. This conviction originates from the recognition that all utterances are a response to what others have said, just as we expect them to respond, since “[a]ny speaker is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree. He is not, after all, the first speaker to disturb the eternal silence of the universe. […] Any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances” (Bakhtin, 1986:68-69). In other words, we never speak and act in a vacuum. Therefore, in every utterance, there is a connection to past utterances and simultaneously an expectation of what is yet to be said. Bakhtin (1986:69) argues that an utterance is not always followed by an immediate response, but sooner or later “what is heard and actively understood will find its response in the subsequent speech or behaviour of the listener”. In this way, the dialogue is unfinalisable:

The word in living conversations is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer’s direction. Forming itself in the atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation in any living dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981:280).

That said, a dialogue is a continuously connected process of responding utterances where processes of becoming are simultaneously inherited from the past but at the same time already orientated towards the future in the expectations of the responses yet to come, because

[n]othing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future (Bakhtin, 1984:166).

This orientation makes it possible, and needed, to go beyond asking ‘what is’ to also envision ‘what might become’. One interesting work in this vein is Anderson’s (2005) study of business meetings, where he found how social practices are tried out in dialogue. He recognised how it is possible for people to talk as if they already were in the future, which makes it possible to hypothetically ‘taste’ what a change in a practice would mean. This way of talking, as if a practice were already different, opens up for conversations about the pros and cons of a proposed change. Anderson’s (2005) study shows that
Towards a dialogical becoming perspective

once we are in language it is possible to talk fluently about what has been, what is and what is yet to come.

To emphasise the future was important also for Carlsen (2006), who coined the perspective ‘dialogic imagination of practice’. According to him, an “imagination of practice is a dialogue between the present of the past and the present of the future. It is a polyphonic process, taking place between a diverse set of stakeholders” (Carlsen, 2006:145). This outlook on becoming processes forces me to approach the study of family meetings differently from much of what I have seen in current literature. It calls for awareness not only for how the present work of family members is related to their previous activities and relations but also, in some way or another, to try to embrace the forward-looking element of processes in becoming. As expressed by Chia and Holt (2009:127), “[i]nvestigating social phenomena in terms of future potential rather than just retrospectively ascribing truth values carries with it a vastly different research orientation and agenda”. And, they continue, this does not mean to make investigations along linear extensions to be measured entirely in clock time; rather, it is about a research orientation where “the future and past are felt in the unfurling present” (Chia & Holt, 2009:132). Ideas for what such a research orientation might look like will be further discussed in the final part of the thesis (see Chapter 12).

The five dimensions viewed together

How can this short introduction to Bakhtin’s work on dialogue contribute to the shift from being to becoming ontology in the study of family meetings? This will now be further elaborated upon along the five dimensions introduced in the preceding chapter (see Table 4.1 for a summary).

The first shift called for, from stable entities to entities as patterns of interactions, invites scholars to think about enterprising families’ organising activities as their joint efforts to shape order, redirect and stabilise in a fluid world. A Bakhtinian reading suggests that these organising activities take place in the ongoing centripetal and centrifugal forces at play. Interestingly, it is in the dialogic meeting between these forces, not in the sense of a dialectical ‘either/or’ but rather as an ongoing struggle of ‘both/and’, that social life is played out. Thus, the Bakhtinian perspective encourages us to delve into, rather than reduce, the complexity at hand in studying dialogic processes as simultaneous struggles of centripetal and centrifugal forces at work.

The second dimension suggested a switch from detached individuality to relationality. That switch invites us to focus on the ‘transindividual’; the ‘in-between’, for a better understanding of how organisational life takes place. From a dialogic point of view, the focus on the ‘in-between’ asks us to recognise utterances in their unfolding rather than individual sentences or words, because that is helpful for getting closer to the social and relational
character of social life. It also calls for exploring living dialogue in detail while at the same time taking the ‘whole’ (setting, time-space, speech genre) into consideration.

In the third dimension, a turn from the principle of sameness to preparing for difference is suggested. This is a turn that invites us to come close to the phenomenon under study to be able to explore the uniqueness in each situation. To Bakhtin (1993), one of the foundations in dialogism is that speaking subjects are always ‘other’ to each other, which makes us experience the world differently because we have what he calls ‘the gift of otherness’. In dialogic encounters, we offer those differences to each other. That said, one way to recognise differences, novelty and uniqueness is to pay attention to the polyphonic (multivoiced) interplay in organisational life and how otherness is offered to one another.

The fourth dimension, from time as mechanical to time as experienced, invites us to understand time from within the flow of lived experience. That is a way to complement chronological timing with the lived experiences of time, thereby opening up a more dynamic understanding of time. This is a key factor for Bakhtin. According to him, people always act from their unique chronotopes, the simultaneous and inseparable time-spaces, which makes us experience and make meaning of what is going on in unique ways.

Lastly, the turn from language as representational to language as performative brings attention to the world-making nature of language. This dimension, obviously, has many connections to Bakhtin’s work. His work underlines that dialogue, and thereby the processes of becoming, are unfinalisable and polyphonic, consisting of a multitude of voices simultaneously in action (Bakhtin, 1984). Consequently, the shaping forces in language are multiple and ongoing even though some voices are usually more authoritative and recognised, while others are more marginalised.
### Table 4.1. A shift from a being to a becoming ontology along five dimensions and the contribution of Bakhtin’s notions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From a being to a becoming ontology ...</th>
<th>... and the invitation for studying family meetings</th>
<th>How Bakhtin’s notions can contribute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From stable entities to entities as patterns of interactions ...</td>
<td>... invites us to approach family meetings as family members’ joint efforts to get together in a fluid world in such a way that it opens up for chaos and order, closings and openings, predictability and novel thinking.</td>
<td>The centripetal and centrifugal forces, as they are played out in dialogue, are fundamental for creating this dynamic movement in family conversations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From detached individuality to relationality ...</td>
<td>... invites us to focus on the trans-individual, the ‘in-between’ as the guiding principle for understanding how social realities are formed.</td>
<td>People communicate with utterances. Hence, a focus on utterance chains in their unfolding, rather than sentences or words, is helpful for grasping the in-between as people exchange utterances with each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the principle of sameness to preparing for difference ...</td>
<td>... invites us to come close to the phenomenon at hand so that it becomes possible to recognise and explore the uniqueness in that particular situation.</td>
<td>We are always ‘other’ and different to each other. In dialogic encounters our ‘gift of otherness’ (our difference) can be offered to one another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From time as mechanical to time as experienced ...</td>
<td>... invites us to understand time from within the flow of experience. We can thereby open up a more dynamic view of time that also recognises the ceaseless elements of how time matters and is played out in everyday organisational worlds.</td>
<td>Everyone always acts from their unique chronotopes, the simultaneous and inseparable time-spaces, which makes us experience and make meaning of what is going on from a specific point of view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From language as representational to language as performative ...</td>
<td>... invites us to remember that language in use is active, ongoing, ambiguous, novel and it does things; it is in language that family members go on doing their family work.</td>
<td>Life is dialogic where dialogic meaning-making is relational, unfinalisable and polyphonic; consisting of a multitude of voices simultaneously in action.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I noted in the previous chapter how these five dimensions together call for a move beyond unproductive dualisms prevalent in organisation studies, such as stability and change. I also underlined that the one-sided focus on how to bring about change in organisations needs to be complemented with an understanding of how it is possible to create a feeling of a temporary stabilisation in a moving world. The dialogical becoming perspective is helpful in this respect. In the elaboration of the five dimensions above, it is possible to notice how stabilisation processes can take place in dialogic encounters between people. Hence, it is in conversations that a feeling of a stabilised state, for instance through the naming of entities such as ‘family’ or ‘organisation’, can develop. It is further possible to note how order, or ‘wholeness’, always needs to be worked on since there are so many strong centrifugal forces that want to tear apart, or create chaos, that ordering can never be complete and it does not happen by itself; it requires work. Ordering is thereby a project that is “always ongoing and ever unfinished; and it is always opposed to the essential messiness of the world” (Morson & Emerson, 1990:139). At the same time, we have to take it for what it is – “an attempt to create order by positing it” (Morson & Emerson, 1990:140). Hence, absolute order can never be an actual factum; it is an ideal. That is why all kinds of abstract logics and theories by which the social world is neatly put in boxes can never be anything less than superficial because order/disorder is an ongoing process in a ceaseless activity, an enormous energy, which is constantly in the process of being produced by the very forces that it drives. This energy may be conceived as a force field created by the ceaseless struggle between centrifugal forces, which strive to keep things various, separate, apart, different from each other, and centripetal forces, which strive to keep things together, unified, same (Clark & Holquist, 1984:7).

This means that the dialogic processes in which the stabilising efforts are played out consist of ongoing, polyphonic and unfinalisable centripetal and centrifugal forces that will continuously push the dialogue in various directions driving towards stabilisation and destabilisation. That is why these forces will never reach some kind of stabilised state, equilibrium or final resolution.

There is, of course, much more that could be said about Bakhtin’s thinking in regard to the processes of becoming. In the following chapters, I will move on to the field study and discuss what can be learnt from two enterprising families’ work in different family meeting practices. In so doing, I will go into more detail about some of the notions introduced here but also bring in related notions that I find crucial for a better understanding of how a dialogic becoming perspective can contribute to a processual understanding of meeting practices.
Part II: Family meetings in practice
5. A brief note on the field study

Continuing from the first part of the dissertation where I discussed the main perspective – a dialogic becoming perspective – this second part will turn to the world of practice in two owner families. The aim of this chapter is to offer a brief overview of how the field studied developed over time, in three phases. Since I engaged in different ways with the families in the different phases, the more detailed practicalities of what research practices were employed and how I have worked with the field study material will be further discussed in the chapters to come.

Three phases of fieldwork

Since the first day of my doctoral programme, I knew I wanted to study a phenomenon that is of relevance and makes sense to practitioners, to those connected with my study. I furthermore knew I wanted to engage in a collaboratively oriented, in-depth field study with close connections to the people with whom I carry out the study. This had certain implications for how the field study developed. In Figure 5.1, you can see how the fieldwork emerged in three interconnected phases.

![Diagram of three phases of fieldwork]

Figure 5.1 Three phases of fieldwork.
To find a relevant and interesting area of study I began broadly in the first phase that started in early 2006. At that time, I knew I wanted to conduct a dissertation in the area of communication among family members in the owner family. This was an area that I had been acquainted with earlier in another study about continuously growing firms (led by Leif Melin, my supervisor) where I was given the opportunity to interview various owners and managers of Swedish firms that had grown over an extended period of time. Several of those companies were family-owned and some of the people I met spoke about the importance of communication in the owner family. In that study, I also learned about family meetings. However, I did not know exactly what to focus on and how to tackle the area of interest. I therefore started with an orientation study in which I reviewed different kinds of literature about family meetings: academic articles, newspaper articles, business magazines as well as how-to books targeted at those working in or with family businesses. In addition, I contacted family members involved in businesses that I knew worked with family meetings. Since there is no record of enterprising families working in this way, I asked the people I interviewed if they knew about other people I could contact. I interviewed people from eight different family businesses where we talked about their family and business history, their situations as owner families, family communication and family meetings. The people I spoke to were both members of the owner family and active in the business. Even though these interviews are not included in a traditional analysis in this text they have been most useful to me, mainly because the conversations gave me a sense of understanding the challenges and possibilities that family members experience in their family meeting work. Thus they gave an indication of what kinds of issues could be worth looking more closely at. Additionally, through the interviews, I met with families that I could remain in contact with for the continuation of the study.

In the second phase, the field study continued with a more in-depth focus on the work in the Stenson family. The contact with this family began with the pre-study, in which I interviewed Rosie Stenson, one of the driving forces in their family work. I first contacted them after hearing from others that they have an elaborate and committed way of working with family meetings. Moreover, they have valuable experiences to share in regard to working with different family meeting practices over an extended period of time. In terms of research practices, I primarily relied on interviews supplemented by studying documents such as books, films, annual reports and articles written about them.

In the third phase, I met with the Philipsson family. I interviewed Judith Philipsson in the research project about continuously growing firms mentioned above, and when I heard that they were about to start having family meetings I contacted them again. In this phase, I wanted to get closer to the family work and be let into their family meetings. Luckily, the collaboration with them offered me the possibility to closely study their first year of having family meetings. I would say that my participation in their meetings is the core of this
study even though we also met in interviews as well as other kinds of encounters.

Sensitive field study material

Before turning to the field study with the Stenson family, I would first like to address the issue of sensitive field study material. When I met with the family members, I sometimes felt that the encounters were deeply touching and that they dealt with sensitive issues. It may be the case that studying enterprising families is different compared with other contexts in organisation studies since this is simultaneously about family and work, the two spheres that are often the most important to us in life. This is something that Fletcher and Watson (2007:159) note in their ethnographic study of a family business where they were drawn “into immensely sensitive areas of the lives of the people studied. And it has produced material which could be equally sensitive in business terms”. It is, of course, important to make serious considerations about what to bring into the text and what to leave untouched when it comes to conversations that can be sensitive to the people involved. I have addressed this concern in three different ways. At the basic level, I have chosen to preserve the anonymity of both the people involved and their businesses. I have also changed what industry they operate in and their customer offerings. Those changes were made to protect the confidentiality of the families involved, both in private and in business. I have tried to make the changes in such a way that the dynamics that I have encountered would not be lost because of these changes. For instance, the base in the Philipsson family firm is a business with a long history in Sweden. In making them anonymous, I searched for another industry that has similar dynamics since that probably influences how they think and act in relation to their firm. Second, I have left out conversations that seemed relevant but too sensitive to put into the text. I do not want to risk people being hurt by what is said in the text. Third, the text about each family has been approved by them.

I will now turn to the two families directly. In so doing, the practicalities of what methods were employed, how I made sense of the field study material and how I wrote the field study accounts will also be addressed.
6. Introducing the Stenson family

The Stenson family owns one of the largest companies in the European market offering professional outdoor equipment for construction and landscaping. In this family, the second- and third-generation owners are searching for how they can change their roles from being involved in everyday operations and instead take on a role that they call 'active owners'. The family members are struggling with how they can act as active owners today and, simultaneously, what it will take them to do so tomorrow as well as in the more distant future. At the same time, in this forward-oriented work, they have one eye on the past, making sure their origin and the factors that made them successful are not lost.

During the ten years during which they have actively worked on these issues, they have developed different kinds of family meeting practices. Bertil, who is part of the family, CEO of the group and one of the majority owners, shares his view of why their family meeting practices are important to them:

> Otherwise, it would be pure luck if there happens to be only sound people that are not fighting too much. I mean, it can end up anywhere, like an organised society or anarchy, the Wild West. These are our institutions for managing the company (Bertil, 15 Jan 2008).

When I met with members of the Stenson family, they told me how they started to work with family meeting practices and their ideas for how to develop their ways of working in the future. In this chapter, I will describe how I met with them, what kinds of research practices were employed and how I worked with the field study material. That is followed by an account of how their meeting practices have evolved over time, focusing on how their family conversations are dialogically shaped by the speech genres at play in those meetings.

Meeting the family

As mentioned in the previous chapter, I first got to know the Stenson family through meeting Rosie Stenson in an interview in the orientation study. I contacted her because I had heard from others that the Stenson family was one of the pioneers in Sweden in terms of working with family meetings. During my first visit, Rosie explained how her parents had bought Torås in the early 1940s. She showed me its original buildings where it all started and we talked about how they managed the company and acted as active, responsible owners. Torås has today approximately 2,000 people employed and it has managed to
make this growth journey with a solid profit base. During a time of globalisation and low-price competition, the company has kept its head office as well as all production in Sweden. All this has been achieved with a strong belief that family involvement makes a difference. I was touched by what she said about how they work hard to keep growing, but also her passionate way of talking about the family and the business. Approximately six months later, I returned to her and asked if I could come back and learn more about their family work. She also gave me permission to contact other family members for interviews.

**Interviews, written material and company visits**

Over eighteen months, from January 2007 to June 2008, I interviewed family members active in the family work\(^\text{12, 13}\). In addition to these encounters, I met with two trusted advisors that have worked for the family for more than 30 years, one of them having the formal role as their auditor and financial advisor of the family and the other being their financial manager. Apart from one interview that took place at home, all the others took place at the Torås premises during office hours. Depending on whom I met, the topics of the conversations varied. With family members, I was interested in hearing more about their upbringings, their roles in the family and the business, their family meetings and other things that popped up during the interviews. Those encounters were recorded and I e-mailed a transcription of the interviews to each family member. Some of them responded and we discussed details of the conversations further.

Since the development and management of Torås is regarded a success in Sweden and the company has won many prizes for good leadership, product design, environmental work and more, there is much written about it in newspapers as well as the business press. In addition, the owners have produced two films, two books and a great deal of other material, which I read carefully. This material, piece by piece, together with the meetings with the people, gave me a more detailed understanding about what the family members value in their work as well as how they started to have family meetings and continuously developed their ways of working together. I also got a picture of what they envision for themselves and their business in the future.

**Creation of the field account**

The field account based on this study has evolved in an iterative process during which I met the people in the family, worked with the field study material and

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\(^{12}\) During this time, I was also on maternity leave for the second time during my dissertation project, when my second daughter was born in April 2007.

\(^{13}\) Please see Appendix 4 for a list of field study activities.
read literature. In the following I will briefly describe how this work has taken place.

**First phase of writing: becoming familiarised with the material**

When I had transcribed the recorded interviews I started to read and reread the interview accounts. I also read press articles and the company’s own material, which was helpful in the creation of a chronological account. I wanted to create a storyline of how their family work had developed over the ten-year period when they had worked with family meetings. However, I soon figured out that to understand that better I had to go back to when the family bought the firm in the early 1940s.

In addition to the chronological story, I organised the material according to different themes that seemed to be meaningful, because they were both themes that the family members talked about and themes that I was interested in. These themes were, for instance, family relations, family involvement, family competence, ownership structure and more. In looking back, I think this work largely helped me become acquainted with the field study material.

In this work, I created different kinds of case stories, trying out the material in various ways. I also wrote academic conference papers where parts of the account served as illustrations. These texts were checked for approval by Rosie and she responded with valuable feedback on the texts. I sent a report to my supervisor Leif Melin with three different field study accounts, three different interpretations of the family work in Torås. I remember that Leif responded that it was good that I had started to acquaint myself with the material, but he also recommended that I try to remain open to other ways of making sense of the material and not be too much in love with those first interpretations.

**Second phase of writing: finding a direction through reading Bakhtin**

Subsequently, I focused on other things in the dissertation project and the text rested in my drawer for more than a year. During this time, I worked with the literature-based framework discussed in the first part of this thesis, which changed my view of looking at things dramatically. When I returned to the chronological text, it was fascinating to note how it made sense to me in new ways. Inspired by the dialogical becoming perspective, I read the field study account as the family members’ ongoing hard work taking place in and through oppositional centripetal and centrifugal forces where one initiative could be interpreted as a reaction to something else and how that made their family work move forward. This made me rewrite the field account. Even though this rereading and rewriting of the account did not change the base of the chronological story, it guided what I saw and offered me a language to make use of in writing. For instance, having read that an utterance needs to be understood in its context of utterance chains, which means that an utterance is always in response to previous utterances, just as it also expects utterances to respond in the future (see Chapter 4), I consciously paid attention to how our
6 Introducing the Stenson family

conversations in the interviews unfolded. With that I mean that no statement (utterance) can be judged in isolation, but rather that I had to look for how the interview unfolded between the two of us. In this way, the recognition of the utterance chain drew attention to the importance of the already spoken as well as the yet unspoken.

To gain further inspiration and ideas for how I could continue developing the account, I read texts about the practice of performing field studies from a dialogic perspective. I found Baxter’s (2010) *contrapuntal analysis* helpful in its down-to-earth character. Among other things, the author brings up the distinction between *manifest* and *latent* themes in discourse. The difference between these two forms of discourse is that while “manifest themes sit on the surface of talk – what is said – latent themes rest below the surface, functioning as the underlying meaning that often sits implicit in words” (Baxter, 2010:158). What I found useful with this distinction is how it made me more sensitive to the unsaid in discourse. Before I read about this distinction, I had mostly paid attention to the latent discourse in my field study material through reading interview excerpts and so forth. Now I also tried to feel my way into the latent discourse, which is not as easy to get hold of. Baxter (2010:159) writes that she usually asks herself: “What does a listener need to know in order to render this textual segment intelligible? What sociocultural and interpersonal discourses need to be invoked to understand what this textual segment means?” This made me explicitly think of what it was that seemed to be taken for granted when I met with the Stenson family members that could be important for a better understanding of the embedded sociocultural heritage they bring with them in their family work. In particular, it is helpful to pay attention to people’s discussion of judgement, because that reflects the value-laden dimension of discourses, such as what the family members regard as good, bad, appropriate, inappropriate and so on; in short, their judgment of what is ‘normal’.

**Third phase of writing: making a speech genre interpretation of the account**

In reading Bakhtin’s work, it especially struck me how his elaboration of the *speech genre* made sense in relation to what I had encountered in the Stenson family. Therefore, I will draw extensively from this notion in the account in this chapter. Recognising speech genres can be helpful for understanding how conversations are always dialogically shaped from within by the speech genre at work. Speech genres are of special significance in that they are most often unnoticed but at the same time always present in the dialogic moment. In his essay entitled *The Problem of Speech Genres*, Bakhtin (1986:60) defines this notion as follows: “Each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is used develops its own *relatively stable types* of these utterances.

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These we may call *speech genres*” (emphasis in original). Thus this notion, in broad terms, is about how the dialogic encounter is always shaped by a specific speech genre enabling particular ways of relating to each other and particular ways of making sense of what is going on. For instance, when we go to the bank, do our everyday grocery shopping or say farewell to the family in the morning, all those situations take place within particular speech genres that are “filled with dialogic overtones” (Bakhtin, 1986:92). The speech genre thereby enables as well as constrains the dialogic processes in that it guides the speaker as well as the listener and governs the possibilities inherited in the dialogic moment. It should be emphasised that there is an infinite number of potential speech genres and a great heterogeneity in how they develop. I think the notion of the speech genre is of significance here since it seems that the Stenson family has developed different kinds of family meetings in which they relate to each other in different ways – perhaps because of different genres at work.

From everyday managers to active owners

Elsbeth was 23 years old and Peter 26 when they married in the countryside in northern Sweden in 1940. They shared a dream of making a living on a small business where they could work and live together. Since Peter was a technician and Elsbeth had a talent for administrative tasks, they looked for a small workshop to buy. In 1941, a newspaper ad announced that Torås was for sale. The owner had gone bankrupt and had to sell his business. Torås was both larger and more expensive than they had originally planned. At the same time, the factory was only a few years old and it had some customer orders in stock. Thanks to their parents who acted as primary obligors, they received a bank loan and were able to buy the firm. They invested their own savings into production material. When the deal had been agreed, they had bank loans and no savings, but they also had their own business.

Luckily, Elsbeth and Peter found a small flat right next to the workshop that they could rent. It was a one-bedroom flat that served as their home as well as their office. The year after, in 1942, Bertil was born. His younger brother, Georg came two years later. Since Elsbeth needed to combine her administrative work with the family and household duties, she mainly worked from home. However, whenever she could, she helped out in the workshop. They worked long hours, seven days a week. Peter mainly worked with the outdoor products they manufactured, but he was also the salesman. Since they did not have a car, he made the purchasing and sales trips via bike or train. From time to time, Peter had to leave the family and serve in the army. The financial situation was often tough and Elsbeth made clothes to earn extra money.

They initially produced and sold various kinds of outdoor products to private as well as corporate clients. However, in 1945, four years after they had
bought Torås, they had a breakthrough and earned recognition when they won a prestigious order to produce professional outdoor equipment for the Swedish government. This order had a significant influence on the direction of the business since it made them take the decision to sell to business customers only, leaving the consumer market aside. As a result of this order and the decision they made, they also decided to invest in a more efficient production facility for such an undertaking.

Over the years, Torås grew gradually through investments in new plants and factory buildings, which allowed them to increase the production capacity and sell to customers throughout Sweden. In addition, Peter wanted to expand to markets abroad. Beginning in the 1960s, he went to the UK and Germany for exhibitions and sales trips. Those endeavours did not pay off at that point in time, but it gave them experience and contacts to continue working with. In that time, Elsbeth and Peter had five children: Bertil, Georg, Marie-Louise, Tomas and Rosie.

The three brothers explained how they, apart from breaks for studies, have always worked in the firm. I asked Bertil how that came about:

Oh my goodness. We have been under such pressure. You could say it has been like a guerrilla operation. We faced such pressure that we had to go into this, the whole family, trying to make it work. We were fighting for life, having this entire business to take

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15 This figure is also in Appendix 5.
off. That is why we all came together in a mustering of strength. To make it work. That is how it started and nobody ever thought of breaking such a promise. You don’t do that (Bertil, 18 Jan 2008).

Georg says he “was born into it”. They helped out with whatever was most needed in the business:

It was such a small business from the beginning. The three of us brothers, without really knowing what we did, we helped out wherever most needed. That was way before we had any kind of clear organisation. Everybody helped out with what was needed (Georg, 15 Jan 2008).

As Georg remembers, his sisters did not like the constant talk about Torås in the family. Marie-Louise’s husband, Erik, explains why he thinks she chose to eventually become a medical doctor:

Marie-Louise did not like these tough discussions [about Torås]. She did not think it was worth it. At the same time, her mother supported her if she wanted to study for another profession (Erik, 16 Oct 2007).

Rosie, the youngest sibling, was too young to make a decision about working or not in the business at that point in time.

**Commentary – a joint attempt at order in a world of flow**

This short summary illustrates how the family members worked hard when they created the foundation of their company. Bertil’s comments that they were under such pressure that everyone fought as best they could together with Georg’s remark that the family members did not really have a set position but rather worked wherever needed show that, in fighting against the centrifugal forces (forces of openness, fluidity and heterogeneity), the family members worked almost as one unit. Their way of working resonates with Tsoukas and Chia’s (2002:567) finding that the effort to create an organisational entity can be understood as stabilising efforts in “an attempt to order the intrinsic flux of human action, to channel it towards certain ends, to give it a particular shape, through generalizing and institutionalizing particular meanings and rules”.

It is possible to note how the parents and brothers are truly in this together. Without the need for an organisational chart, everyone helped out with what was mostly needed. As has been acknowledged in current family business studies, the close relationships between family members can contribute to a specific kind of ‘family social capital’ (Salvato & Melin, 2008) that is unique for
this kind of organisation. The start of Torås seems to be an illustration of how social capital can work in practice.

In acting out of their close relationship, it becomes possible to let one activity unfold into another depending on their current need. This is further illustrated by Georg who says, “without really knowing what we did, we helped out wherever most needed”. Hence, from the very start they moved forward step by step in an emergent approach. This reminds me of Chia and Holt’s (2009:9) finding “that strategic success may very well be an indirect and unintended outcome of everyday coping actions and embedded local opportunistism”.

During the inception of Torås, it is possible to further notice the performative force of the daily family conversations that moved the family members in different directions. The house where the family lived was located in the factory area, and Elsbeth had her office at home. Thus, the children were literally born into the business, and the lively conversations about Torås were ongoing in their mundane family life. I understand it as a flow of conversations where there is no or little separation between family and business. Among the siblings, it seems as if the brothers saw no other way than moving into the business. This is different from Marie-Louise who did not appreciate the ‘factory talk’ and wanted to get away from it. As it seems, her mother’s support was influential for how her direction took off.

Ownership and management successions

When Elsbeth came down to make breakfast on a Saturday morning in 1972, she had lost her ability to speak. They immediately took her to hospital and it turned out she had suffered a stroke. For more than 30 years, Peter and Elsbeth had jointly raised the family and developed the business. Discussions about succession had been going on for a while and they now realised it was time to pass down ownership and management to the next generation. They decided to give the shares to the three brothers, and the two sisters were bought out from the firm. Bertil was appointed CEO, and the family continued to have a strong everyday presence in the business; Elsbeth and Bertil were still working and all three brothers had management positions at Torås. Tage, who worked as the financial director in the business at that point in time, remembers:

After Elsbeth had her stroke she continued to work in the business. Among other things, she handled all the mail. In this way, she had good control of what was going on and she could write a message on an incoming invoice such as ‘is this really necessary?’ (Tage, 16 May 2008).

In his new role as the head of the family business, Bertil continued along the path that his parents had embarked on. He focused on cost-efficient
production where everything produced was based on a specific client order. He and Georg worked closely in product development and on production efficiency. Tomas continuously developed their IT systems. Since they wanted customised data programs to support their logistics, he often had to develop the systems himself. Peter continued with market activities and Elsbeth with the administrative tasks that she could still handle.

During this time, international expansion took off. In 1980, Torás had businesses in Norway, Denmark, Finland, France and the US. To become better prepared for further developments, the company was restructured in 1984. The family had made some investments in other businesses as well, and a clearer company structure was needed. They created one group for the outdoor equipment with Torás AB as a parent company and another group for other businesses they invested in, organised under Torás International. In this restructuring process, employees were offered shares in Torás AB. Most employees lived in the local community and they had spent their whole careers in the business. Eventually, three per cent of Torás AB was in the hands of employees.

Three years later, in 1987, Dagens Industri (Sweden’s largest daily business paper) instituted a prestigious prize, recognising the leader of the year in Sweden. Bertil was the first to receive this prize.

In 1994, Torás reached one billion SEK in turnover for the first time, with 30 per cent of their production going to export markets. They wanted to continue to grow and to sell even more on the European market. To make that happen, they saw a need for new management. After 52 years in business, with Peter and Bertil as the company’s figureheads, they wanted someone with international industry experience to take Torás to the next level. Therefore, Torás appointed the first non-family member as company CEO. Walter Andersson, someone whom Bertil had known for years, was recruited:

We know production but are not as good at marketing and sales.
Walter is cut out for that (Bertil, Veckans Affärer, 22 Aug 1994).

Bertil stayed in the company with the formal role as chairman of the board. His brothers and their father acted as board members too. Together with Walter, they started comprehensive strategy work in which ten key issues were identified. These issues had to do with how to take Torás to the next level: as an internationally recognised business offering outdoor equipment. Walter’s task was to make sure that the rapid growth continued by working on the ten issues. Just like Bertil, Walter had a strong leadership style and he immediately introduced some changes in the way of working in the organisation. He was sales-oriented and invested heavily in marketing and IT. He also believed in a more formal way of leading the firm. This was in great contrast to Elsbeth and Peter as well as the other family members, who had an informal way of managing the firm. They often had private relationships with employees, and
contracts with suppliers and customers were rather confirmed by a handshake than by a piece of paper. Overall, Walter’s leadership style was a significant change for employees as well as for the owners. Family members felt the difference:

> It was during this time, from ’94 to ’97, that we woke up and could see how important our culture is. Of course, some of them [employees] applauded willingly and liked the drive and so on, but many, or most of us, did feel that this is not us. […] This is not Torás. That became very clear and that made us wake up (Rosie, 18 Dec 2007).

It turned out that the investments in marketing and IT did not pay off as expected, and the ten strategic issues were largely left untouched. The family started to worry. Rosie remembers that her parents were sceptical and anxious about the future:

> I know mum was totally heartbroken. Father muttered when the CEO said he would cut the rough diamond. What about the uncut diamond? Father thought it had all been okay (Rosie, 18 Dec 2007).

Torás, which had a history of high profit margins, was making less money. Between 1996 and 1997, the return on equity after taxes deteriorated from 20 to 12 per cent. Bertil warned Walter he had to improve. The family also had some doubts about the profit forecast. After thoroughly going through the details, they found out that the forecast of 235 MSEK had to be reduced to 170 MSEK. Everything happened very quickly and the CEO was asked to leave the firm. Bertil took over as CEO for the second time. He immediately stopped all development projects initiated by Walter. Consultants were asked to leave, and the marketing campaigns were brought to an end.

**Commentary – clashing logics**

There were two leadership successions during these years. In the first, Peter handed over to Bertil, his son. In the second, Bertil handed over to Walter, the first non-family member to take over as CEO of the company. The first succession did not lead to any big changes in the family’s way of doing business. Hence, for more than 50 years they had steadily developed the firm into a financially solid business that was established on the international market. During these years, they had developed a strong culture and a specific spirit of how to do business, which included an informal atmosphere and a focus on continuous product development. From here, they wanted to take the next step and make the business flourish even more. For that to happen, they made the centrifugal move of recruiting a non-family member as CEO. From the family’s
point of view, he in turn continued with the centrifugal forces, initiating several development projects simultaneously and focusing on marketing and sales, which was a different way of working from the more moderate way of doing things that the family was used to. He also believed in a more formal way of relating to employees, suppliers and customers.

According to the terminology in the family business literature, to take in a non-family member as CEO is a way to 'professionalise' the business. However, as has been noted before, this is a process that is often far from smooth:

Founders of family businesses tend to be driven by their particular vision of their product or service. They tend to be intuitive in their decision making, their power is based on ownership, and they motivate their followers through their charismatic behaviour. Conversely, those trained as professional managers generally derive their power not from ownership but from positions of authority. They tend to make decisions based more on logic and rational analysis than on intuition. Furthermore, these managers tend to be rather impersonal in their interactions with others, in contrast to the more personal style of the founder (Dyer, 1989:223).

This quote reflects well what happened at Torås when Walter was recruited. It seems that he entered with a different logic – a different way of doing business and an unfamiliar language – and a major clash took place. The different logic is sensed by Rosie who comments that “this is not us” and “this is not Torås”. Hall and Nordqvist (2008), in their article about professionalisation, emphasise the importance of understanding the sociocultural dimension in the family business when a new CEO is recruited. We can here notice the difficulty that can arise when that is not the case. So, what is the difference between those two logics?

Just as Dyer notes in the quote above, and as I brought up in the discussion on professionalisation (see Chapter 2), current discussion about professionalisation and the professional manager is still rooted in a being perspective of the world including entitative and rational thinking. At Torås, we could note how Walter acted according to how a professional manager is supposed to act, which means that he introduced a more formalised, impersonal way of relating. This is in contrast to the way of doing business developed at Torås during the 50 years of operation where the family’s everyday commitment to trust-based relationships was fundamental. It is not strange, from a Bakhtinian perspective, that all these centrifugal moves that Walter opened up needed to be held back by strong centripetal forces. That is one interpretation of what happened when Walter was asked to leave and Bertil stepped in again and immediately closed down all development projects. In
Introducing the Stenson family

those actions, we can notice how Bertil wanted to pull back the strong centrifugal forces that quickly had opened up and moved the business in several directions simultaneously. Hence, Bertil and the family wanted to regain control by taking back (and bringing home) total command of the business.

A broader family involvement

There was much to do, and Bertil turned to the family to find out about their future wishes for Torås. At this time, it was himself, his two brothers and his father who were active in the firm. He doubted that the other family members wanted to keep the ownership of Torås within the family and he was not sure himself either that he had the energy to continue with the business. Historically, discussions about Torås used to take place whenever the family members met, at work, at birthday parties, celebrating Christmas and so on. This time Bertil invited them all to a special meeting. When they were gathered he asked them what to do and if it would be better to sell Torås. The reaction from the other family members was overwhelming. Bertil had not at all expected that his suggestion could lead to such strong emotions and outcry as it did. The family members jointly decided to keep Torås within the family. This became the take-off for something new:

Before recruiting the external CEO, everything had been pretty much in peace and quiet [to the rest of us in the family] and taken care of by the brothers. In all this mess related to the break with the CEO, things became more difficult to handle. At this point, when they realised it didn’t work with an external CEO under these conditions, Bertil thought the time had come for the next generation to figure out what to do in the future (Erik, 16 Oct 2007).

Erik, married to Marie-Louise and employed at a governmental institution, started to get involved in the active ownership work. So did Rosie as well as Bertil’s two daughters Sara and Lisa (the first to engage from the third generation). They went to a seminar in Stockholm organised by the Family Business Network (FBN). Here they met with other enterprising families facing similar situations and they had the idea to create a specific forum for family members to meet and discuss important questions for the family and their firm, a so-called family council. This was what the family members were looking for – an arena for them to get together.

Shortly after the FBN seminar, on 22 February 1998, the Stenson family had their first family council meeting to which all family members were invited. They jointly decided that Peter and Elsbeth’s five children with their families

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16 FBN (www.fbn-i.org) is an organisation for owner families.
were to be considered family members and thereby invited to participate in the family council. They regarded it as a strength to have an inclusive approach to the family:

> It is better if more people are involved because that gives us a larger pool of experience. […] That is what I like with this idea that we are many since in this way we can be many enough who would like to focus on this and we can do more things. Some of us might be more interested in the business while others are more interested in social activities (Rosie, 15 Oct 2007).

> We will probably be a more capable owner family if we can make use of all competence in the family. […] It is the combination and the ability to make use of all competence in the family that is our strength (Erik, 16 Oct 2007).

During their first family council meeting, they initiated discussions on policies for family members’ employment in the firm, family values and how to carry out board work in the future. Working groups were formed and intensive work began. They also needed to sort out the ownership situation in the family so that everyone had the same understanding of what ownership they were talking about, who owns what, what is owned via Torås and so on. This was the first formalised family meeting. How did they know how to act?

> It came quite naturally for most of us, I think. I mean, in 1998, Sara was 26 years old. Everyone among the siblings [in the second generation] and two among the cousins were old enough. […] They were used to board meetings, management meetings and the like at Torås. And I have, from where I come, long experience of having meetings (Erik, 16 Oct 2007).

Tomas was voted chairman of the family council. He has some other memories of their first meetings:

> There was much chatter in the beginning. We often ended up talking about details in the factory. Why it did not work and how they did the wrong things on the factory floor. There was usually such a mess that I often thought I knew less after the meeting than before (Tomas, 15 Oct 2007).

In general, they had not yet found out how to talk to each other and what to address in those meetings:
I think our problem in the beginning had to do with us talking about details. And people speaking at the same time, and those kinds of things (Rosie, 15 Oct 2007).

Commentary – the first step towards a new family speech genre

The family members’ shared experiences of how quickly everything might be ruined seemed to unite them in a new way. Since they were not willing to risk their business again, they made the decision to make a joint effort in a way they had not done before. The broader family involvement was the beginning of a new way of acting as owners of Torås. One of the options they discovered was the creation of an arena for the family members devoted to conversations about business-related issues that the family was facing. From a Bakhtinian perspective, the family council they created can be understood as the inception of a new family ritual devoted to developing, maintaining and honouring the business they valued so deeply. As they themselves pointed out, the family council allowed them a more polyphonic way of working in relation to their family business. This is the case since it opened up family members who were not employed in the business to take part in business-oriented conversations. Since the family members had never worked together like this before, it is not strange that it was difficult for them to find out how to relate to each other in these conversations. To develop a new way of working together – learning how to master a new speech genre – takes time. Nevertheless, that is needed because “if speech genres did not exist and we had not mastered them, if we had to originate them during the speech process and construct each utterance at will for the first time, speech communication would be almost impossible” (Bakhtin, 1986:79).

Revitalising the values

The most active family members, Rosie, Bertil, Erik, Sara and Lisa, continued to participate in courses offered by the FBN. During these courses, they learned about the importance of developing and maintaining the values of the firm. This was something the family members were well aware of and they wanted to revitalise and strengthen their values. Back home again they worked hard on articulating their values underpinning their way of doing business. Brainstorming sessions and long discussions took place in council meetings and elsewhere when the family met. Eventually they created a document describing the core values. Bertil, with approval from the other family members, decided that these values should be used as the core values in the business. Thus he integrated the core values into the corporate strategy work. All this work with the values was to make sure their philosophy permeated how to do business in Torås. In the organisation, they have two guiding stars: the corporate strategy, which sets the goal of the business, and the core values – which they call the
framework – which serve as guidance on how to achieve the goals. Bertil emphasises the role of the values in the firm:

If we don’t work with those issues it can end up anywhere. In general, a business is supposed to make money. That is how it is all built up. But that is not the main concern for us. To us it is only the result of good work (Bertil, 15 Jan 2008).

Were these core values – the foundations of all their culture work – consistent over time?

They are probably quite constant I think. […] If we say we have humbleness or honesty or creativity then to me they all are part of something like the whole. Which means you cannot just take away anything because that would take away the whole, which would take away the balance. […] You cannot just take away. We have responsibility, then you cannot take that away because it means responsibility over time. Or respect for other people; that we think all people should be treated fairly and with respect, is that something that goes out of fashion? Yes, it may be so in society, but it is something that we nevertheless want to emphasise. […] Yes, I think they are durable. When we selected them that was on the basis that they are of value also in the future (Rosie, 17 Dec 2007).

In parallel with the work on values, the family created some basic structures and documents regarding family member training and employment, legal documents and more. They saw a need to set up committees that could focus on specific areas such as education, law and family finance. These committees were responsible for creating policies and further investigating things in different areas of importance to them:

That is the smartness in this. We create rules of the game while we are still on speaking terms with each other and can deal with it. We have buy-out regulations and we know what to do in case someone doesn’t want to be a part any longer. We decide on those things before we do something (Bertil, 15 Jan 2008).

In family council meetings, they also talked about how to manage Torås in the future. The five siblings in the second generation and their offspring in the third realised that it would be difficult for the third generation to continue to have top management positions like those of the current generation. Since the firm was growing rapidly, it was complex and demanding to take on a
management position. Therefore, they had to find other ways to control the firm:

I would like to say that the role we are taking on now is to act as owners. We realise that for a company of this size, we cannot produce top management people in a family consisting of 15 people. […] That is why, through different systems, we make sure that we train ourselves on how to relate to certain issues. Things that we have learned over the years. Our collective knowledge. […] And developing suitable strategies about how to manage the company. That is our prime focus (Bertil, 15 Jan 2008).

Sara pointed out that there could be yet other reasons for not having a family member as corporate CEO:

That will give us the possibility to fire the CEO without creating a family conflict. […] To me the family harmony is more important and I don’t want to end up in a fight with a close relative. It is much better with an external CEO, which means it is not someone from the family. In that case, if the company goes down you can fire that person (Sara, 8 Jan 2008).

It is, however, not only the business that is changing in nature. The third generation members also have a different point of departure since they were not born on the factory floor as their parents were. Sara and Lisa, Bertil’s two daughters, have the closest daily connection to the firm. Both their parents worked in the company and they lived in a house for staff that was built on the factory premises during their upbringing. This house was close to their grandmother and grandfather, who lived in the factory area too. Sara remembers that they used to have dinner in their grandparents’ house, where they incessantly talked about Torås. Even though the company was a taken-for-granted ingredient in her life, she did not know that much about it:

I actually did not know what father was doing. Yes, Torås existed. Father worked in an office. And he worked almost all the time. That he was a manager was not something I was aware of. I guess other people knew that better than I did. We did not discuss the business at home – there was more talk when we were at grandmother’s place. On the other hand, it had always been like that, so it came naturally to me. The only thing I remember as strange was that other children knew when they were supposed to have dinner and when their parents were expected home from work (Sara, 8 Jan 2008).
Georg and his wife lived outside Torås and, consequently, their two daughters did not have the daily contact that their cousins had. Even so, there seemed to be some intangible understanding that Georg’s daughters were socialised into:

I have two daughters at the ages of 20 and 22. I can sometimes be surprised how much there is that I have never taught them but that they know anyhow. It seems to be something that they got through the atmosphere that we live in (Georg, 15 Jan 2008).

Marie-Louise became a medical doctor and moved with her family to Lund in southern Sweden. Her two children have spent the least time in Torås. Rosie was a schoolteacher in Torås village when her two children were born. However, in 1999, when her children were nine and eleven years old, she started to work for Torås with their corporate culture. Her husband is a farmer and she and her family live on a farm a short distance away from Torås.

In 2000, the family consisted of 17 people from three generations. In order to create a solid ground for their family work they turned to Jönköping International Business School for a customised course about active ownership:

It is good to get the general view: How does this work generally? And what’s it like at Torås? And I think this was mostly for the cousins because also the youngest participated. Even my children […] Mikael must have been ten and he was the youngest among the cousins and Stina around twelve years old. They were allowed to play around but they also participated. They, in fact, still talk about how interesting it was (Rosie, 15 Oct 2007).

Bertil was, however, concerned because there were so many things that the next generation needed to learn to master the role of owners. Moreover, since the third generation has not had daily contact with the business in their upbringings, they need to find other ways to learn about the company. What he is mainly concerned about is those things that cannot really be taught in an educational program:

That we in the circle of owners know enough about our ownership, our business, and that we know enough about how we should manage it in a successful way. That is where we are facing our biggest challenges. Back then we got it all at the kitchen table. That is the major problem in any organisation, no matter if you look at the prime minister, in our nation, or what else. The big problem today is that you know too little about your surroundings. If you understand that, then I think you can cope with almost anything. Part of this is those things you can learn at school. But that is the easiest part. And it is the other, that which
you cannot learn in school, that which you have to be curious about, and that is how everything is connected out there in the world (Bertil, 15 Jan 2008).

**Commentary – a need to learn from within their current circumstances**

In Bertil’s utterances above, he nicely summarises the need, as well as the difficulty, to think and act processually. He says that the greatest challenge is to notice “that which you have to be curious about, and that is how everything is connected in the world”. Yes, that is a great challenge because how can we learn to see the multitude of connections? In a society where we are trained to think in separate entities and how to divide and break up, we are less trained in thinking in terms of connectivity. Moreover, as I further read Bertil, he is worried about how it is possible to learn those things you have to be around, and practice, to master them. This corresponds to Bakhtin’s (1984) ideas about how we learn to act, think and make sense from within our current concerns. To skilfully understand and master a specific speech genre you have to be socialised into it and it has to be taught from within, since “the logic of genre is not an abstract logic” (Bakhtin, 1984:157). My interpretation of Bertil’s concern is that the third generation has not been socialised into the way of thinking and doing business as he and his siblings were when they literally lived and worked together. As he points out, this is not something that can be learned or transferred through abstract logic in training programs or the like. To really learn the Stenson family’s way of doing business takes time – you have to understand how it has evolved over time and you need to be in the flow of the business to grasp how to do it. From this point of view, the family’s work on going back and searching for their original family values can be understood as one way of enquiring into the roots of their own speech genre and a way for family members to be connected with their past. This seems to be of importance, since a genre

lives in the present, but always remembers its past, its beginning. 

[...] For the correct understanding of a genre, therefore, it is necessary to return to its sources (Bakhtin, 1984:106).

Furthermore, all the work in the family council where the family created structures and policies regarding employment, training, ownership exit and more is of course important for the creation of these policies, but the very process of creating the policies is also important in itself. That is a way for the family to remember the past and connect it with their current situation as well as what is yet to come. Hence, during times when the family members no longer live together in the same place, the creation of the family council meetings can be understood as a way to build a shared chronotope where they can reconnect to the chronotope from the past, when they all lived and worked together.
Another family arena is created

The aftermath of the crisis in the IT sector in 2000 became troublesome for Torås. They had by then exceeded 200 million SEK in profit. However, the recession hit them hard and they had to dismiss 120 employees, something that had never happened before in Torås’ history. During that time, the family saw the need to work faster and more in depth with burning issues regarding the crisis and the future of their company. At the same time, it turned out that the family council was not the perfect arena since not all family members were interested in hard-core business discussions. Neither was the board a perfect place:

We have a formal board, but it is not a functioning board (Tomas, 15 Oct 2007).

Owing to legal regulations, Torås needed to have representatives from the labour unions on the board. The family members thought that these representatives were more interested in their own rights than in the development of the company. Eventually, in 2001, they decided to create another arena for strategic discussions, an ownership council:

We established the fact that not all issues could be discussed with the unions. The interests of the owners may need to be discussed so that they can act in a more united manner [when meeting the unions] (Erik, 16 Oct 2007).

Representatives in the ownership council were elected by the family council once a year. Bertil does not want to see any external representatives there:

No, no, never in my life will we have external people in the ownership council. You can of course have them in the board. […] You do of course have white-collar workers with you. Those people that administer and they can of course have some kind of indirect influence. But the ownership council is the ownership council and I don’t want any external people in that room. Full stop (Bertil, 15 Jan 2008).

The administrators he refers to are trusted people that the family has known and worked with for many years. One of them is Torsten. He started as their company auditor as early as the 1960s. Today he is the financial manager in the firm, a member of the management team and on the board of directors. Tage is another valuable person for the family. He started to work as an accountant at Torås in 1961 when he was 17 years old. They regard him as a family member and he still lives in Peter’s house (Elsbeth passed away before Peter). He has
multiple sclerosis and thereby some physical limitations. But, being a man with an outstanding memory, he remembers all tax laws and helps the family with financial matters.

The newly established ownership council started meeting once a month in order not to lose momentum in their work. One of the first issues they addressed was how to become full owners of Torås. Three per cent of the shares were still in the hands of employees. Some of the shareholders had worked in the company for many, many years and had a strong relationship with the firm. The family did not want to destroy that relationship but, at the same time, they regarded it as crucial to have full voting control to be fully in charge of Torås. Furthermore, that would give them the possibility to reallocate shares within the family:

If Bertil decides not to be as active as today and he can see that the next generation, or the next generation together with Rosie or something like that, can take over the responsibility, yes, in that case he will probably give away some of his shares as well. How quickly this will happen, that I don’t know. I guess Georg and Tomas will do the same. So that there is a smaller reallocation of the shares (Erik, 16 Oct 2007).

The introduction of the ownership council changed the nature of the family council. Ownership issues and strategic firm issues were now discussed in the ownership council and then reported to the family council and the board. Even though the family council meetings still dealt with business matters, the council evolved into being more of a social gathering for the family. The new set-up was also a way to make all family members feel welcome:

The basic idea is that all will want to participate in the family council and the social activities because that is fun and interesting and you feel you belong. When you feel that you are ready to discuss owner-related issues and strategic issues and you think that is important, then you have that possibility. You tell the others you are interested so that you can get voted onto the ownership council (Erik, 16 Oct 2007).

At the same time, some family members regard it as too much to have different kinds of family meetings. Sara, with three young boys at home, says she does not prioritise the family council meetings, which most often take place during weekends. She focuses her time and energy on the ownership council:

I am in this stage of my life when there is so much. Therefore, I feel that I want to be free during weekends (Sara, 8 Jan 2008).
Still others think the meetings are needed, because there are many things that need to be worked on:

The thing is, there is so much that we need to do. I mean, it is not only owning the shares. For us to run this successfully we have to handle many different things. Sometimes I have the feeling that we see each other very much and even so we don’t have the time to do all the things that I would like to have completed by now (Rosie, 15 Oct 2007).

In the family council, they now have meetings two or three times a year. They have developed a meeting agenda that is based on a set structure, one that always includes information from the ownership council, information from Torås, social issues and cyclic issues. Cyclic issues include selecting representatives to the ownership council, last wills, marriage settlements and the like. The core idea when they take decisions in the family council is not to vote but to discuss until they have reached a satisfying solution for everyone. When they do not get where they want, they postpone the discussion until the next meeting. In practice, however, Bertil’s voice is still very influential:

Bertil will have to like the suggestions from someone else very much to think they are better than his own. I think that is understandable in the role he has had for so long. He has been the dominant figure through all these years. Sometimes he has needed that [to be dominant]. Sometimes that has been the only way out. When they have faced more severe crises like bad sales figures or when something has not worked properly then he is the one who has taken full responsibility and that, of course, leads to the fact that he is used to having responsibility and has sometimes even had difficulties letting someone else take over that responsibility. That doesn’t matter today, but ten years from now when he thinks he is too old, then it can be problematic if the next generation has not been trained for this. That is one of the things we are working on (Erik, 16 Oct 2007).

There is no set place for family council meetings. Over time, meetings have been held in summer houses, in someone’s home or in any of the Torås premises outside their head office. One meeting was held at their subsidiary in Norway, where the local managing director told them about how they work there. To the family, this is a way to learn more about the business. The social part of the meetings has also evolved into an essential part, which is yet another reason for having these meetings in various places. Most often, they have a social element in connection with the family council meeting. The social committee has an important role in planning those activities. Over the years,
6 Introducing the Stenson family

they have also started to get together and make a trip when a family member celebrates a birthday. Rosie explains why the social activities are important:

We mostly do this to keep together, get to know each other and develop a feeling of community. [...] It is a way to prepare for the future as well. So that the cousins will get to know each other and their spouses. To get along well together. This means that besides the fun part of it we also plan this consciously (Rosie, 15 Oct 2007).

Commentary – an interplay of meeting practices
I noted earlier how the inception of the family council opened up a new way of working together in that another speech genre was created. The introduction of yet another family practice, the ownership council, simultaneously transforms the meaning of the family council. Since the ownership council takes over as the new decision-making arena for business-oriented matters, the family council turns into more of a socialising forum with the aim of having a good time together and developing strong family relationships. The fact that family council meetings are held in a time and space outside the business premises while the ownership council meeting is held on the business premises during business hours is also a way to separate these two meeting practices. In addition, that the family council is open for everyone in the family while the ownership council has restricted participation which is another marker of the differences between these two meeting practices. Hence, the creation of the ownership council also makes it possible to more clearly define the role of the family council. In that way, each of these meeting practices seems to develop its own, yet intertwined, speech genre.

In summary, it seems as if the introduction of the ownership council lets the family council nurture into what Bakhtin (1984) refers to as a more carnivalesque culture while the ownership council develops into a formal culture. These two kinds of cultures build on very different genres that create different rules of the game, thereby allowing for different ways of relating to each other (Bakhtin, 1984). The carnival is centrifugal in nature, serving the need of opening up and allowing flow in life, while the official culture is centripetal in nature, serving the need of consolidating and closing (Bakhtin, 1984). This means that at the same time as the family develops the ownership council where they focus on centripetal issues, such as buying back the shares from their employees and creating policies for the upcoming transition to an external CEO, that simultaneously gives them the opportunity to cultivate the family council into a more carnivalesque ritual. The carnivalesque genre is special in that it contributes to “life turned inside out, the reverse side of the world” (Bakhtin, 1984:122). In this genre, what is usually thought of as ‘normal’ can be suspended when traditional roles and rules are set aside since “[t]he carnival senses of the world possess a mighty life-creating and transforming power, and
indestructible vitality” (Bakhtin, 1984:107). Just as Rosie comments, the social aspects of the family council are significant for family commitment and continuity. That the family council takes place in various places and not on their business premises is probably also an important marker for this ritual to be something other than the ownership council. In the interviews with the Stenson family members, several of them told me stories of how they had experienced nice times together, for instance all the joy they had had on a bike trip in southern Sweden. To them, these kinds of activities seemed to make a difference and were important for the joy of working together. From a Bakhtinian perspective, to focus on the carnivalesque too seems to be of great importance for sharing an enriching life together. Since a carnival is non-hierarchical and not performed but rather lived, it is helpful because

[p]eople who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free familiar contact on the carnival square. [...]

Carnival is the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, a new mode of interrelationship between individuals (Bakhtin, 1984:123).

Thus, for a family firm with traditional hierarchies both in the context of the business and in the family, it is probably of great value to meet in ways that leave these hierarchies in the background. Their decision-making rule in the family council – where they do not make use of voting systems but rather discuss until they reach a satisfying solution – signals that all voices are equally important in this ritual (even though Bertil’s voice is authoritative and powerful as some have remarked). The carnivalesque nature of the family council seems to be of significance, especially in the current situation of deciding how to make the next generation interested in being a part of their family business endeavours.

**Envisioning the future: From ownership council to board of directors**

The hard work was paying off. In 2004, Torås reached the number one position in the European market for their key product. However, they have even more ambitious plans. In 2005, a market company was founded in parallel with the existing company. The aim was to give the whole Torås concept a stronger position in the European market. At the same time, the family has lively discussions about how to find a structure in which they formally lead the strategic work in the firm. They are happy with the ownership council they have created, but it is not the official decision-making arena. The slumbering board in the company, with meetings twice a year, is still the official decision-making arena. Since Bertil will turn 65 years old in 2008, they realise it will soon be time for him to leave his role as CEO, meaning that someone not belonging
to the family will take over his position – for the second time. This time they want to be more prepared as well as have a stronger control mechanism in place. Eventually, they figure out that the best idea is probably to create a holding company. They can then transform their ownership council into the official board of the holding company. As they see it, that will be the principal platform for the family to manage and control Torås, irrespective of whether they have a non-family CEO or not. Bertil’s vision is that the board in the holding company will be “where the power in the organisation is”. The main activities for the family members in the board will then be the following:

To manage and make sure we recruit and fire people and to develop appropriate strategies and knowledge about how to manage the business. That is what we are focusing on (Bertil, 15 Jan 2008).

The overall picture of where they want to go seems to be shared by the family members, but there are still different views on how to proceed. They often have long discussions in the ownership council:

We have a few people who are more risk-averse, like Tomas and Sara who think it is totally unnecessary to do this or that. And on the other side, probably, is Bertil. Rosie and I are a little more in between. Sometimes we are closer to Bertil and sometimes in the other direction. It is good to have these opposing views because then we have to discuss for a while and make sure we reach a good decision that everyone can back (Erik, 16 Oct 2007).

Finally, in 2007 the family managed to become the sole owners of Torås again. That was essential:

This gives us the possibility to restructure the business so that we can have one parent company that owns everything. The local companies can have their own formalised boards with representatives from the unions. That is where they should be represented. In this way, we can create an arena for the unions where they can, and should, be active (Erik, 16 Oct 2007).

Rosie is hoping that full ownership control will also make the shareholders’ meeting an active arena in the future:

I think this will make a great difference because we used to have employees as owners and that created a shareholders’ meeting that was mostly about different kinds of information where a lot of other people have taken part. But it is different now when the
family owns 100 per cent. I hope it can be a more active forum and that the cousins can feel this is actually ours (Rosie, 15 Oct 2007).

Hence, in a few years time, the dream about a holding company will hopefully be realised. For this to happen, there are, however, still many legal and practical matters to sort out. The family has started to develop the rules of procedure in the ownership council as a preparation for when that will be the formal board. They are also working on the instructions for the CEO. They regard their current work with the ownership council as a transition time and a period of training and preparation for the upcoming board work. However, it is somewhat complicated today, because Bertil is still the CEO:

It is a little bit complicated to put the rules in place today. How we want him [Bertil] to act and those things because he has managed this by himself all the time. The most important thing is that we have started this training and that we want to know a little bit more about what we want it to be like when we recruit an external CEO. When that will happen we cannot just let them go on, we have to give them directions (Tomas, 15 Oct 2007).

It is not only the ownership council that will be turned into something new in the future. The character of the family council will most likely also change because new family meeting practices will be implemented. When the family grows, not all members can probably be involved in the family council as they are today. They have discussed a sort of family assembly to elect people for different committees. They have also talked about a senior council where the experience and knowledge of the senior family members can be utilised. In addition, they need to remember that they have stakes in other businesses besides Torås that need to be taken care of:

We may have focused too much on the company and less on all the other things that we own. And we also need to start thinking of the cousins now, the next generation, more about how they look at things (Sara, 8 Jan 2008).

Hence, the hard work goes on. What is important to remember, though, Rosie underlines, is the satisfaction of doing this together:

This is a challenge, like it always has been. Like in the beginning when people told mum and dad that it would never work. But we will prove that it can work. And people keep telling us that it gets more and more difficult over the generations. But no, we have to prove ourselves. When we succeed and everything runs like it
should, like it has done so far, then you feel so much pride. I guess that is much of what lies behind this. To be part of this (Rosie, 15 Oct 2007).

On dialogically shaped family meeting practices

The account of the Stenson family describes how they, during the early years of Torås, lived closely together in a one-bedroom flat located next to the factory premises with the office in their living room. During this time, there was little separation between family and business matters. Over time, the family grew and family members moved out of their first premises. At the same time, the business spread and they established local branches in more than 50 markets in Europe and beyond. For the owner family to be able to still keep control of the business they found that they had to change their presence in the business and act as ‘active owners’ instead of everyday managers. This idea was born, further developed and practised in their family meeting conversations. It is possible to see how this development over time is not only a kind of quantitative and linear development but also a qualitative, continuous life-enriching process. In this work, the future is not ready-made but rather in creation as the family members work together when past, present and potential future conversations function as resources as the family members learn how they want to act as active owners of Torås.

To Bakhtin (1984), dialogues are ongoing and unfinalisable. So is the family work in the Stenson family, where the family meeting practices are developing together with the family. For instance, when the current generation thinks about the future, when they no longer will have operational roles in the business, they picture themselves engaged in a senior council.

One way to interpret the extensive work that the Stenson family members have invested in is that the creation of various kinds of meeting practices has allowed them to develop a richer ‘private language’ (Tagiuri & Davis, 1996). This is a language made up of different speech genres in interplay with each other. Since the genres largely set the direction for what kinds of conversation are possible, because they shape the dialogues from within and give directions for the dialogic processes, it is pivotal to better understand how these genres are set in motion and how they influence the family conversations going on. Can a more ‘bilingual’ family with a wider repertoire of genres engage in family conversations in a more multifaceted way? One interpretation is that different kinds of meeting practices can help the family discuss a multitude of issues, in different ways, from different perspectives, through the interplay of different voices, thereby helping the family deal with the complexity of managing a family business.
I will get back to the discussion of how meeting conversations are shaped by the speech genres at play in the final part of the dissertation. Before that the field study with the Philipsson family will be presented. While this account contributed with an understanding of the development of different meeting practices over an extended period of time, the account of the Philipsson family will focus on an in-depth exploration of meeting conversations held during one year of cousin meetings.
7. Introducing the Philipsson family

Before moving on to the field study account of the Philipsson family there is a need to address what I learned from the study of the Stenson family in regard to fieldwork because it had significant implications for how the study evolved.

The field study of the Stenson family was interesting because it offered an understanding of different kinds of family meeting practices; how they develop in interaction with each other and how they evolve over time. Hence, it offered a wide understanding of family meeting practices. However, at the same time, I had trouble understanding how this work took place since we were talking about it in interviews but I did not have any insight into their family meetings in practice. Even though the interviews were interesting indeed, they were mostly about things that had already taken place and not their current concerns. In this way, it was difficult (perhaps impossible) to better understand how their family meeting work unfolded in practice. I felt the need to get into closer contact with their ongoing work. I further felt there was so much more that could be learnt, but I did not know how to get there. I suggested some ideas of other ways of working together in an e-mail to Rosie. She was reluctant and eventually responded that they did not want to be a part of the study any longer. Their agenda was too busy and they did not have time. As she told me, she could be helpful in reading, but she did not want to take time from the other family members.

On the one hand, I was disappointed with how everything had evolved because there was so much more that could be learnt from their elaborate way of working together in the family. On the other hand, I was relieved since I did not know what to do to make our relationship different. This is when I fully realised I had to move on in the fieldwork and I had to make sure I had the opportunity to work differently in the next part of the field study. This time I wanted to switch modes from stories told to stories lived. In short, I wanted to be a part of the meetings and, importantly, to work with the family.

Withness-thinking

The inspiration for working with people came from Shotter’s (2005) notion of withness-thinking. I came across this notion early on in my doctoral programme and it immediately made much sense to me. According to Shotter (2008a:186), “[w]ithness (dialogic)-thinking is a form of reflective interaction that involves coming into living contact with an other’s living being, with their utterances, their bodily expressions, their words, their ‘works’”. Shotter further
contrasts ‘withness-thinking’ with ‘aboutness-thinking’ where the other is objectified, which happens if we study something or someone from a distanced outside position.

Based on my experience of the limitations of studying something retrospectively and from a distance – to make a study about something – I started to formulate how I wanted to work with the family in the continuation of the field study. For that to be possible, I had to develop a different kind of relationship with the family members.

In practical terms, the inclination towards withness-thinking means that I have striven towards a collaborative kind of inquiry that acknowledges and values connections between the family members and me. I therefore had to move beyond thinking about family members as being researched and they had to see me beyond my role as researcher. This approach challenges orthodox research practices in that I work from the basis that knowledge is co-created between us in the dialogic moment, for instance refuting the assumption that information flows only one way when the respondents share their beliefs or experiences with the researcher (Brewis & Wray-Bliss, 2008).

In hindsight, I can identify three premises that have guided me in the work according to withness-thinking (I did not think about them when I started, but I can see now that they have unknowingly been there). These premises are introduced below.

**Recognising everyday local practice**

There have been calls for more in-depth studies creating an understanding of everyday family business matters (Nordqvist, Hall & Melin, 2009). In studying ‘with’ people, I had to be there in the everyday when the family was doing their family meeting work. This conviction grew stronger in my reading of Bakhtin. His thinking around dialogism is usually claimed to be a philosophy of the “ordinary, taken-for-granted process of living” (Baxter, 2010:24). To Bakhtin that is important since it is in the everyday that individual creativity as well as social transformation takes place (Morson & Emerson, 1990).

In this close way of working, withness-thinking favours the local understanding of particular contexts and explains how this is formed in social interplay. One of the features of this way of relating is the chance to develop insights into practical concerns about the family meeting, so-called ‘street wisdom’ or ‘knowing how’, which can be contrasted against ‘knowing about’ or theoretically codified book knowledge that more distant research approaches tend to develop (Deetz, 2001:13). In the words of Deetz (2001:37), in his summary of dialogue-inspired research approaches, “[t]he point of research in this sense is not to get it right but to challenge guiding assumptions, fixed meanings and relations, and reopen the formative capacity of human beings in relation to others and the world”. Hence, withness-thinking explores a plurality of possibilities in social phenomena.
Focusing on moment-to-moment conversations in their unfolding

Another premise that has guided me is the appreciation of the “moment-to-moment effort that constitutes the project of living” (Morson & Emerson, 1990:10). I continuously had to remind myself to go beyond the simplifications of thinking about things, people and activities as fixed and final. I especially remember one meeting I had with Rosie Stenson when she had read a draft of the field account of their family work. In a comment on the text in general, she reminded me about the difficulty, yet importance, of thinking in dynamically ongoing relationships where ‘things’ are in the making. She brought up the importance of understanding that they act as a team in the family where there is no one person doing everything but rather myriads of actions taking place simultaneously. In this feedback, she reminded me of the importance of thinking in relational terms where development is continuously taking place. She somehow summarised what I had grasped intellectually in reading literature about becoming, but even so, had forgotten about in the actual fieldwork and in my writing. She reminded me about the importance of emphasising the moment-to-moment everyday development.

Remembering the contextual surrounding

The third premise, which is related to the previous two, is concerned with context; how the local surrounding where the family conversations take place is intertwined with the meaning-making processes in the dialogic moment. This is because “[c]ontext is not a collection of variables or of situations influencing activity but constructed as people interact” (Ericson, 2007:1). Therefore, from a dialogic perspective, the words uttered do not make sense outside of their context (Linell, 2009). In addition, since the context is unfinalised and dynamic – it is continuously moving – it cannot be reduced to a stabilised picture. In this way, the context is not external to the conversation but part of the conversations themselves. To be ‘with’ the people in the study is a prerequisite for understanding how context matters. It is when I am there in the everyday that I can see how people interact and what kinds of habits and routines they have.

In summary, these three premises, recognising everyday local practice, moment-to-moment conversations in their unfolding and remembering the contextual surrounding, started to be formulated in the work with the Philipsson family (to be introduced next). As I gradually understood more about what these premises meant to me and when I gained more confidence and experience over time, they became even more important to me in this shift from aboutness-thinking to withness-thinking, or from stories told to stories lived. In other words, when it was possible for me to move from a ‘weak’ to a ‘strong’ process orientation in the field study.
Meeting the family

This section will introduce how I first got in contact with the Philipsson family and how our relationship developed over time. In so doing, I also convey their upcoming succession, the heritage at stake and why they saw a need to start having cousin meetings where potential owner-managers in the next generation could come together and discuss their future.

My first encounters with the Philipsson family (2005–2007)

I met with Judith and Ted Philipsson for an interview in connection with a research project about continuously growing firms in 2005. At that point in time, Judith was the CEO of Brunnsala Sawmill, one of the companies in the Brunnsala Group. She had a background as a nurse but had started to work as secretary to Ted (her husband) who was the CEO when she started in 1995. A couple of years later he took on a role in the organisation as the ‘company entrepreneur’ and she stepped into the formal role of company CEO.

I remember I was greatly touched by Judith the first time I met her. In addition to the fact that she seemed to share my interest in relations and communication, she had valuable experience of leading a family business. Since I regarded the interview with her as valuable, I later asked if I could come back to discuss some of my preliminary ideas for my thesis. In March 2006, we met a second time. During this meeting, I briefly told her about my unpolished idea of writing a dissertation in the area of communication in the owner family. On that occasion, I wanted to hear her experiences and points of view on this subject. Judith’s honesty, passion as well as sincere frustration when talking about these issues and her own situation as the company CEO in a business that her husband and his two brothers own touched me deeply. She gave me a feeling for how sincerely she values the family and the business and the complexity of creating enriching family conversations in this setting. She also reflected on her own struggles in acting as a wife, mother and company CEO in an organisation that they want someone in the next generation to take over in due course.

This was in early 2006, and I thought I would like to focus on family meetings, which the Philipsson family did not work with. In fact, their lack of this kind of family arena and the difficulties for them to engage in conversations in rewarding ways were exactly some of the issues that Judith addressed.

About a year later, I met with Jennifer Philipsson, one of the next-generation cousins in the Philipsson family because she was a student at Jönköping International Business School at that time. She was writing her master’s thesis about family councils in family businesses. She told me that she was interested in this topic because they considered creating a family council
themselves. This was in 2007 when I was just about to go on maternity leave for my second baby.

Reconnecting with the family (June 2008)

I was back after maternity leave and wanted to continue with my field study. As mentioned above, I wanted to engage with a family in such a way that I could get direct experience of family meetings in practice. I was thinking about whom to contact and got thinking of Judith. I also came to think about what Jennifer had told me about their plans to create a family council. Wouldn’t it be great to contact them to see what they had done in this regard? I wanted to contact Judith. But, at the same time, I had heard that her husband was suffering badly from brain cancer. Should I really bother her during vacation in these circumstances? I decided to contact Jennifer. I could not find her phone number so I called Brunnsala Coffee, one of the businesses that the family owns (coffee roaster). Her father, Mark Philipsson, had been the acting CEO for many years in this company and Jennifer had worked there in the previous summer after graduation. Maybe she would still be there. This was 25 June 2008 and I got through to the switchboard at Brunnsala Coffee. No, they said, Jennifer does not work here any longer but would I like to talk to Mark?

I had never met Mark but I had heard about him. Judith had mentioned him in the interviews and I had read about him as well. He was actively involved in different business organisations in Sweden and was on several boards. He had been the CEO of Brunnsala Coffee for many years. On the internet, I had read that he had just recently left that position to become the CEO of their parent company instead.

Of course, I wanted to talk to him and it turned out that my timing was perfect! I briefly introduced my reason for calling and he responded by saying that they were just about to have their first cousin meeting during the summer. The reason for initialising those meetings, he told me, was that they were facing ownership and management succession and needed to figure out who should take over their businesses and how to make that happen. In five years, he wanted them as an owner family to have some sort of master plan for those issues. Since he wanted a succession process in which all potential next-generation owner managers could be involved, he had suggested starting with meetings for the cousins in the next generation. For me it was excellent timing since they were just about to begin to have those meetings. Mark also uttered things such as “We probably have much to learn from you as well”. I was very happy that he appreciated my research project. We decided to meet right after the summer (when they would have had their first meeting). Even though my phone call with Mark had not lasted for many minutes, I had a feeling that this could be something interesting. Since I had already met with Judith, Ted and Jennifer, I knew a few of the family members as well as a little about their business history. I knew it was promising.
Getting to know more through Jennifer and Mark (August 2008)

On a Friday around noon, after driving for a couple of hours, I arrived at the small village where the family lives and works. The meeting was planned to take place at Brunnsala Coffee. As I stepped into the modern office building, I was surprised at how spacious it was. The building, with a ceiling going all the way up to the top of the house, was impressive. I also noticed the open layout that immediately gave me a feeling of how the office was organised. Jennifer was already there. We embraced and started to chat. She said her dad had to do some e-mails, and after a few minutes of small talk we could hear Mark’s busy footsteps on the stairs as he came down from the second floor. He asked if I had had any lunch. I had not, so we took his car for a lunch at a nearby restaurant. I was full of questions but did not know if it was appropriate to go on asking them immediately. I decided to hold back my curiosity until we got back to the office.

Back in the office, we had coffee and went into the conference room. Mark had brought a packet of printed PowerPoint slides and some brochures. We got started and there was much to talk about. In this conversation, I slowly took in how complex their situation was.

In my preparation for this meeting, I had read that Brunnsala was one of Sweden’s oldest family businesses still in operation. Thus, I was not surprised when Mark said it was the will of the family that ownership and management should be taken over by the next generation. As he explained, the role of the family members that take over was to act as ‘administrators’ of the business and make sure it would be handed over to future generations. When he spoke about their role as administrators, it reminded me of a book about their company that I had found in our university library. On the front cover of the book, it says:

With love for our heritage, with strength from our community,
with knowledge from ancient times, with a sense of quality our
future looks bright.

The sawmill has been owned by the family for centuries. Today, the group of companies owned by the family include Brunnsala Sawmill, Brunnsala Farm and Brunnsala Coffee. The group was owned by the three brothers in the ninth generation, Mark and his two brothers Ted and Dan, together with a foundation that owned 30 per cent of the shares. The foundation had been created by their parents with the purpose of promoting education and scientific research in the agricultural sector.

17 He used the Swedish word “förvalta”. That means to assume the duty of administering the business and prepare to hand it over to future generations.
The three brothers that jointly owned 70 per cent of the Brunnsala Group had been active in the family firm more or less their whole working lives. Mark had acted as CEO in the coffee-roasting business, Dan in the farm and Ted had been CEO as well as having other positions in the sawmill.

However, in the preceding year, they had gone through some changes that had significant implications for the family as well as the business. In early autumn 2007, they learned that Ted had aggressive brain cancer, which of course was a tragedy for the family members (he passed away a year later). In addition, Mark stepped down as CEO of Brunnsala Coffee and into the role as CEO for the parent company. During that time, the board also asked Dan to leave his position in the farm since they were not satisfied with his way of managing the farm (a position that was taken over by Jennifer’s husband, Nicklas). As a result, for the first time in history they had non-family members as CEOs in all three subsidiaries.

All three businesses had their own management teams but the active board work takes place in the mother company. Mark and one of his sisters have positions on the board, but the majority of board members are external and they have an external chairman. In regard to the foundation, Mark is the family’s representative and acts as chairman.

Since the three brothers shared the wish to hand over ownership to the next generation and none of the cousins were actively involved in the business, they thought it was time to start working on their succession. Mark said he would like them to have made a decision about who should take over the ownership and management within five years. Jennifer explained that one of the initiatives in this direction was that all cousins should be sent all management reports to
follow what was happening in the business. That led us further into the discussion about the succession:

Jenny: When you say that you want it to be finished in five years, what does that mean?

Mark: Five to seven years. We should know who will take on the management role of the group. It could be that I am still the chairman of the board but nothing else. I am turning 60 next year and you shouldn’t plan to stay until you are 70. It may end up that way but that is not how I want it to be since I have so much else I would like to do in life. But we must also make sure that the management teams within the different companies are okay. I don’t think any of the cousins will be CEO of the group or any of the businesses in five years’ time. You can of course come in and work in another position but not as CEO. That is not good, neither for the company nor for the person.

Jennifer: You cannot come in for the sole reason that your last name is Philipsson. That is absolutely not possible.

Mark: I have said that the necessary requirement to begin here is that you have the competence for the task but also that you have the social skills needed and that you are accepted by the employees. And it is more difficult to become socially accepted if you come from the owner family than coming from the outside. There are pros but also cons.

Mark told us about the previous succession and the thoughts behind Mark’s father’s decision to create a foundation that owned 30 per cent of the shares. According to Mark, that had to do with his father’s experience of family conflict. The idea of the foundation was that no one should have the opportunity to ruin the business or to work there for financial gain. Rather, the role of the owner-manager is to administer the business and hand it over to future generations in good shape. Mark further described how his father, when he was asked to come home and take over because his father had passed away, had a tough situation when dealing with all other shareholders in the family. At that point, 30 family members owned the business and he only had four per cent of the ownership stake. When Mark’s father wanted to reinvest the profits in the business, the family was split into two camps, those who wanted to invest and those who wanted the profits to be distributed among the shareholders. Thanks to his father’s trading capabilities in listed companies, he eventually had the financial resources to buy out the other family members. However, the two camps remained for the rest of his life. Mark explained that his father was scared to death that something like that would happen again. That is why he created an ownership situation with a foundation and centralised ownership by the three brothers.
Mark: He [Mark’s father] said you should not have to go through what I have gone through. We have to find another solution. This is not perfect either, because perfect solutions do not exist, as little as perfect people do. And Father thought that the person running the business should not do it for money. That is why he made the three of us owners and our sisters were bought out. Owing to changing tax laws, everything went very quickly. We never got involved. It was not a long process. He informed us but he had already decided on how to do it.

We continued to talk about the present situation. The upcoming succession, compared with when Mark and his brothers took over, is different. Mark and his two brothers together have ten children from one to 28 years old, Dan’s children being the youngest. I asked whom he sees as potential owners in the future.

Mark: In terms of ownership, it is Ted’s children and my own. Dan’s children as well, of course, but in the future. It will take another 20 years before they are old enough.

He was further determined that not everyone should become owners because that would once again, just like it was for his father, create a situation where there were too many owners.

Jenny: So you think that not all cousins should be owners?
Mark: Yes, ideally I think so. In the long term, I think that is important. It may function in this generation but if they then have three or four children each it will be a very difficult situation. It becomes difficult and no one can keep it together. It is better if it [ownership] is concentrated.

I learned that besides the wish to keep the business within the family in the 10th generation, Mark and his brothers have had different views on many things related to Brunnsala and the relationship between them as brothers has been filled with tension. Even so, they have managed to continuously develop their various businesses. The sawmill has been influential in developing environmentally friendly work procedures. Their coffee-roasting company is now the second largest in the Swedish market and they are continuously earning market share in a highly competitive marketplace dominated by a few international players. Their farm has been recognised for high-quality agriculture products. Besides their strained relationship and different perspectives on risk and what to focus on, one thing that the brothers do share
is the long-term commitment and understanding that what they do in the business can benefit the environment and others in the local community.

Mark told me that the idea behind their upcoming cousin meetings was to create an arena where the next-generation potential owners could come together and jointly discuss their futures regarding who should take over and how to do so. The participants in the meetings are Mark and four of his children (his youngest daughter has Down’s syndrome and will not become an owner in the group, which is the reason why she is not participating) and Judith and her three children (Ted cannot participate because of his illness). According to Mark, the reason he has not invited Dan and his children is because his children are too young to take part since they are only one and three years old.

These are some of the things that Jennifer and Mark introduced me to. Towards the end of our three-hour meeting Mark asked how we could go on from there. I suggested a next step could be for me to individually interview the seven cousins who will take part in the cousin meetings. Since the meetings are about the future of the cousins, it would be interesting to hear their views on everything that is going on. Mark and Jennifer agreed that could be a good way to continue. We exchanged contact details and said goodbye.

Figure 7.2 Ninth and tenth generation in the Philipsson family. Cousin meeting participants (circled), August 2008.  

These are some of the things that Jennifer and Mark introduced me to. Towards the end of our three-hour meeting Mark asked how we could go on from there. I suggested a next step could be for me to individually interview the seven cousins who will take part in the cousin meetings. Since the meetings are about the future of the cousins, it would be interesting to hear their views on everything that is going on. Mark and Jennifer agreed that could be a good way to continue. We exchanged contact details and said goodbye.

18 This figure is also in Appendix 6.
I was excited about seeing the cousins from the next generation and wanted to get started quickly. Mark helped me with contact information and I started the interviews a few days after the meeting with Jennifer and Mark.

How did the shift from aboutness-thinking to withness-thinking influence how the interviews were carried out? To me it had to do with how I looked upon these encounters. While I did not go there to collect facts, I went there to get to know the cousins. I was curious about how they experienced their current situations and wanted to hear more about how they made sense of the upcoming succession and seeing each other in the cousin meetings. In practical terms, this meant I had not prepared specific questions. Even though it was clear we had different roles, they as interviewees and I as the interviewer, I felt as if I was invited to one-on-one conversations in their home. Since the family responded to this approach and invited me for dinner etcetera, everything just emerged and we got to know each other during these various encounters. A brief summary of what we spoke about follows.

**Stefan,** 28 years old, is the eldest of Ted and Judith’s children. He lives with his wife on a farm that belongs to his wife’s family business some kilometres away from Brunnsala premises. Two months previously they had had their first baby; the first in the eleventh generation. When I saw Stefan, he had just realised his life’s dream to become a policeman. After three years of education, he graduated and got a position at the local police station. Even so he cannot let go of the idea that he one day might have to take over the sawmill, just like his father once did. He knows, “In my heart, I have never felt for it”, but anyhow:

> In some ways, I don’t just want to leave everything at Brunnsala. That is where I have my roots and I want my children to have the possibility to experience what I did when I grew up in the Red Villa. In some ways, I don’t just want to be an average Swede. There is nothing wrong with that, it can be as good as anything else, but we have this possibility.

I never took advantage of the possibility given me, partly because I don’t have that interest. And that is why I don’t work there since I don’t want to. And it is very difficult if you don’t have that interest. And it is expected that you should do it. [...] Maybe my son will have this interest. You can never know about the future. It is such a mess all of this. Very tiresome. At the same time, I know I should be happy, as this chance has been given to me.

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19 The Red Villa is the main building at Brunnsala where Stefan’s ancestors have lived for generations. This is also where he grew up with his parents. It is an impressive villa surrounded by a magnificent park located next to Brunnsala Sawmill.
Alex, 25 years old, was taking a master’s degree in business administration in a city some hours away from home. The day after I interviewed him he took off for an exchange semester at a university in the US. He said he one day would like to work in the business, preferably in marketing, but for that he needs some other work experience first. He has mixed feelings for Brunnsala. On the one hand, he is very proud of being a Philipsson and part of all that his ancestors have built up. On the other hand, the conflict between his father and his two uncles has made him aware of the potential difficulties of a family business:

I don’t think they have ever understood how I felt in all this. But to live in the middle of a conflict for several years is tiring. I have been angry with Dan and Mark for a conflict I am not even involved in. And with Dad of course. Eventually I got angry with Grandfather as well because of how this is. I have had difficulties sleeping at night. Dad has been a restless soul because of this family conflict and that has spilled over to the rest of the family as well. This conflict should have been solved before we were about to enter. But it hasn’t been. I have always thought, how difficult can it be? When you are three? That always leads to a majority. But I have of course not told anyone about all of this.

Maria, the youngest of Ted and Judith’s children, is 22 years old. She has just started at the university located a couple of hours away, where she will study for four years to become a planning architect. She says she would like Brunnsala to continue being family-owned, but she does not necessarily want to be the one who takes over. She is confident they will find a satisfying solution:

It will be sorted out. We are so many and it feels like there are many of us who want to take over. Or, maybe not that many, but someone will make sure it happens. This is a relief for me, I think.

Josefine, 28 years old, is the eldest of Mark and Elisabeth’s children. When I met her she was about to take her university degree in agriculture a few months later. The very week when I came to see her she had signed up for a position at Brunnsala. This was quite a big thing among the cousins because they have always been told they first have to work elsewhere for at least five years. And that had been Josefine’s plan, too. But the plans changed; she will now move back home and be the first in the 10th generation to take on a formal role in the group. After being part-time employed for a year when another employee left the company, she had now decided to continue. She had some ideas of what could be useful to talk about in the upcoming cousin meetings:
Questions such as who would like to come in and work in the company. [...] We can talk about anything as long as we do not fall out with each other. Therefore, I think it is important to talk about who would like to take over, how that can happen, the business, the board, the forest and those things. Well, in general how everyone looks at this. That is needed since it is something we have never spoken about.

Jennifer, 25 years, works with bookkeeping and administration in a private company twenty minutes away from Brunnsala. She moved back to their home village after her university degree in business administration. Her husband took over the role as CEO of the farm after Dan. Jennifer knows with certainty that she would like to step into the business whenever there is an opening for that:

Dad has always told us to go out and work somewhere else for a couple of years. But at the moment we don’t really know what the current rules are. Josefine has not worked outside. Another thing is that it is not always that easy to know how to show you are interested in working in the business. Dad used to say he didn’t know if we were interested or not because we did not show that. But how can I show my interest? I have told him explicitly I am interested. I think it is him as well who does not really know what he wants. And this with Ted [his illness] is really bad. There is much going on right now.

Adam, 23 years old, had just started his second year to become a master forest ranger. He thinks it is important to look also beyond their own immediate interests and not forget the other people working at Brunnsala. At the moment, he does not see himself as becoming active in the business, but who knows, maybe in twenty years from now. He considers the cousin meetings important in the sense that they can help people feel trust for each other and the succession process. He would like the process to end up with not everyone in the 10th generation being an owner:

I think that even though the issue of ownership is not the most burning issue today, it will eventually be. [...] The best would be if we could jointly reach a conclusion on how we would like it to be without people feeling mistreated. It is important that we start talking about these things before we end up in a conflict. We have to talk with everyone and see who would like to become an owner. It also has to work if some among us get employed. If we are aiming at a family member becoming CEO in twenty years from now, how can we handle such an issue? And what happens if we do not agree on that? In sum, I think this is all about
information, decisions and having the possibility to influence. So that everything functions in the everyday work at Brunnsala. This village is not that big, so we also have a major responsibility for those working here.

**Olivia** is 21 years old. She was currently at university but was also planning her next journey abroad. Together with her boyfriend, she wanted to travel in South America for some months. However, her biggest concern is what she should study when she comes back home again. She knows she wants to work with people and do something that is of importance to other people and can make a difference. Doctor? Nurse? She is confident she will not be one of those who take over. She nevertheless thinks the upcoming cousin meetings are important because that will open up different kinds of conversations:

I know we [the two families that the cousins come from] are different. We have grown up with different values. This is natural. I know we work together to a certain degree and we want to start those discussions now so that we don’t end up in unnecessary conflict with each other. Which means it is important to discuss what everyone wants, but also what we don’t want. That everything is possible to discuss. [...] I like this because those meetings force me into new thinking and besides I can see my siblings and cousins more often. Fantastic!

**Moa** is 19 years old and goes to a school with a focus on drama. During holidays she works at Brunnsala Coffee. Since Moa has Down’s syndrome, she will not become an owner and she is not part of the meetings. She is very proud of being part of Brunnsala and what her ancestors have created:

I think it is important to think about the history. To not forget that. Now when Ted is ill someone else will have to make sure we don’t forget our past.

**Therese and Philip**, the children of Dan and Isabell were only one and three years old and were of course not interviewed.

**One year of collaboration (September 2008–August 2009)**

The interview encounters with the cousins made me exhausted and energised at the same time. The interviews took place in their parents’ homes (apart from Stefan whom I met in his own home), which offered chances to get to know each other during coffee, dinner and so on. These one-on-one interviews proved to be an excellent start and a way to get to know the family members
Introducing the Philipsson family

and understand some of their thinking around the succession and the cousin meetings to come.

In hindsight, I can see how these interviews became the start for one year of intensive collaboration. During that year, I took part in all their six subsequent cousin meetings. The length varied, but in general they started at around nine or ten in the morning and closed at around three to five in the afternoon. I audio-recorded most of the meetings and two of them were video-recorded. In addition, I took notes, they took minutes and they also created various kinds of material during the meetings, such as to-do lists and the like. My role during the meetings varied. Everyone knew I was there doing my PhD study. I was mostly ‘just there’, listening and trying to make sense of what was going on. I sometimes acted as a facilitator in specific parts of the meetings (that will be further described in the account).

In addition to the cousin meetings, there was one initial preparatory meeting. I interviewed the CEO of Brunnsala Coffee, the cousins’ parents and significant others. Apart from these more formalised activities, I highly valued other occasions with the family members such as breakfast prior to a meeting, a walk and talk during a break and all other kinds of informal contacts we had over the phone, via e-mail and text messages. In those relaxed and informal contacts, we got to know each other better and it also gave me a more holistic understanding of their situation as well as the activities in between the cousin meetings. In summary, I would say that a rich field study material was developed during that one year of collaboration.

I see this collaboration as a kind of emerging process in which the cousin meetings were something of a backbone to my field study and from which other activities and initiatives evolved. To my understanding, all these activities and the way the family members allowed me to be with them are what made it possible for me to experience from within how their new meeting practice found its own dialogic shape and how the conversations grew and unfolded between everyone involved.

20 The more formalised activities such as meetings and interviews are listed in Appendix 4.
8. The inner becoming of family meetings

This chapter offers an in-depth, close and rather detailed reading of how the Philipsson family’s cousin meetings proceeded during the first year. The aim is to give an understanding of how the processes of becoming evolve – from within – by focusing on people’s utterances in, and around, their meetings. To that end, the chapter explores different dimensions of the utterance chain to show how these dimensions can offer an enriched understanding of how the processes of becoming unfold in the family conversations. The chapter is organised into three sections. The first introduces how I worked with the field study material and wrote the account. Thereafter, I turn to the Philipsson family directly and how the conversations unfolded during a year of cousin meetings. The chapter closes with a summarising discussion.

Creation of the field account

Next, I will share a condensed description of how I went about writing the account of the cousin meetings in the Philipsson family, as that gives an understanding of how the final account ended up the way it is.

First phase: the logic of key issues

Just about a week after the last cousin meeting that I participated in, in August 2009, I went to spend the autumn semester at Marquette University in the US. I had decided that this would be the time for me to write this account. Once settled in, I went through all my field study material. I collected all interview accounts, the meeting agendas that they had sent out prior to the meetings, their meeting minutes, various kinds of material that had been created during the meetings, my field notes and transcriptions from the meetings as well as e-mail accounts and notes from phone calls. I organised all this in chronological order.

I also started to categorise the material according to my initial idea of how I wanted to organise the account, namely to write about key issues addressed during the meetings. I had recognised some issues that the family members returned to in the conversations. I therefore thought that these issues were of great importance to them. After poring over the field study material, I eventually identified four key issues: 1) cousin meetings, how can we get going?, 2) how can we create new possibilities within established relationships?, 3) how can we relate to potential conflict in a constructive way? and 4) what do I want to do in my life?
After intensive work according to this logic where I never managed to put the text together in a satisfying way, I had to go back home from the US. I was slightly disappointed that I had not managed to finalise the account. I was also rather stressed about what to do next. I looked at all the potentiality in the rich field material and did not know how to put it together.

Second phase: the logic of dialogic elements
Back home I thought I had seen the light when I found out that it was not really the issues themselves that seemed to be the driving forces in their family conversations (this is after all a logic of content and I wanted to make a process-oriented study), but rather how the conversations unfolded between the meeting participants. I therefore revisited the fieldwork material and this time more specifically looked for an understanding of how the family conversations unfolded. This led me into an enquiry of dialogic elements, which I labelled authoring the dialogic self, listening in the dialogic moment, wayfinding in the relational landscape and more.

While I was satisfied because the dialogical elements seemed promising, the search for these elements destroyed the overall feeling for the story at large. It therefore became an account that was rich in detail, but nevertheless not sufficient since it simultaneously took away the context. When writing according to this logic I did not follow the chronological order of how the meetings unfolded over time but rather tried to look for illustrations of the different dialogical elements and gather excerpts from the conversations under different headings/labels. The problem with this decontextualised and predesigned structure was that it took away exactly what I deemed the most interesting, such as the dialogic time/space moment in its full complexity embracing how everything, everyone and every conversation is in relation to everything else in that particular moment in time and how that dialogic moment relates to the next dialogic moment.

Third phase: writing as enquiry
Ten months had passed since I started to work on the account. I recognised that my previous attempts to make something out of this account had led to a monologisation of the dialogic material. I understood I had to rethink my working approach. I read about Bakhtin’s (1984) discussion of plot in Dostoevsky’s novel, which helped me articulate what I had felt but could not express myself. Bakhtin (1984) addresses how it is possible to write without a specific destination in mind. In this way of writing, the writer positions him- or herself from within the flow of the dialogue to sense how the dialogue unfolds. Hence, the writer tries to not ‘plan’ the text in a traditional sense, or shape the text beforehand because from this way of approaching writing, “[p]lot is no longer the sequence characters are ordered to follow, but the result of what they happen to say” (Morson & Emerson, 1990:247). Inspired by this way of thinking about the plot I returned to the family conversations in the meetings
and decided to let the conversations in themselves – not some key issues or dialogic elements – guide me.

I reread Bakhtin’s (1986) plea for the focus on utterances in the unfolding. In studying real-life communication, it is in the utterances that we need to start, he says, because the utterance is the basic building block in any dialogue. In fact, he continues, to learn to speak means to learn how to construct utterances since that is how we engage in dialogue and not in individual sentences or in individual words (Bakhtin, 1986).

Since utterances are bounded by social interplay and not grammatical laws (such as the sentence), utterances have a unique feature of taking in the relational and contextual dimensions needed for us to get to grips with the complexity of real-life dialogue. Moreover, Bakhtin (1986) argues it is exactly those qualities that the sentence does not have that make sentences or words fruitless in the study of dialogue. The underlying argument is that a single sentence (if it is not a whole utterance) does not have the capability needed for the listener to make a valid response; those qualities are only acquired when the sentence is developed into a full utterance. That is the case since one of the differences between sentences and utterances is that when the former is bounded by grammatical means, the latter is marked by the relational domain of an actual response in the exchange. When studying real-life dialogue it is, however, not enough to study individual utterances, as there cannot be any isolated utterances; they always proceed from other utterances just as they expect yet other utterances to respond back. That is how a given utterance “is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related” (Bakhtin, 1986:93). Hence, no utterance can be said to be the first, nor the last, but it is rather an utterance within a chain.

I decided to start writing in chronological order and let the unfolding of utterances in the meetings lead the way. As I encountered the fieldwork anew and started to write without knowing where the text would bring me, I began to see new things in the material. It was a refreshing experience in which the text materialised so that one utterance came after another.

When I later read Richardson and Adams St. Pierre (2005) about writing as a method of inquiry, it encouraged me to keep going in this way. According to them, the idea to start analysis work by activities of analytic induction such as making comparisons, coding, sorting and categorising data (as I had previously tried to do with this account) is to be caught in positivist working practices. In such stepwise working, writing is supposed to be “a tracing of thought already thought, as a transparent reflection of the known and the real – writing as representation, as repetition” (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2005:967). What they suggest instead is to think of writing as a valuable and creative process in which the very act of writing itself is a mode of thinking and inquiring into the phenomenon at hand.

In this rewriting, it was not enough for me to return to my transcriptions from the meetings; I had to listen to the recordings from the meetings again.
That proved to be the best way for me to return to the utterances as they were made in the meetings. Hence, I did not return to the files because I wanted to create a more ‘true’ or ‘real’ account of what happened in the dialogic moment, but I needed to do so to tune into the emotional undertones in the conversations. From this perspective, the transcriptions were already too decontextualised. Listening to the files, I noticed how this rich material became even richer. This time, I ‘travelled’ back to the meetings and tried to remember my feelings of being there, just as I paid attention to the feelings and thoughts now. That allowed me to bring in another kind of data, the sensed, fleeting data that I could not get from my field notes but that were nevertheless important for the writing process.

Even though I had found a new approach, it still did not instruct me what in these myriads of utterances to take into account and what to leave unnoticed. I decided to write about one meeting at a time. Returning to a specific meeting I listened to the recorded file from that meeting and asked myself a twofold question: what can the utterance chains in this particular meeting teach me about the family meeting and what can this family meeting teach me about the utterance chains? The utterances that seemed to have the potentiality to impart new aspects of the family conversations in the meeting, and vice versa, are included in the account. In this way, every meeting will discuss a specific point of view of the utterance chain and how that made a difference in the meeting. Thus, much is left out. But I hope the reader will find that what is in here makes sense for creating a processual understanding of the family meeting.

One year of cousin meetings

When I met the cousins in the one-on-one interviews, they had expressed a sincere interest in getting started with the cousin meetings. I also heard many thought-provoking ideas concerning what to talk about in those meetings as well as what they were currently struggling with – in short, food for thought about what could be of importance for the upcoming meetings. When I later spoke with Judith over the phone, we briefly spoke about the interviews. We decided to see each other and go through some of the preliminary findings from the interviews. I also called Mark and he was able to join us for the meeting.

In preparing to meet with them, I listened through the recorded interview files and checked my notes. Based on this, I made a brief PowerPoint report summarising what we had talked about in the interviews. I organised the report

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21 See, for instance, Rhodes’s (2000) article in which he questions the practice of transcriptions as a means to give a true representation of what is actually happening in the field.

22 Interestingly, Bakhtin uses the notion of ‘transcription’ for understanding processes of monologisation (Morson & Emerson, 1990:56).
into three themes that covered different aspects of what we had discussed during the interviews: (1) meeting process; how the cousin meetings can be performed in an enriching way, including issues such as where to meet and who should participate in the meetings; (2) meeting content; issues important to talk about in the meetings, such as what it means to be an owner; and (3) meeting output; what the cousins wanted to get out of these meetings, such as a plan for succession. Since we had not talked about what I should do with the interview material, I wrote the report in general terms to make sure I did not reveal who said what. I e-mailed the report to Judith and Mark the day before we met.

**Preparation meeting: It will crystallise vs. this is how it is (September 2008)**

The three of us met in the Red Villa. Judith started to talk about how complex the situation was because of the foundation that owned 30 per cent, but also since the other three owners did not have a unified view about the future ownership structure in the group. Nonetheless, she was happy about the upcoming cousin meetings and she trusted the process would take them where they needed to go:

Judith: These are really tough issues. But I am happy the cousins are so positive to seeing each other and talking about it. In so doing, I think it will crystallise. It always does.

I reacted to her way of phrasing it, that it would crystallise. I remembered that was a phrase that her eldest son, Stefan, had used too when I met with him, and I remembered the way he spoke about it, that the future was not yet set and he did not know what solution they would come up. However, this view was not totally shared by Mark:

Mark: I think the first meetings should be focused on information giving from us to them. With the message, this is how it is. This is the fundamental base. Here are the articles of association, here is the foundation and this is how it works. That does not seem to be clear to them.

Mark stopped for a short while as we took in what had been said thus far. He then continued:

Mark: This is the basics I have to give to them because this is the way it is. Is it possible to make changes? Yes, but for that we need to have 100 per cent [of the owners] to be on speaking terms. And I do not understand how that will ever be possible. If it is 90 per cent, then it is not
8 The inner becoming of family meetings

enough. This is how it is [Mark points at a printed article of association]. And this is difficult to do something about.

As we continued to talk, I noticed how these two logics seemed to be at work; the one suggested by Judith in which the process will lead them on a route that is not yet known to them and the other introduced by Mark where much more is already set. As the meeting unfolded, these competing views clashed. After a while, Mark seemed to be more open to letting go of some of the rules they had created for themselves. The background, as he told us, is that his oldest daughter, Josefine, has recently been employed in Brunnsala Coffee, without previous working experience from another organisation. This is something they have previously regarded as impossible. Now this had happened and Mark explained:

Mark: I have been thinking of this for quite a while and I think I have slightly changed my view. I still think education is essentially significant and you have to have an education that is relevant for your work tasks. But social competence is probably even more important. If you don’t fit into the work team then people will leave. And if the competent people leave and you are the only one left because you are the owner, then it is goodbye. That is why it is not possible to say that this is how it should be in every issue we have decided upon. It has to be on a one-by-one basis for every cousin.

Hence, Mark suggested a change in attitude where social competence should be more highly valued than formal education. In addition, he brought forward the idea that there cannot be any such thing as general rules that apply to every cousin in every situation. As I interpreted this utterance, he had moved a little bit away from his first utterance when he was firmly talking about ‘this is how it is’.

We continued to go through the PowerPoint report. The different points addressed in the report generated further questions and conversations. Mark and Judith thought the interviews could be interesting to share between the cousins as well. I promised to think about how that could be done in practice. Towards the end of the meeting, I asked them if it would be possible for me to continue seeing them as part of my dissertation study. They responded saying that it could be of help for both parties. Mark further asked me if I would like to be paid for my work. I told them, I would prefer not to, because I did not want to feel the obligation to deliver any specific results. Towards the end of our three-hour meeting, they invited me to the next cousin meeting that would take place ten days later.
Commentary - an ideological meeting of centrifugal and centripetal forces in the utterance

Throughout the meeting, the two discourses ‘this is how it is’ and ‘it will crystallise’ seemed to be in interaction. In general, Mark was more inclined to utter ideas of following their predefined rules, while Judith suggested they would find out along the way as they started to see each other. This interplay of different logics and how they met each other in their utterances is an example of the centripetal and centrifugal interplay in dialogue. Bakhtin writes:

> Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The processes of centralisation and decentralisation, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance [...] (Bakhtin, 1981:272).

When Judith started off by offering the centrifugal suggestion that it would crystallise as they move on, Mark responded with the centripetal force saying no, wait a second, we have boundaries that we need to consider. This is an example of how these different forces of openings and closings rub against each other. At the same time, it is not possible to stay neutral to these forces – they do something to us – as we take in the words offered by the other and make our response. That is how I interpret Mark’s next comment when he opened up somewhat by saying that these rules cannot be set in stone; we have to be more flexible. Hence, he seemed to have listened to Judith and changed his position slightly. At the same time, these forces are not equally strong and, at any given moment, one of them is more dominant and the other more marginalised (Baxter, 2010). Another aspect of these forces is that they give life to the point of view – the worldview – of the speaker. That is because language is “not a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as worldview [...]”(Bakhtin, 1981:271).

As this quote underlines, and as the utterances by Judith and Mark illustrate, their respective worldviews are communicated in their suggestions for how the meeting process can unfold. If I relate back to the difference between the being and the becoming ontology (see Chapter 3), it is interesting to note how Mark’s utterance signals more of an entitative worldview where he believes in rules to be defined and applied. That differs from the suggestion by Judith, which has more of a relational orientation, suggesting things have to evolve as they start to see each other in the meetings. Thus, their utterances are not value-free suggestions, but rather reflections on their positions on this matter.

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Back in my office, I started to think of how in practical terms we could share the interview accounts between everyone the cousins. Since some of the interviews were sensitive, revealing highly personal matters, I thought we needed to do something with the accounts before they could be shared. Maybe they needed to be rewritten?

**Cousin meeting: How should we manage our meetings? (September 2008)**

Everyone is gathered for a cousin meeting in the Red Villa. The meeting had been scheduled here because that would allow Ted to be part of the meeting even though he is ill. Unfortunately, his health had deteriorated dramatically and he is now in hospital.

When we arrived at 11 o’clock a buffet was served in the kitchen with bacon, egg, yoghurt and everything else needed for an appetising Sunday brunch. People were making jokes and talking about the weekend. There was small talk among the cousins about where to be seated when Mark took on the chair position at the short end of the table. He circulated an agenda and opened the meeting by asking if the agenda could be approved. There were seven items on the agenda: 1) opening the meeting, 2) scheduling and formalities of today’s meeting (closing time, who to be chairperson, secretary, etc.), 3) feedback and comments on the first meeting, 4) how do we look upon our companies? Jenny Helin, 5) board meeting 29 Sep, 6) any other business and 7) next meeting.

The first issue on the agenda created an intense discussion. Mark’s eldest daughter, Josefine, said she wanted an external chair. Mark welcomed the suggestion. In the discussion about who should be chairperson, Stefan underlined that the chairperson is important because they need to find a way to make sure the meetings will not go on forever. Adam raised the question of how they can be certain that what they have decided on will be executed and followed up. He also wanted them to create an overall time plan for the succession when they can agree on when they will have to make a decision concerning who takes over. However, what worried the cousins the most was the risk of destroying their relationships so that the feelings they had now, when they were “more like sisters and brothers than cousins”, might be damaged. There were lively discussions back and forth and a decision was eventually made to make a rotation system by which the oldest cousin would start to be the chair at the next meeting and thereafter change every meeting according to age. The chair of the meeting would be responsible for preparing an agenda as well. It was further decided that the person who served as the

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23 For some reason, I did not want to ask (did not dare to ask?) if I could record this meeting. Therefore, this part of the account builds on my notes from the meeting together with their meeting minutes. That is why this section does not include any quotes from the meeting conversations.
chair in one meeting should be the secretary in the following. In this way, everyone would learn more about what it means to chair a meeting and how to take minutes. Having agreed on these basic structures, the cousins seemed to be satisfied they had achieved a working order for the coming meetings.

Mark thereafter handed over to me. I explained that there was much wise thinking in the interviews that might be of interest to them. I told them I had an idea about how it would be possible to share the interview accounts with each other if they thought that was a good idea. Mark took out the PowerPoint report and everyone wanted to have a look. We went through the report, which created much talk about what to talk about in the upcoming meetings, and the cousins said they would very much like to continue to discuss the interviews. We decided on a working model where the next step was that I would go home and make a short summary of each interview to send to the interviewee. When everyone had approved their own text, we would then share them between us in the group.

Going through the PowerPoint report, they saw many different issues that they would like to discuss in future meetings. To not forget anything, Jennifer took out a piece of paper and created a list of important topics. She wrote down handling of conflict, learning about board work and what it means to be an owner. All of a sudden, someone noticed that the time had passed by quickly and everyone got in a hurry to close the meeting.

Commentary - orchestrating potentiality in committed responses
To me, this meeting was very much about commitment. The cousins committed themselves to taking charge of the structuring of the meetings in terms of acting as chair, preparing agendas and writing minutes. The creation of the list of future topics to address can as well be interpreted as a promise of conversations to come, just as the promise to develop and share each other’s interview accounts was an invitation to future explorations. These various promises seemed to arise in the cousins’ responses to each other. With that, I mean how someone suggested something that the other related to – answered to – which led the conversation in a specific direction:

Every utterance must be regarded primarily as a response to preceding utterances of the given sphere (we understand the word ‘response’ here in the broadest sense). Each utterance refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies on the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account. [...] Therefore, each utterance is filled with various kinds of responsive reactions to other utterances of the given sphere of speech communication (Bakhtin, 1986:91, emphasis in original).

When, for instance, the discussion about who should be the chairperson of the meetings was aired, a first suggestion was to bring in someone external (a non-
family member). In the response to this suggestion, yet someone else liked the idea of the chairperson but brought forward that this could be an opportunity for themselves to learn more about chairing meetings. Thus, “responsive understanding is a fundamental force” where yet new meanings are created (Bakhtin, 1981:280). To respond is an active, meaning-making process in which we take in the utterance offered by the other and formulate something from within that dialogic interplay:

The fact is that when the listener perceives and understands the meaning [...] he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude toward it. He either agrees or disagrees with it (completely or partially), augments it, applies it, prepares for its execution, and so on. Any understanding of live speech, a live utterance, is inherently responsive, although the degree of this activity varies extremely (Bakhtin, 1986:68).

In my notes from this meeting, I had written down how I felt that the cousins really wanted to get started together. It felt as if the responsiveness that came directly created the very foundation for the promises and commitments that were made. I had written down the word ‘potentiality’ in my notebook too. When I look back, I can see how it seemed to be the active responses to each person’s utterances that created the atmosphere of potentiality. I later found out that dialogic potentiality has a specific meaning and place in Bakhtin’s work. Analysing Dostoevsky’s novels he concluded that nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future (Bakhtin, 1984:166).

This open view, where new meanings are still to be co-created in the utterance of the “new word” (Bakhtin, 1984:166) is telling of the atmosphere in the meeting. The notion of ‘unfinalisability’ is of significance here too, signalling that the world is not only messy, but open to future responses.

One distinguishing feature of Bakhtin’s (1984) view of potentiality, unfinalisability and creativity is that he sees it as immanent in everyday life. In accordance with his view of dialogue as inherent in life, so is creativity and potentiality something we all embody. The implication of this view is a concern for how creativity is manifested in everyday life. It thereby breaks with the romantic outlook in which creativity is something exceptional, mysterious and only in the hands of a few. At the same time, it is a break from the formalistic takes on creativity, where creativity is something that can only be worked on according to a plan. What can be noticed here, in contrast to formalistic and
romantic views, is how the cousins’ responses to each other, in the spur of the moment, orchestrated a meeting of potentiality for future conversations.

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When I returned to my office the day after the meeting, I needed to start working on the interview accounts. I was now on my way towards something I had never tried before. I worked with the interviews one by one. I listened carefully to the recorded files from the interviews and tried to tune into what the voices in each interview expressed. From these voices, I put together quotes from our conversations. At this stage, I recognised that I was essentially facing three challenges. First, the difficulty of transforming a two-hour interview into a three- to five-page summary without losing too much depth. I thought it was important to minimise the number of pages because I did not want the total text to be too long for everyone to read. At the same time, if I took away too much, there would only be some general and loosely kept conversations left that did not say much. Second, I wanted to keep the balance between on the one hand making each summary reflect the flow of the conversations in that specific interview and on the other hand making the summaries coherent in a way that made sure certain issues were reflected in all summaries and would make sense when they were read together. For instance, I had the feeling they wanted to read about each other’s ideas of being an owner or not and how they pictured themselves in the future. Third, there was a great difference in terms of how sensitive it was for the cousins to talk about those issues. I wanted their emotional voices to come through but at the same time I did not want to expose anyone so that she or he would feel unprotected. A few days before Christmas, I e-mailed each cousin his or her own summary. This became the start of a co-authoring process that went on for some days.

Co-authoring interview summaries: I don’t want anyone to get hurt ... (December 2008)

In addition to the e-mail, I also called the cousins to talk about the interview account I had sent to them. I asked them to read and get back to me in any way they wanted to. As the table below summarises, the responses varied among the cousins.
### Table 8.1 Summary of co-authoring interaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cousin</th>
<th>Type of interaction in the co-authoring process</th>
<th>His or her writing in their own interview account</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stefan</td>
<td>E-mail and text messages.</td>
<td>He did not change the text in any way, just sent me a text message to thank me for a good job with the interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>E-mail and phone calls.</td>
<td>He rewrote and took away parts from the text. He also wrote an introduction asking his cousins to be conscious in their reading, taking into consideration that the text was written by a third party.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>E-mails and phone call.</td>
<td>She did not write anything herself directly in the text but asked me to add some things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josefine</td>
<td>E-mails and phone calls.</td>
<td>She rewrote quite extensively, added text, removed other parts and made changes and comments along the document. She made the changes in the track changes function in Microsoft Word so that I could easily see what she wanted to change. She also changed the language into a more formal, written language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>E-mails.</td>
<td>She rewrote quite extensively, added text, removed other parts and made changes along the document. She also changed the language into a more formal, written language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>E-mail.</td>
<td>He did not change the text in any way, just responded by e-mail saying he was happy with it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>E-mails and phone calls.</td>
<td>She rewrote quite extensively, added text removed other parts and made changes along the document. She also changed the language into a more formal, written language.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stefan and Adam responded by saying they did not want to make any changes in the text. I received a text message from Stefan in which he briefly said he was happy with the text and did not want to change anything. In a similar way, Adam responded via e-mail saying he had nothing he wanted to add or take away. A striking similarity between the other five who wanted to make changes was their concerns for how their text would be received by the other cousins. For instance, Alex wrote me an e-mail saying:

Hi Jenny. It was interesting to read the interview with myself. There is, however, much that I would like to change because I think it can be interpreted differently when I read it compared to what I meant. I also want to take away things I don’t want the others to read. It so easily gets misinterpreted.

In the new version he sent me he had written an introduction, asking his cousins to remember that the text was based on an interview situation and thereafter “written by a third party”. My interpretation is that he wanted to underline that those words were uttered at another point in time, with another aim, to another addressee and then formulated by me, not him. He later also sent me a text message explaining that it was important for him that the others should not be hurt by his text. His sister, Maria, also reasoned along those lines when she asked me to add a few things in order not to hurt anyone with her words. In a similar way, Olivia wanted to make changes to make sure that what she meant would get through. She explained this further in an e-mail to me:

I changed it [the text] quite a bit. That is because I want the others to understand what I mean and not what I say. I think you understood exactly what I meant with everything but it can easily get wrong in the ‘interconnections’. That is what I have learned at least (my life is sometimes too much ‘misunderstanding’ à la a whispering game). I think I sound too childish sometimes and I tried to make the interview more written than spoken. Like I said, I want to explain what I mean [...]. Change more if you feel like it, I am happy with it all now!

Josefine used the track changes function in Microsoft Word, which made her authoring transparent so that I could follow how she had changed the text. This reading was interesting for the reason that it highlighted what she wanted to clarify further, what she added and took away. I recognised that some of her texts were reflections on the original interview text. I therefore put these reflections in Microsoft Word’s function ‘comment’ and thereafter made the changes she had suggested. I sent this new version back to her, and she made some new, smaller changes. Eventually the first two paragraphs of her interview
The inner becoming of family meetings

account looked like the text in Figure 8.1 when we sent the document to her cousins.

8 The inner becoming of family meetings

Josefine, Sep 6, 2008

Josefine berättar om hur hon har upplevt det att vara en "Philipsen" här hemma:

Josefine: Jag tycker att det var jättejobbigt att ta tid, hur börjar jag vill ha några nedhuggna i det. Och egentligen det och se förhållandena med
Josefine: Jag tycker jag, i princip, att det bara var jobbigt. Man fick räkna på hur ens besederd jag, att man började ordentligt, att man alltid
Josefine berättar att hon inte vill säga att hon tillhör Brunnalsa-

Josefine berättar att hon inte vill säga att hon tillhör Brunnalsa-

Josefine berättar att hon inte vill säga att hon tillhör Brunnalsa-

Figure 8.1 Illustration of a co-authored interview account.

Commentary - textualising addressee

The textualisation process described above illuminates how the interview accounts were transformed in the co-authoring process. In this process, the cousins seemed to be concerned with how their texts would be received by the others. To use Bakhtin's (1986:95) terminology, they seemed to be concerned with issues of addressee:

An essential (constitutive) marker of the utterance is its quality of being directed to someone, its addressee. As distinct from the signifying units of language – words and sentences – that are
impersonal, belonging to nobody and addressed to nobody, the utterance has both an author [...] and an addressee.

There are two related issues at play that make addressivity such a central concern here. First, that the co-authored accounts were based on talk, or conversations, from our interview encounter. In the co-authoring process, these conversations were transformed into a written text. As it seems, the transformation from a talk-based to a text-based account made a great difference. As the illustration from Josefine’s account illustrates, this shift made it possible for herself to encounter her own words anew. Hence, it seemed like the text was experienced as more durable, or fixed, which opened up new ways of making sense of her own narratives. Owing to the fixing character of the account, it becomes important to think of how one’s own traces will be received by the potential addressee.

Other than changes in format, there was also an explicit change in addressee in this co-authoring process. While the interview occasion was an encounter between the cousins and me, the new accounts were to be shared with the other family members. That change of addressee creates a need to think of how these new addressees might make sense of the account, how each account will ‘land’ among the cousins when they are reading. Both the style and tone of voice in our utterances are based on whom we are addressing. In recognising the addressee, we can understand it is not possible just to speak out of the blue. On the contrary, words are uttered for someone, just as we expect them to respond back. Hence, addressivity has to do with relationality and the expectations of the addressee, where addressivity gives meaning and motivation for our deeds and utterances. The recognition that the meanings of words uttered are to be defined by the addressee together with the intention of the author — that the word is a two-sided act in which its meaning is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant — plays a role in all our encounters (Bakhtin, 1986). That is how every word expresses the relationship between the one and the other in a conversation. Consequently, whatever one says is never totally up to oneself but a joint performance taken place within an ‘us’.

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When all seven cousins had approved their own accounts, I sent them, as well as Judith and Mark, a compilation of all summaries. In one of the responses, I was informed they had had a ceremony for Ted who had recently passed away. I was sad to hear he had not been able to fight his brain cancer any longer.
Cousin meeting: Labelling and defining (January 2009)

It is just before lunch in Mark’s home. The meeting is planned to go on until five in the afternoon at the latest. This is the first meeting when one of the cousins is to be the chair. Josefine, eldest among the cousins, has sent out an agenda as agreed in the previous meeting. As everyone is seated around the table she takes the chair. There are four issues on the agenda: 1) discussions based on the interviews, 2) information about Brunnsala Farm, 3) discussions about how to continue working with the museum and 4) financial issues.

Josefine seems to be confident in her role as chair as she starts off with formalities. Judith wants to add one thing to the agenda: how is it possible for the cousins to be involved as owners without being employed in the group? When Judith brings up this issue I come to think about how quickly everything can change, like it has here since Ted passed away. In his last will and testament, his shares are to be equally divided among his three children. Until they are 25 years old, Judith will formally administer their shares, which means she will do that for Maria. The two eldest children, however, Stefan and Alex, are now shareholders of the group.

Josefine gives me the floor. I explain that I want us to talk about the interviews in two steps. In the first step, I want us to sit two by two and talk about three things: what similarities do you see in the interview accounts, what differences do you notice and what were you most touched by when reading them?

Intense conversations immediately take off as people move into different rooms to talk about the interviews. When we meet again some 30 minutes later we share what we have talked about in pairs. What strikes me in listening to them is the need to give substance to and create meaning of different notions and concepts that are of concern for them in the family. In the following, I will give some illustrations from these conversations.

The conflict

Josefine and Maria tell us they are both touched by how much everyone seems to care for each other. Another side of that coin, however, is the fear of getting into family conflict:

Maria: About being touched. It is this fear of conflict that everyone has. There is so much conflict, conflict. And then our parents’ conflict too [difficult to hear what she says since she falls into tears].

Olivia: It is okay Maria.

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One of the projects that Ted worked on before he got cancer was the creation of Brunnsala Museum. This museum is about traditional life in the countryside in Brunnsala and Sweden as well as more future-oriented work about what is needed for a durable agriculture life.
Josefine: We were touched by the fact that everyone cares for each other and we don’t want to fight. All interviews are quite similar but this about conflict is a strong word.

Maria: It feels like, if we say that we are afraid of conflict, then I have the feeling we are already in a conflict.

Jennifer: That makes the fear of conflict the conflict in itself. I think that is the threat. If we are not allowed to have a fear of conflict, and we should not have any conflict, then it will turn into a vicious circle. Eventually that will be the conflict, or how shall I put it? That we will not have the courage to bring issues forward.

Adam: But we will have conflict anyhow, we’d better face it.

Jennifer: Yes, we’d better tackle it before it becomes a conflict.

The conversation about conflict keeps going. Josefine suggests that one of the purposes of the cousin meetings is to handle conflict as well as learning how to handle it. Jennifer adds that she thinks the meetings will be a good place for them to get to know each other better and in that way know what people are like, which can prevent conflict from arising. However, it is still not clear what the word ‘conflict’ stands for:

Adam: Conflict does not necessarily mean something negative. It depends on the situation when you enter the conflict. I mean, if you have different opinions in a discussion, then this is a kind of conflict, but if you create some kind of guidelines so you know how to act …

Josefine: But that is a discussion.

Jennifer: It depends on how you define conflict. If you think that is conflict, then I think we have very different takes on that. To me it is more like when you are in two different camps and you can hardly speak to each other. Or, you speak to each other but it doesn’t lead you anywhere.

Adam: I think this is conflict, but if you can sit down together … . Most of it is common sense. If we have guidelines and make sure people are following those...

Olivia: We have to add this to our list [of things to discuss in the future]. We have to make an analysis of this concept.

The issue about family conflict is something that really worries the cousins. In this meeting, they return to the subject repeatedly. As I interpret the above conversation, they talk about (at least) four different strategies for dealing with conflict: to talk about it and define what it means to them, to get to know each other better and thereby know what people like/dislike and what people are like, which can prevent conflict from arising, to talk about issues before they
eventually turn into conflict as well as to practise conflict resolution in meetings.

It is interesting to notice how the exploration of what conflict can mean for them takes place in a conversation where different voices come through and suggest different ideas. For instance, Adam, in his request for guidelines, seems to believe in a ‘script’ so that people know how to behave when conflict arises. That can be contrasted with Jennifer’s take on the subject where she is not sure what conflict is. Olivia has yet another take on the issue in that she seems to believe it is something they cannot solve today and, therefore, something that has to be put on another agenda. In this polyphonic way of reasoning about conflict, I notice that it seems to be okay that the different voices can stay apart in their plurality, without the need to merge into a single point of view of the subject.

**This is Olivia – who is Olivia?**

As we continue to talk, Olivia wants to hear how people interpreted her interview account. Already in the authoring of her interview account Olivia was worried about how it would be read and interpreted by the others. A bit further into the meeting, she wants to hear from the others about how they understood her and who they think she is:

Olivia: It is important for me not to be misunderstood. That is why I made quite a lot of changes in the interview. I wanted it to be more like written text. It would please me very much if everyone could say this is how Olivia thinks and if they can say what they think about it.

Jennifer: That is really difficult.

Olivia: You just have to say this is how I have interpreted you, this is what I think.

Jennifer: It is not that easy because I mix them all up and forget who said what. That is at least what I have done. I don’t remember exactly what **you** said.

Olivia: That is exactly why. To explain how you think or otherwise we may confuse things.

Alex: The way I look at it, if I remember your writing, is that you think the business is interesting but you are not really interested in working there. As we have been saying here, you want to have information about what is going on, but you don’t want to work there. At least not the way you look at it at the moment. Also, that you want to make a difference in the world. In all of this, I think I am quite close to you, because I could also have done something like that in the environmental movement.

Josefine: That is what I wanted five years ago as well. To get an education and then work abroad.
Jenny: You asked what I see in reading. I would probably interpret your account differently depending on what I am thinking of when I’m reading. You seem to be concerned that you don’t know what to do in life. To me, that is part of being someone who reflects on issues and sees things from different perspectives.

Olivia: That is what I’m hoping.

Jenny: If so, I see your questioning as part of moving forward in your ideas.

Mark: One comment from me on you, Olivia, is that you are a reflective person who has great distance to what we are doing here. You are probably the one with the greatest distance to what we are doing. Thinking that you don’t know what to do. That is not something Josefine knew either, five years back in time. If anyone had told me three years ago that Josefine would start working here, I would have said, never in my life!

Olivia: Something like this, I think it would be great fun to do this with everyone. Maybe it will feel a little bit forced, but interesting to do.

In Olivia’s quest to find out who she is and what she wants to do in life (she tells us she has to figure out what to do in life as she wants to start her university studies in the coming autumn), she seems to appreciate hearing other people’s interpretations of her interview. From a Bakhtinian point of view that is a way to continue explore oneself. Bakhtin (1990) examines the process of selfhood in three related categories: the I-for-myself (how my own consciousness looks and feels about myself), the I-for-others (how myself appears to others) and the-others-for-me (how outsiders appear to me). From this categorisation of the self we can see how Olivia’s request is to set up a dialogue between her I-for-others (how the other cousins have interpreted her text) and the-others-for-me (in that she can hear what the others are thinking about her). This dialogue, about herself, can contribute with an understanding about herself that she would never be able to discover on her own, which can thereby be an opportunity for her to broaden as well as deepen her view of herself.

However, the conversation then takes another turn as people start talking about how the plan for one’s life changes over time. This is a conversation that leads to another important notion for them, that of active ownership.

**Active ownership**

The meeting has reached the point where Judith’s issue about how it is possible to act as owners without being employed is discussed. I bring up a suggestion that Max, the CEO of Brunnsala Coffee, made when I met him for an interview:
I think the idea brought forward by Max, that there are other ways to contribute to the business, is interesting. As he suggested, there are other things where he can see a value and support by the family if you act as owners without being employed. For instance, he talked about having summer or winter parties. It would also be of value for him if someone from the family would like to work with the museum, helping in the work with values, history and so on. As I understand it, he is referring to an active role, which does not necessarily mean to be formally employed in the business. That you act as owners in other ways.

A figurehead.

Yes, that is also active ownership. When Dad says active ownership then he equals that to working in the business. When we spoke about active ownership at university, we discussed more in terms of being active in other ways. You don't necessarily need to be employed but you do care. That is also a way of talking about being active. It depends on what you mean.

Yes, naturally. But then you need to know what areas you are supposed to be active in.

Of course.

You have to distinguish that from the operative role. That is extremely important. I have said that a thousand times. You are an owner once a year, at the shareholders' meeting. You can of course decide on some issues that are ownership issues. To arrange a summer party or so. But being operational, that is different. This becomes more and more important since we only have external CEOs these days.

[With a slightly irritated voice] When you say those things, you return to this all the time. You say something and that is how it is. But there are other ways as well. We know what you think but we don't necessarily need to end up there right now. Perhaps in five years, but for the moment it is probably wise if all doors are open so that you can discuss from different perspectives. I know, for instance, that the salespeople think our history is actually very important to them. Mikael spends hours talking to them about our roots. It can be of great significance if anyone would be interested in working with those things.

You can call it different things.

You are right.

We can decide that when we say active owner that means to us that someone is working in some way, and you can be an operational owner when you work in the business, but when
you are an active owner that means you work with everything around, but you are not employed in the business.

What is at stake here is a fundamental notion to them, that of active ownership. I recall my first meeting with Mark. He introduced me to the importance of active ownership. To him, that meant that the one who owns Brunnsala should be formally employed in the group, too. In short, Mark had a clear-cut and finalised idea of what active ownership meant to him. In this conversation, however, Josefine and her sister Jennifer are questioning this meaning and want to open up alternatives. As I understand Josefine when she tells her father to stop offering them his predefined opinions, she is tired of these finalised meanings that leave no opportunity for other ways of understanding what active ownership can mean to them. She also questions her father’s authoritative voice when talking like ‘this is how it is’. The problem with authoritative discourse, from a dialogic perspective, is that it has a closed meaning with “no space around it to play in, no contradictory emotions” (Bakhtin, 1981:344). This is the case since

[...] the authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, originally connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already acknowledged in the past. It is a prior discourse. It is therefore not a question of choosing it from among other possible discourses that are equal (Bakhtin, 1981:342).

This quote is right to the point literally as well as metaphorically. As Mark previously told me, the idea that active ownership equals being employed is something he learned from his father’s experience and passed on to the next generation. However, in this meeting, they seem to have created an arena where it is possible to start questioning this finalised meaning of active ownership. In short, the cousin meeting seems to open up a polyphonic way of labelling and filling words with meaning where “a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world” can be uttered having the possibility to break with predefined meanings (Bakhtin, 1984:6).

**Who has the right to move into the Red Villa?**

We have been talking for hours. I can feel that the energy in the room is going down. But all of a sudden, something is happening that clears the sky. I am immediately wide awake again as I feel we are moving towards something that is tense. Mark is talking. He elaborates on why he thinks it is of importance to create rules of the game and follow these rules. He then changes the subject slightly as he lets us know he has heard Stefan is about to move into the Red Villa with his family. To Mark, this is not a decision that Judith can take on her own. She responds with irritation, saying she thought they had already agreed
on this. For the first time, I experience a really heated conversation in the cousin meeting:

Judith: When we moved in, Ted and I, we moved into the Red Villa because he was the eldest son and the eldest son is to take over the villa. That is how it should be.

Mark: No, you and Ted moved in for the reason he became CEO of the sawmill. It is a workman’s dwelling, the one who is responsible for the sawmill should also live there.

Judith: (In a very upset tone of voice) Ted knew you would never let Stefan move in, that is why he never talked to you about this issue. If this is the case then it is easy for me. I am not moving out.

There are some discussions in which it turns out that Mark’s daughter, Jennifer, may be interested in moving into the Red Villa too. All the good intentions about speaking with respect seem to have been forgotten and Stefan has to tell his mother to calm down. Eventually, Mark seems to need further support from elsewhere as he says:

Mark: Let us see what the tax authority has to say about this as well.

What is happening in this emotionally loaded moment? The Red Villa seems to have a great value to both Mark and Judith. What I see when I revisit this argumentation is that both of them are talking with an authoritative voice. Their authority comes from the reuse of voices and utterances that once took place in a distant past. For instance, Judith says she and Ted moved in once upon a time because the rule was that the eldest son was to move in. She does not say who made this rule, but it seems to have been someone with power. Mark responds by giving an alternative interpretation of this rule. This way of referring to and making use of other people’s talk is something Bakhtin has labelled ‘double-voiced utterances’. Double voicing can be understood as a process where someone makes use “of someone else’s discourse for his own purposes by inserting a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and which retains, an intention of its own” (Morson & Emerson, 1990:152). In so doing, the intention and consciousness held by the speaker is infused by the intention of the original speaker. That is why Bakhtin (1984) labels it ‘double-voicing’ in that two consciousnesses co-exist in one utterance.
Commentary - the polyphonic process of filling words with meaning

As the meeting proceeds, different things and notions are discussed in similar ways where there seems to be a need to define and find meaning in words and notions that are of importance to the family. In this process, some of their current taken-for-granted truths are challenged as new perspectives emerge. According to Bakhtin (1984:110), truth is not something that is ready-made because

[tru]th is not born nor is to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction.

At the same time, the inherited truths they bring with them mean something to them and it is possible to notice how the words they are talking about, to a greater or lesser degree, already have some meaning attached to them. That is the case since words that have been used for some time have an inherited meaning from previous conversations:

The life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation.

In this process the word does not forget its own path and cannot completely free itself from the power of these concrete contexts into which it has entered (Bakhtin, 1984:202).

Thus a word is never neutral and without luggage – without voice. Nonetheless, what we have witnessed in this meeting is how they started to unmask some of these taken-for-granted meanings as they fill the words with new meanings. A main feature of this process is the polyphonic nature of the meeting. As the family members speak and offer each other their views on, for instance, who Olivia is, the different views rub against each other and show different potential meanings of Olivia. This feature of multivoicedness is of significance in the meaning-making process since “meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning; they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings” (Bakhtin, 1986:7). In this polyphonic process, the importance is “precisely what happens between various consciousnesses, that is, their interaction and interdependence” (Bakhtin, 1984:36, emphasis in original).

Additionally, in a polyphonic meeting of different voices it is possible to see (hear) that one person is not necessarily equal to one voice. One example is the

25 One signature of Bakhtin's writing is the ambiguity in his texts and the use of the same notion in different contexts and with different meanings. This holds true for polyphony as well. This is a term that he never explicitly defined but wrote extensively about in the book Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics (Bakhtin, 1984).
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conversation between Judith and Mark about who should live in the Red Villa. In this exchange, Judith makes explicit use not only of her own voice, but also of some unspecified ‘old’ voice as well as the voice of her late husband. It is even so that a singular utterance can be polyphonic, as the double-voiced utterances illustrate.

Double voicing is regular in our everyday speaking when we sometimes make use of someone else’s discourse on purpose, other times without even recognising we do. In double voicing, the reference to the original speaker differs:

With some of them we completely merge our own voice, forgetting whose they are; others, which we take as authoritative, we use to reinforce our own words; still others, finally, we populate with our own aspirations, alien or hostile to them (Bakhtin, 1984:195).

In contrast to the many examples of polyphonic processes where new meanings can be co-created, the conversation between Judith and Mark is different in that it illustrates a more monologic way of talking where their voices do not seem to meet. In this way of speaking and responding to each other, no new thoughts about who should live in the Red Villa were expressed.

It has been a long day and some of the cousins seem to be a little restless. As the meeting closes it is decided that the theme for the next meeting should be the conflict between Mark and his two brothers. Since the interviews revealed how much the cousins are worried about conflict and how some of them have really been hurt by the conflict between the three brothers in the ninth generation, the cousins suggest that they would like to meet with Dan (their uncle), to talk about the conflict from his perspective. They suggest it would be a great idea to meet without their parents. Hence, it is decided that they will invite Dan, that Judith and Mark will not participate and that I will facilitate the meeting.

Cousin meeting: What is your view of the conflict? (March 2009)

I felt humbly thankful for being entrusted with the task of facilitating this meeting. Dan had not taken part in the previous cousin meetings but I had met him once for an interview a few months earlier.

In the preparation of the meeting, I thought about how to frame the conversations so that they would allow us to talk about the conflict, which is a sensitive issue for them, in a new way. Since this is a conflict that has been in
the family for so long, they have developed their own speech genre, which shapes their relationships and ways of talking to each other in relation to the conflict. I wanted this meeting to offer possibilities of seeing each other beyond these habits of interacting and thereby offer a taste of other ways of relating to each other.

Here is what I did. I talked to my mother who is a psychologist and works with conflict resolution. She gave me valuable help and reminded me about Roth's (2007) work on conflict resolution where the work before the actual meeting is emphasised. Inspired by Roth's (2007) way of working, I called everyone who was invited to the meeting and asked them to start thinking about two kinds of questions, questions they wanted to ask the others and questions they wanted to be asked themselves. The idea behind the first question was to start thinking about what they wanted to know about the others and how that could be asked in a respectful way. The other question sprang from the idea that there might be something that they wanted to respond to; things they wanted the others to listen to. It also felt important to think of questions in two directions to create awareness not only of how it feels to be asked but also to be asking questions. In addition, the idea was to create possibilities for the many perspectives – from different voices – in the room (Roth, 2007). When we had developed the questions I grouped them into three different categories: questions to Dan, questions to Mark's children and questions to Ted's children. I brought these questions with me to the meeting.

**Framing the meeting: exploring the future of the Brunnsala Group**

On the first occasion I talked to Dan over the phone about him meeting the cousins, he suggested the meeting could be held in his home. I regarded this as a significant welcoming gesture. When we arrived at his house that Sunday morning around 10 o'clock, he was just about to set the table with coffee and homemade pastries. After some small talk, we decided to get going.

I thought it would be useful for us to frame the conversations to take place in an enriching way. For that purpose, I wanted everyone to ‘warm up’ by talking about things that are not difficult but yet of great importance for them, before turning to our questions. Two more things that seemed to be important were first to create a feeling of being in this together and, second, not to get caught in the troublesome past relations but rather finding ways to talk about the future. For that reason, I opened the meeting by suggesting that this meeting could be looked upon as a moment of exploring rather than us having to achieve commitments, conclusions or decisions. Thereafter, I asked them to form small groups (preferably not groups of siblings). Each group was given an envelope containing 20 pictures from magazines. I asked them to discuss within

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26 She is also currently writing her doctoral thesis about family relations and communication in family businesses.
their group and choose the picture they thought best symbolises the brand of Brunnsala in five years.

Coffee cups were filled up and people went to different rooms to discuss. After 15 minutes, we reconvened. The conversation was easy-going and I noticed an intense energy because the future of their business is something they all relate to and are concerned about. Let me share one illustration with you from this framing session of the meeting.

The last couple to show their picture was Josefine and Dan. They had chosen two pictures.

Josefine: Well, we chose these two pictures. One big tree with lots of branches and one picture of a house of cards. The house of cards is pointing upwards but is at the same time quite unstable if the wind comes around. Or what do you think Dan?

Dan: Oh, I don’t know.

Josefine: It was like this. I chose this picture [the house of cards], or I said, we can take this picture because it is pointing upwards and it symbolises how we can climb up the stairs so to speak. We move forward. But Dan found this picture [the tree] and that is very much the same in the sense that it is growing upwards. And Dan who has been here longer started to talk about …

Dan: You can turn the house of cards upside down. It has to do with stability and history. And it is a bit of gamble, you can say. Houses of cards are interesting because you can build them enormously high and very stable and develop a lot but you must all the time make sure they don’t fall apart. Or you may place one card wrong. And the less solid business you have, the more consciously you have to place your cards.

Stefan: But you can always use glue.

(A big laughter in the group)

Dan: You can, of course, use glue but then you have to make sure nothing is forgotten along the way.

I experienced it as an easy-going conversation in the room. Everyone was involved and talked with a lot of energy and seriousness. At the same time, there was a lot of joking. Since joint laughter has the possibility to liberate and lift us above troublesome situations, it was probably an important ingredient that made the conversation flow easily. Bakhtin (1984:125) describes the healing power of social, choral laughter as something that “lifts the barrier and clears the path”.

I noticed how people were filling in and expanding on what the previous speaker had said. My interpretation is that these metaphorical ways of talking...
helped the conversations take off. The conversations about the pictures seemed to have opened up to talking about what they value in the future (to move on, expand, how the parents can let go). In addition, talking about the pictures seemed to acknowledge the importance of seeing things from different perspectives. As I had understood it, that was their whole point behind this meeting – that the cousins wanted to meet Dan to understand his view of things. The short conversations around the pictures seemed to lay the ground for that kind of thinking in a nice way.

Opening up possibilities for reflective interaction
After a short discussion around the different pictures, we turned to the next phase of the meeting, to talk more directly about their relationships and the conflict. Inspired by the ideas developed by the renowned family therapist Tom Andersen (2005) I suggested we should engage in reflecting processes. In practical terms, reflecting processes build on the idea that some participants in a conversation are in a listening position, while others are in a talking position. Thanks to this way of organising conversations, the ones in the talking position can talk without being interrupted. At the same time, being in a listening position enables you to let your “inner talks” float freely and to reflect on people’s utterances which “help people to expand their ecology of ideas” (Andersen, 1987:422). It turned out that the room where we sat was furnished in a very good way for us to engage in this kind of dialogue. We only created a little more space in between the couches and then I asked Stefan, Alex and Maria to sit down on one of the couches, Josefine and Jennifer on another, and I sat with Dan on the third one. I invited the cousins to sit and listen while Dan and I initiated the conversation.

Figure 8.2 Seating for reflecting processes.

A fumbling start and an unexpected turn
Jenny: Dan, let’s see. I will start to talk with you. I think I speak for everyone when I say we are very happy to be here today. If we start by looking back, I wonder when you were the same age as
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the cousins are today, what were your dreams back then and what was it that made you step into the business?

Dan: (To the cousins, in a tone of making a joke) How old are you, 15–16?

(Scattered laughs from some of the cousins)

Stefan: 23 to 28.

Oh no, this question did not land very well, I thought, because Dan did not answer. He replied by making a joke. He knew very well that all cousins are at least 20 years old. Was the question too strange? Andersen (2005) reminds us that questions should make a difference in some way, but at the same time they cannot be too strange, since too strange questions cannot be responded to, they do not make sense in the dialogical moment. Some cousins chuckled. It felt as if the situation required us to respond to his joke by laughing. But Stefan put us back on track again when he replied to Dan without falling into the joke. To me, his way of answering communicated that he wanted to talk seriously.

After Stefan’s reply we talked about how Dan came into the business as he was called home when another employee quit his position. His dream was to start something by himself but he did not have the financial possibilities and he did not know how, but it just came about that he stayed at home. We continued to talk about his dream that never came true when I asked him:

Jenny: I also have another question from the cousins; let me read it to you, ‘How did your relationship with your brothers during childhood influence the conflict between you as grown-ups?’.

A long pause. I noticed how Dan started to breathe more deeply as if he needed energy from his whole body. He folded his hands. Unfolded his hands. Looked down. It felt as if he was searching for words. Then he uttered silently, slowly:

Dan: Our relationship when we grew up? We did not have any relationship.

A pause again. I didn’t really know what to say. I somehow had difficulties to grasp what he was conveying. Eventually, I said:

Jenny: Oh, is that your way of looking at it?
Dan: Yes.
Jenny: But you lived under the same roof?
Dan: Yes, we did. But not always, because I am much younger. When I was with them, it was, like always, I got to be by myself. After that, they went to school.

Something much unexpected happened during this exchange. There was such a difference in his way of responding. Just a while ago, he had been making jokes and now he responded frankly, in an unreserved manner about his relationship with his brothers. It was as if he managed to let go of the character he usually had to make use of while in interaction with his family members and instead stepped forward as his own person. According to Bakhtin (1986), the difference between a character and a person is that a character has to act monologically as given and finished-off, while the person, on the other hand, is dialogic and opens up the otherness around.

I noticed how the response came as a surprise to Dan as well and he was taken aback by his own voice. I noticed because he huddled himself up and his eyes were sorrowful. You can notice from my response that I did not know what to believe; did they really not have any kind of relationship? They had been raised together, lived and worked side by side their entire lives. A moment later, he continued to explain that it had to do with the difference in age between him and his brothers. I still could not believe my ears; that is why I asked:

Jenny: So you didn’t play together?
Dan: No, if I was with them they teased me. Or I was not with them. I cannot remember us ever playing.

We continued for a short while to talk about his childhood. I thereafter moved on to Josefine and Jennifer.

How to ruin a conversation with the wrong question
In my first question to them, I asked:

Jenny: What struck you when listening?
Josefine: That Dan said Ted and Mark had not been kind to him when they were children. That is maybe always the case between siblings but they seem to have had a very troublesome time.

Jennifer: You can notice that when listening to him, that they did not have any kind of relationship. Often you at least think you have some kind of relationship. I felt, oops, was it that bad?

Jenny: Then you realise how difficult it must have been for them to work together?
Jennifer: Yes, totally.
We continued to talk a little bit more about their non-existing relationship when I heard myself saying:

Jenny: I have received questions for you as well. Both of you have said that you want to work in the Brunnsala Group. Why is that?

As I started posing the question I heard how wrong it was. In this dialogic moment, it felt as if the question came from nowhere and it took the conversation in a totally different direction. But I could not stop once I had started to utter the first words. In hindsight, I have tried to think of explanations for why I asked this question. One explanation could be that I was not fully in the dialogic moment. To borrow Lowe’s (2005) words, I was probably “listening in order to speak” rather than “talking in order to listen”. This may be related to the fact that I felt obliged to use the questions we had prepared. But I was probably also scared of the strong emotions in the room. I really do not know the reason why. What I know is that the question took the conversation away from the dialogue thread that Dan had introduced and that the sisters had responded to. Now when I am listening again to the conversations and writing this chapter I can see that the best thing for me to do would probably have been not to say anything. To wait, listen and let the conversation flow between the sisters. But I did not.

I think we all knew that the only way for Josefine and Jennifer to respond was to say what they had said so many times before, their arguments for why they wanted to join the business. Thus, the question did not offer us any possibilities for new thinking. At that moment, I decided to let go of the previously formulated questions.

**Our chance to save a dialogic moment**

Even though my question above took the conversation off track, it is fascinating to notice how we have chances to save the dialogic moment if the participants want to. Thus, we have great opportunities to reconnect. This reminds me about what Bakhtin (1986) meant when he wrote that whatever is heard and understood will sooner or later be responded to. He further wrote that sometimes the response does not come immediately, but sooner or later a response will come. When I moved on to Maria, Alex and Stefan, I first asked them what they were struck by when listening:

Alex: That the relationship was as bad. At least in those cases that he talked about.
Jenny: Was that surprising or new to you?
Maria: No, I don’t think so [she is so tearful that you cannot hear what she says]. Dad ... thinking of him ...
Alex: I also think this is hard because I think of Dad who is not among us any longer.
Stefan: I am thinking of two things. It is sad that they did not have any kind of relationship in their childhood. And it is sad that the lack of relationship has followed them through their whole life. I think it is very sad that they could never work these things out.

Here, the three of them clearly showed how they wanted to reconnect to the thread that Dan had brought up. They showed us both through the words they used, such as how sad they were about the situation, but also through their feelings. You could barely hear what Maria said but we felt; we listened and understood her pain because this made her think of her dad who had passed away a couple of months before. I think this reconnection was a significant move for the continuation of the conversation.

**A conversation about the conversation**

The meeting had been going on for approximately 50 minutes. All had been in talking as well as listening positions. Without talking about it we naturally left this way of talking when Alex brought up the importance of talking to each other in the family:

Alex: The current generation really needed a succession more like, I hope, ours will be.

Stefan: Earlier on. I know you have probably talked to each other. But not at this age, like when you are 20 to 25.

Jenny: What is it that you should talk about?

Stefan: Like we do right now. To understand each other’s points of view, how everyone thinks and so on. As I understand it, we have all moved on and got to understand each other better…

Josefine: To get to know each other in another way.

Jennifer: I guess you can talk about anything. If you just talk about everything then you’d better understand how people think and that makes it easier if you would like to bring something to the table. When you know that Alex and Maria are reasoning like this and Stefan like this, you can talk better.

When I look back on the moment of this discussion, I remember how good it felt to be able to have a conversation about the conversation. In looking at our own conversation from the outside, we felt strengthened by our possibility of having this kind of conversation together. We somehow looked at it and explored what we took from this way of relating to each other.

**The introduction of a useful metaphor**

We had moved on to talk about the role of being an owner and how owners can contribute to the business. This made Dan suggest that it depends on where you are in relation to the business:
Dan: I think that depends on where you are in the business. Are you above, below, do you carry it on your shoulders, behind your back or in front of you?

Jenny: Do you mean how you, yourself, are in relation to the business?

Dan: How it feels and where you want to have the business. It is visual, do you have it behind you, on your shoulders or do you stand on it?

Stefan: Dad had it, he lived like in a ball you can say, and he had it all over himself. In all ways. It was in front of him, behind him and below him.

Stefan: And I have it a little more on the side at the moment. I don't have it behind me and not that very much in front of me either. I don't have it that much above me, it is not a burden and I feel I have control and stand above it.

Dan: You can also think about what you want to do with it in the future. Would you like to put it in front of you? I have always thought you need to have it in front as well as behind you. That you have to walk a little bit in circles around it. If you only have it above you then it becomes hell. But you can also have it behind you if you are an owner only. Then you have it behind you only. You can pull, you can look at it, but you don’t necessarily need to have it with you.

Alex: As a student, I have not yet come to it, but as an owner, I still want to keep the soul in the business and make sure it is maintained. But some years ago when I did not know at all where to go, then it was more like a burden. It was not comfortable at all and I did not know really where to go. In the near future, I think it will be more on the side, since I will not work in the business.

Dan: Sometimes you push it up a steep hill.

Josefine: Oh, that is not good.

The metaphor Dan offered here allowed for a discussion that the cousins could immediately relate to. As I understand this encounter, it became possible for them to metaphorically explore where they had been in relation to the business, where they currently were, as well as where it might place them in the future. It is interesting to note how this entitative way of speaking in relation to the business seemed to be useful to them. It was as if a shared language had evolved, which created a new kind of understanding for each other as well as offered a new way of thinking about oneself in relation to the family business. According to Shotter (2009a), such “shared moments of common reference” can help provide mutual orientation on how to move on in our becoming. These moments can thereby enhance the possibility of “unconfused collaboration”. That is “a form of collaboration in which all participants
involved continually update the *common ground* they share with each other” (Shotter, 2009a:31, emphasis in original).

**Understanding my own relationships by listening to yours**

Dan continued to use the same metaphor, but this time to explore how Ted might have related to the business. He suggested:

Dan: Ted was forced to take over. And when he was not allowed to do it his way he became frustrated. And he could never take a step back. This has its own pros and cons. But you often feel lost. He was positive with strong ideas but it was difficult to be close to him, since he could never change his mind. And he could never see things from someone else’s perspective.

He was often right but he could never realise when he was wrong. He could work hard, for sure. And you will move on, but in that way you will have a lot of obstacles along the way instead of taking the other road sometimes.

Alex: I can recognise much in what Dan is saying. It reminds me about the conflict I used to have with Dad at home. When I wanted to do something in one way then he wanted me to do it differently. And when I told him you can never give in, he replied by saying ‘yes, I can’. That is what he said but I knew he was angry with me. He made me feel bad about it. This took away all the joy of doing it my way since he was angry with me anyhow. So we came to a dead end. I think that was one of his weaknesses.

In these utterances, we can see how Dan talks about how he experienced his brother, which opens up Alex to reflect about his memories of being with his father. Thus, as I read it, Dan offers his views and in so doing he creates a moment for the children to talk about and understand their own relationship to their father.

**Closing the meeting respectfully**

The conversation had gone on for almost two hours. It was time for us to close the meeting. I had thought beforehand that I wanted to close the meeting in a respectful way but did not know exactly how. Since I was touched by the dialogic possibilities that had been created in the room, I thought it could be enriching to end the conversation by reflecting on what we had jointly created during these two hours. Let me share parts of this conversation.

Jenny: Our time is up for now. Some of the questions have not yet been asked and others have been added along the way. That is
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how it gets. Before we finish for now, I would like us to ... – can we do like this? Imagine that a gull had found its way into this room and had been soaring above us during our meeting, what would that gull have seen and heard?

Josefine: I don't really understand.
Stefan: You mean like an outsider?
Jenny: Yes, if the gull had been around, listening and looking, what would it have seen?
Alex: Can I begin?
Jenny: Yes, go on.
Alex: It should have seen both that we already know much, but also that we have talked about something that has never been talked about before. We have talked with Dan like we have never done before. And that is good. That is needed. It is much, we have talked about our problems and unfortunate situation, and even if that is good, I believe it is important that we can bring the positive things even more to light in the future. In future discussions and so on. I think we have started something here today.

Jennifer: But also that everything has multiple sides. Or at least two ways to look at things. And even if you know that, it is good to be reminded about it from time to time. It has been very interesting to hear Dan's view today because I have never ever done that before. I have heard from Ted and Dad but never what Dan thinks about things.

Stefan: I think it is important to let go of certain things and move on. We cannot look backwards and blame what has been. Quite the contrary, I think we have to look forward and see our possibilities. Try to do something together.

Dan: Can I say something? If I were a gull I would have been thinking you should not make life too complicated. And you cannot think you can decide on everything or own everything yourself.

The conversation ended with some small talk about the need to continue this kind of meeting.

Right after this two-hour meeting, Judith and Mark came over to Dan's house, since a regular cousin meeting was planned to take place after lunch. However, as Judith rightly commented, we did not have much energy for further talk. I think we were all exhausted by our pre-meeting. Dan, who had previously not been part of the cousin meetings, joined the regular cousin meeting (naturally, since we were in his home). What is more noteworthy is that from this day and onwards he took part in all the subsequent cousin meetings.
Commentary – being moved in dialogic listening

One of the reasons why I found it fascinating to revisit this meeting is that even though it originated in conflict, it opened up such a respectful dialogic encounter. For us in the room, there was such an intense energy of coming into being that you sometimes got the feeling you could touch it; how people were totally focused on listening to each other and themselves and trying to understand what was happening in the dialogic moment that created the natural pauses when we took in the words uttered before someone else responded. Unfortunately, these sorts of moments are difficult to describe in words; you have to experience them. As I experienced it, we had fleeting moments of intense energy and of being together in the moment. As it seems, this way of listening and relating to each other has inherent transformational power.

Another aspect of this meeting that made it special, I think, is that everyone was there to really listen to each other and try to take in what was said. Shotter (2009b) pointed out the importance of “listening into” the other person’s talk, just like we usually say we are “looking into” something. As we have witnessed in this account, when people are “talking in order to listen” (Lowe, 2005) it becomes possible to deeply take in each other’s words. That resonates with Bakhtin’s (1986:127) insight that “[b]eing heard as such is already a dialogic relation”.

In their work on listening, Stewart and Thomas (1995) distinguish between ‘active listening’ and ‘dialogical listening’. According to them, while active listening emphasises putting oneself in the other’s position, dialogic listening accentuates listening to the voice of the other as well as oneself. They see three kinds of problems with the idea of focusing only on the other in listening; first, it is simply not possible to get inside someone else’s mind and understand his or her perspective. Second, neither is it possible to set aside our own perspective. Third, a one-sided focus means downplaying the joint process of offering each other one’s own unique otherness, which is fundamental in the dialogic interplay. To Bakhtin (1986) it would not only be hardly possible but also fruitless to limit oneself to only seeing the world through the eyes of the other or experiencing the world through a walk in the other’s moccasins. He instead writes about the importance of ‘outsideness’ as well as ‘insideness’ for a greater understanding of each other and our social relations. Bakhtin (1986) calls for a dialogic back-and-forth process of engaging in the dialogic moment so as to both feel our way into the others, their ways of thinking and experiencing, but also listen to our own voice to take in the otherness offered to us. This is how we can bring something new into our understanding. It is with this focus on recognising otherness that I read Lipari’s (2009) argumentation that the ethical deed originates in “listening otherwise”. As she points out in her beautiful consideration of ethics, this is a form of listening where we are “committed to receiving otherness”, which means that we are “intentionally engaging with what is unfamiliar, strange, and not already understood” (Lipari, 2009:45). One illustration of this way of listening, I think,
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took place in the conversation about where everyone is in relation to Brunnsala. As I heard the conversation unfold, it created new ideas about oneself, as well as other people's situations in relation to the group.

From this way of understanding the dialogic moment, dialogic listening is “not an immediate, one-pass form of listening, but a back-and-forth, dialogically structured task in which, crucially, everything which is said and done, is done in response to something that happens within the situation of the listening” (Shotter, 2009b:34, emphasis in the original). Dialogical listening thereby becomes a two-way emerging process of listening where it is the shared moment of what is happening in between the speaking subjects that becomes important. According to Stewart and Thomas, “when you are listening dialogically you join with the other person in the process of co-creating meaning between you” (1995:192). I think that is revealing for what happened in this meeting.

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The themes for the two following meetings were based on the list that Jennifer had compiled about important things to discuss. In the next meeting, taking place in a conference room at Brunnsala Coffee in May, Ivan Landström, their external chairman of the board for ten years, was invited to talk about board work. It was an interesting session during which he offered his view on what a family business is, how it differs from other organisations and the role of the board in family-owned businesses. He also shared his view on present and future challenges at Brunnsala.

The following meeting was held in June. The background of this meeting was the recognition that the cousins wanted to meet and learn more about the three companies in the group. Therefore, Mark had arranged a company tour with visits to their three companies. I was surprised when I arrived outside Brunnsala Coffee at eight o’clock a Sunday morning and met approximately 30 Philipsson people. All relatives in the ninth and tenth generations had been invited and most of them had shown up. This became a joyful day where mingling, trips to the different businesses and good food were the main ingredients.

I video-recorded these two meetings, which gave me the opportunity to revisit them. Nonetheless, I will not bring anything from these meetings explicitly into the text. The reason is that while the first meeting was rewarding for learning more about governance in general and in the family business in particular and the second meeting was an example of the importance of socialising events, both these themes are beyond the scope of this account.
We were in the middle of the Swedish summer and almost one year had passed since we started to see each other. I asked the cousins if we could make a one-on-one follow-up interview. I wanted to hear about their experiences during the year and how they looked at the future. They accepted, and they also suggested that we complete the co-authoring of interview accounts again. This time, they wanted the interview accounts to be more similar in terms of what issues were addressed. Their wish was to make the interview accounts more comparable with each other. I thought that was reasonable and when we started I did not think of the consequences of doing the ‘same’ procedure again and what the streamlining of the interviews (the same questions to everyone) would mean to the process. However, as we met in the interviews and co-authored the interview accounts I recognised that the energy and the vitality we had felt the first time was not there in the same way this time. Undeniably, we had a good time seeing each other in the one-on-one interviews but, at the same time, I felt that the process went so quickly and smoothly because everyone knew what to do next that little new came out of our encounters.

Commentary - in the absence of surprise

One of Bakhtin’s (1986) landmarks is his focus on social worlds as open and dialogue as unfinalisable; he stresses that the final word has not yet been uttered. Against this background, it is interesting to reflect on what happened in this process when we repeated the interview/authoring/reading/discussion process that had been so rewarding the first time. For some reason, it was not as energising the second time. I would not say the procedure did not make sense the second time, because it certainly did and we had some interesting interview conversations, but it was not as energising as the first time. Even though, from a process perspective, you can never do exactly the same thing twice, because everything is made for another first time, I can here see that this well-known, already experienced process we engaged in was so familiar to us that it seemed to prevent otherness and newness from arising. In short, there was a lack of surprise and thereby potentiality for the unknown to arise.

In comparison with the first time, the lack of surprise was evident in several respects. First, when I met the cousins the first time, several of them told me that they had never spoken about these things before. They even had difficulties finding words to talk about the upcoming meetings, about the succession and what they wanted in all this. This time, we had one year of cousin meetings behind us in which these issues had been thoroughly discussed. Hence, it was not a big thing to talk about. This shows how much more relaxed they were about these matters. At the same time, the excitement of thinking, talking and listening to the yet-not-uttered was not there in the same way.
Second, when I met the cousins the first time we were new to each other. Hence, it was a meeting in which the gift of otherness that we could share with each other was ‘larger’ than it was in this follow-up interview. That made the second interview more comfortable in one sense, but there was also so much that we now took for granted since we had experienced this one-year collaborative process together.

Third, the whole process of working together was known to us. For instance, in the co-authoring process that had taken place a year ago, some of the interview accounts had been sent between me and the cousins three or four times. This time we only had one round when some of the cousins added a few things to their own interview accounts.

To me it felt as if, after this year of exploring newness, there was a need to stop and rest for a while. During the year when so many openings had taken place, it seemed there was a need to slow down a little. As previous research illustrates, to have closing conversations can be an important means to create a feeling of harmony and gratitude for what has been achieved. In looking back and summarising what has been, it can help punctuate the everyday flow and thereby somewhat close the unfinalisable past and open up the future (Ford & Ford, 2003).

At the same time, in this process of finalising – staying in this land without surprises – both in terms of what we spoke about and how we did it, the whole process went smoothly and without any struggles. Since everyone knew what to expect, it seemed we did not create moments for taking in otherness. Did this streamlined and quick process take away the possibility for our utterances to express the potentiality of surprising and new meanings? I wonder what difference it would have made for our conversations if we had somewhat changed the interview/co-authoring process the second time.

A few days before the next cousin meeting, I e-mailed everyone a compilation of the co-authored interview accounts to be discussed in the meeting.

Cousin meeting: Looking back, moving forward (August 2009)

We were gathered in the conference room at Brunnsala Coffee. The general theme, as it was announced in the agenda, was to look back and reflect on the first year of cousin meetings. Adam, in his role as chair, had manoeuvred the meeting through some formalities and other issues that needed to be communicated and sorted out, such as the annual research symposium organised by their foundation, celebrations in the company, housing issues and more. Once those issues had been discussed, it was time for a coffee break. It was heart-warming to come out to the kitchen area and see the anniversary celebration cake Josefine had made for us. It was a celebration of one year of
cousin meetings and the cake was beautifully decorated with one candle for each of the cousins, Judith, Mark, Dan and me.

After the coffee break, it was time to discuss this year of cousin meetings. There was an easy-going atmosphere in the room and people started to make comments on how much the cousins have grown during this year – how much has fallen into place. Everyone had read each other’s interview accounts as an input to the discussion. I asked them to form groups of three and talk about the following: what struck you in reading?, what has changed during this year? and what do you want to happen in the year to come? After some intense and lively group discussions for 30 minutes, we gathered to listen to each other. I recognised that just as much as these conversations are about different kinds of issues, or content, they are also a way of communicating the family members’ relationships with each other. Some further explanations of what I mean by that, and illustrations, are below.

To be part of the group or not
Josefine: Oh I forgot, what was the first question? What struck us in reading?
Jennifer: The fear of feeling left outside if one is not an owner. Several among us expressed a fear of being left outside.
Adam: I don’t recognise that for myself but when you bring this issue to the table I can recognise it from many of the others.
Judith: And that is important in this group. That everyone has the confidence to say that I don’t need to work here, I can be part of this group in twenty years from now when we see each other twice a year, never mind what.
Mark: Whether you are part of this group or not doesn’t have to be about the number of shares. It has to do with how you are as a person.
Judith: Your own interest.
Mark: To own shares for a sentimental reason is totally out of the question because that makes it damn difficult for the ones that are to manage this business.
Josefine: And it is the members of this group, hopefully, that will support each other, in five or ten years from now, or how long it can take, so that someone can say to him- or herself that “I will sell my shares” and that this is happening without the slightest anguish or fear. That we in this group can support each other in coming to that stage.

This is how the discussion about what they were struck by got started. As I listened again to the tape, I could hear many relational threads in this conversation and it reminds me that “[h]uman beings cannot not communicate and when we communicate we cannot not stay in relation to each other”
The inner becoming of family meetings

(Seikkula & Armkil, 2005:40, my translation from Swedish). The conversation above is not only content-wise about their relationships but simultaneously about how they define this group among themselves. Moreover, what they say is that the bonds between them are not primarily based on shares in Brunnsala but rather on their own intention to be part of it. It is also a message to some unspecified others that the cousins should not be afraid to not become owners of Brunnsala because they will be part of the group anyway, if they want to. When I listened to how this conversation unfolded, in which every utterance built on the previous one, it was at the same time the creation of an atmosphere of being in this together; our relationship with each other makes a difference – and it will continue to do so for a long time.

How can I get into the company?

The discussion about the need to belong to the group evolved into another theme where the question about how the cousins can make it into the company was addressed. Jennifer and Alex explicitly said in their interviews that they wanted to start working in the group in the future. At the same time, they were not sure about how that could be realised. They brought this up for discussion:

Alex: I think this is something we all are wondering about, how can we get into the business?
Josefine: How can you show you are interested?
Alex: Yes, and how can you actually go about it? I would say that there is no precise answer to this question, and therefore it is something we all find to be quite blurred. We have lived with the saying on the one hand ‘get out and find yourself a job outside Brunnsala’ and on the other hand, ‘you have to show you are interested’.
Josefine: Yes, and how do you do that?
Mark: It is not that easy being a parent either. Stefan, you already have found out I guess [since Stefan has got a baby], and the rest of you will also do that one day. It is damn difficult. To inspire and to offer the right incentives. You have to advertise yourself as well.
Josefine: Yes, but how do you do that?

Even though Mark always says it is the management in each organisation that decides who to recruit and that he has nothing to do with the recruitment process, everyone knows he has a strong position in the group. For some reason, he is never explicitly asked for what he can do to support those who want to be employed in the group. Here, however, I can hear how the question about how to get into the company, even though it is not officially articulated to him, is nevertheless addressed to him. This is one of the first times I hear the cousins make this request to Mark, even though it is still a hidden request. And
he responds. He responds from the fact of being a father and the difficulty to
know how much to push his children in a specific direction. In his genuine
response, he brings forward the difficulty for him too. At the same time, he
does not open up to talking about it more explicitly and he does not respond
from his position as the CEO in the group.

The need to have the papers in place
In talking about what they wanted to happen in the next year, Judith suggested
that the current generation of owners needed to make sure the papers were in
place in case something happened to them:

Josefine: And then Judith came up with a very good idea.
Judith: Yes, it is most important for the company that Mark and Dan
have a last will where they have written down how their parts
should be administered in case something happened to them. In
Dan's case, it will be more than 20 years before Therese and
Philip have an education. So, how are your shares to be
administered if you suddenly pass away? We have that kind of
experience in the family. It would be a disaster for the business
if a chief guardian came in and said that Philip and Therese
should have a maximised dividend of profit every year. That
would ruin the business. It is not as difficult for Mark since your
children are grown-up people and can take care of your shares.
But this is utterly important. Have you already done something
like this? I don't say you have not, because I don't know that,
but I think it is of great significance that the cousins can relax
and know that this is taken care of.

Jennifer: So you don't need to say exactly what you have written, but that
something is put on paper.
Dan: But I think you are making this overly complicated. A chief
guardian does not necessarily need to say that they should
maximise the profit dividend.
Judith: But do you think it is okay that a chief guardian has 30 per cent
of the shares?
Dan: But the chief guardian will not have such a position in the
board.
Judith: Hmm. You are not answering.

When I relisten to this conversation from the point of view of how they are
communicating in relationships, I can see how Dan and Judith are upset with
each other. My interpretation is that Judith is frustrated, as she does not know
what Dan wants to do with his shares or how they will be taken care of in case
something happens to him. In Dan's reply, I hear that he thinks this is not her
business. Even though they do not say those things explicitly, one
interpretation is that this exchange is a balancing act in their relationship with each other. In this process, they seem to simultaneously move further away from each other as if they are talking in parallel.

**An opening for a new kind of involvement in the group**

In the conversation about the goals for the cousin meetings during the next year, Mark suggested that one or two of the cousins could take a seat on the board. This was new information to the cousins and highly appreciated:

Alex: And we have a wish from Mark that someone, one or two of us, can act as owner representatives in the board. To have this sorted out by the next shareholders’ meeting. Mark, would you …?

Mark: You shouldn’t sit on the board to look after your own interests that is out of the question because it doesn’t lead the group forward. And you have to be involved in all the businesses in the group. In other words, if we have Brunnsala Group then you have to be engaged in all the companies and be interested in carrying them forward. That is how a board should function. And I think it would be very nice if one or two of you would like to take on this position. To get the competence needed. You are all beginning to get your academic degrees, to be ready. You cannot all sit on the board, but neither does it need to be a lifelong commitment. We can have a rolling schedule. I don’t think it is enough to sit one year only, but three to four years and then switch.

Alex: Mark, can you explain what you hope the benefits would be?  
Mark: That we can start to develop an ownership strategy. We have not had any thus far, the business has just rolled on. The one managing the business has worked, but we [as owners] have not had any strategy and that is needed. What do we want with our business? What do the owners want? That we can give the general strategy to operations management. They have to have some kind of input from us. Currently, I speak to them but in a few years time I will not be around any longer. So we need something for them. On that level because we should not be involved in the everyday matters. And if we don’t have any ownership strategy then that will mean that management will do as they want. That can of course be one way. But that would mean we have no influence whatsoever. I want us to have a say. We have, thus far, been a disaster in that sense. But I don’t think that I and my brothers have had the same view of this. I am not sure Dan thinks this is a good solution but I don’t know. I have never been criticised but I don’t know what that means.
What Mark says here seem to be of great importance to him. Furthermore, I hear two relational messages: one of them targeted towards the cousins, in which we can understand that they have made progress and Mark thinks they are ready to formally enter the board, which has previously been discussed as something to happen in a distant future. This is a significant gesture by which Mark is opening up a new way to introduce one or two of them to the board.

At the same time, I hear the disappointment with the relationship between himself and his brothers in these two utterances. I can feel his frustration about everything that never took place between them and that they never managed to work together. Ending his utterance, he says, “I have never been criticised but I don’t know what that means”. One way to make sense of what he says is that he wants Dan to respond to him, that Dan would eventually give a response back. Bakhtin says that “[f]or the word (and consequently for a human being) there is nothing more terrible than a lack of response” (1986:127). It is that feeling of not being responded to that Mark seem to have in relation to his brother.

The meeting continued and, in closing, they talked about how important these meetings had been to them to get started with the succession as well as for their own development. Towards the end of the meeting, we jointly created a to-do list with commitments regarding how they wanted to continue to develop in the year to come. For the second anniversary of their cousin meetings, they decided they wanted the following to have happened: that they together would have gone through a tailor-made educational program for them as an owner family, that all current owners would have written their last will and that they would have started to formulate an ownership strategy.

**Commentary - communication in relationships**

This meeting was explicitly said to be a meeting in which everyone could look back on one year of cousin meetings and start talking about how to continue to work together in the future. What is striking in those discussions is how much they circle around relations, the cousins’ relations to each other, to the senior generation and to Brunnsala, and what it would mean for the cousins if they decided to try to connect themselves to the business in a formal position or not. To me, the one-year anniversary cake decorated with one candle per person was also a significant gesture that they are in this together. That Mark invited everyone for a barbecue that night also signals the importance of having a good time together.

In revisiting the conversations from this meeting, I also noticed that besides from talking about relationships as a theme it was apparent how the conversations were an ongoing interactive act where the relationships laid the platform for how those conversations unfolded. What I mean is that a response to an utterance is not only about what the content is all about, it is also a response to a specific someone since we are responding from, and about, our “social positions” (Seikkula & Arnkil, 2005). In this way, our conversations
contain dimensions of social control. However, what was possible to notice is how the relational processes most often did not take place officially but were rather worked out in the conversations about the things they were talking about, such as selling one’s shares.

Furthermore, the meeting conversations also illustrate how relationships are continuously formed and reformed in the responses to each other, in a “relational flow” (Gergen, 2009), where “the interrelationships between speakers are always changing, even if the degree is hardly noticeable. In the process of this generation, the content being generated also generates” (Morson & Emerson, 1990:22).

That was exactly what the cousins brought forward in the interviews when they looked back on this year of having cousin meetings. Their relationships with each other had changed. Both Josefine and Alex, for instance, told how their relationships with Dan had changed when they had another kind of conversation with him in the previous meeting about conflict. Olivia also said she appreciated the meetings because she once again had the kind of close connection with her cousins that they used to have when they grew up.

How processes of becoming unfold from within the conversation

One year of cousin meetings has passed. If I were to summarise the conditions for their succession process when the meetings started, as I heard them from my first contacts with Mark (who also initiated the meetings), it would be as follows: it is the wish of the family that someone or a few among the cousins take over ownership in the tenth generation. The person who takes over should also be employed in Brunnsla since they believe in what they call ‘active ownership’. To them, active ownership at that point in time means that the owner has an operational role in the group. For a family member to be employed, they should have an appropriate university degree, at least five years of working experience from another company, and there should be a position available. Furthermore, they should have the social skills needed to be accepted among other employees. In addition, even though they want someone or a few to take over, they do not want too many owners (seven is too many) since they believe in what they call ‘concentrated ownership’. Hence, when the cousins were about to enter the meeting room to make decisions about the future for themselves and Brunnsla, they had strong boundaries to keep within. Or, in a Bakhtinian terminology, it was a rather finished-off monologic discourse that they were invited to join. At the same time, it was a dialogical move that Mark opened up when he invited the potential owners in the next generation to jointly engage in a decision-making process in the cousin meetings.
In this chapter, I have explored how their initial, rather closed and finished idea of how their succession should end developed as they connected to each other in new ways where yet unexplored ideas were brought into the conversations. During this year, different voices worked against each other in such a way that some of their previously taken-for-granted truths about their succession solution were destabilised and new ideas and beliefs about what was the best course for them started to evolve. One way to understand what has happened during this year is that the initial monologic idea was replaced by a more multifaceted agenda in which different points of views were brought to the table by the interplay of different voices during their cousin meetings. What this chapter thereby clearly illustrates is the transformational power in the conversations themselves, in the unfolding of utterances in and around the family meetings. Hence, it is in the reconnecting with each other when they were talking and listening – in the turn-taking between offering and responding to each other – that the processes of becoming unfolded from within.

I departed from different dimensions of the utterance chain as the organising scaffold for understanding how this dialogic transformation could emerge and take place. This account thereby offers a glimpse of how “the inner becoming of things” (Bergson, 1911:322) can evolve in family meetings: an account of how processes of becoming unfold as one utterance responds to another. Given that “an utterance is never just a reflection or an expression of something already existing outside it that is given and final. It always creates something that never existed before, something absolutely new and unrepeatable”, we can better understand the transformational power of the utterance chain (Bakhtin, 1986:119).

But what is it in the utterance chain that makes the inner becoming possible and how does it evolve? Discussing the different dimensions of the utterance chain, I noted in the first meeting, the preparation meeting with Judith and Mark, how the utterances were filled with ideological undertones that were expressed in the centripetal and centrifugal forces of their utterances. I also addressed how these forces touch us and make us move as we take in what the other just uttered. In the following meeting, the first cousin meeting I participated in, I discussed how the committed responses to one another created potentiality and creativity, hence how one response to the other created a vitality and energy in the room with commitments for future conversations to take place between them. We thereafter engaged in a co-authoring process of their interview accounts. In this work, I noticed how the issue of addressivity played an important role. Since the interview accounts were to be shared among all the cousins, they wanted to make sure their accounts were appropriate for the potential addressees. In the following cousin meeting when we discussed those interview accounts, it was possible to notice how these accounts, as well as the meeting as such, opened up a polyphonic meeting between different voices. In the dialogic meeting between different voices, some old truths were questioned, as words and concepts were filled with (new)
meanings. The next meeting originated in the conflict between the owners. Even so, it facilitated an encounter characterised by dialogic listening between meeting participants. This opened up a new understanding, as we had the opportunity to listen to each other as well as to our own voices. In the follow-up interviews, I noted how the repetition of the interview/authoring/reading/discussion process lead to a closing down of newness in that the potentiality of surprise was missing. At the same time, I acknowledged the need for ‘closing talk’ in which we could reflect back on the steps taken during this year of seeing each other in the cousin meetings. In the final meeting explored in this chapter, I pointed out the importance of understanding that when we communicate about something, we are simultaneously communicating about our relationships with each other.

When I look at these dimensions together I can see how the conversations unfolded in a ceaseless flow of interconnected utterances and responses. It seems to be from within this flow that dialogic potentiality is born and current ideas can be expanded. To make it possible to engage in this close and in-depth elaboration of the transformational power of the family conversations, I focused on specific dimensions of the utterance chain for each cousin meeting. At the same time as this allowed me to explore the very details of what is happening in the meetings, this is of course a simplification since all dimensions of the utterance chain are interlinked with each other. In the next chapter (the last in this section) I will move from the discussion of different dimensions of the utterance chain separately and instead continue to explore the flow of conversations. In that I will also discuss the practice of having family meetings more as a whole.
9. In the becoming of a meeting practice: Allowing for a process of wayfinding

When I met with the Stenson family, they were struggling with how to organise themselves to act as active owners. They wanted to find ways to involve the whole family and keep control over Torås even if they would not have operational positions in the future. This work had been going on for more than ten years when different kinds of family meeting practices had been created along the way.

When I first rang Mark Philipsson in the summer of 2008 he explained how they needed to find out who among the cousins in the tenth generation should take over ownership and how to make that happen since he and his brothers (as the current generation of owner managers) need to be replaced in a few years’ time. The creation of a new meeting practice – the inception of the cousin meetings – was a way for them to get going with their ownership succession process.

What is striking about the situation in these two families is that even though the difficulties they are facing are not unique in the sense that also other enterprising families are developing ways to act as active owners and also other enterprising families are facing succession; they are similar in that both have to find their own ‘solutions’ to their challenges at hand. Furthermore, as we have seen, their solution is not something they have analytically decided on through the making of a plan, in which they first think of what they would like to do and in the next step implement this solution. Rather, their way forward in their current situation was something that emerged in their work, in the family conversations, where a new way of acting as an owner family developed along the way.

In this chapter, I will revisit the field study of those two families and look for how their conversations, in and around their family meeting practices, helped them find their own ways of proceeding in their current situations. While the field study accounts in the previous chapters primarily explored the family meeting practices by focusing on different dimensions of the utterance chain, I will in this chapter look at the practice of having family meetings more as a whole. With that, I mean how the creation of a family meeting practice gave the families a possibility to meet and move forward in a process that, drawing on Chia and Holt (2009), I will call a process of wayfinding.27

27 In their book *Strategy Without Design*, Chia and Holt (2009) suggest ‘wayfinding’ as an alternative metaphor to the more common ‘navigation’ metaphor for understanding how we can meet the
The need for a new orientation

Both the Stenson family and the Philipsson family were searching for new ways of working together. Shotter’s (2008a) distinction between ‘difficulties of the intellect’ and ‘difficulties of the will’ is useful for a better understanding of the situations the families are facing. The significance of this distinction is that it gives an idea of how different kinds of challenges need to be addressed in different ways since they are of fundamentally different characters.

Drawing on Wittgenstein (1953), Shotter (2008a) describes how difficulties of the intellect can be formulated as a repetitive kind of problem, problems that have been faced before and, therefore, can be solved by thought in traditional problem-solving methods. This is in contrast to the difficulty of the will, which has to do with finding a new orientation in an unknown circumstance, a new way of doing things for the first time. The difficulty of the will, which he also calls ‘difficulty of orientation’ and ‘relational difficulties’ (Shotter, 2008a:174), is different because the situation is new to us and thus “at first we have nothing to thinking with – the qualitative nature, the kind of situation we are ‘in’, is unclear to us” (Shotter, 2009c:2). Hence, we have to start by ‘moving around’ and in that way find a new way of orientating ourselves. In the situation we are facing, every move we make can create possibilities for a new situation. That is why we cannot map out the total terrain and in this way master our surroundings. We have to deal with uncertainties and incompleteness. In this dialogically shaped situation we are also utterly interconnected – and dependent – on each other since we are facing a difficulty that has to do with what we would like our new future to look like for us together. Therefore, difficulty of the will is about finding new ways to relate ourselves to each other and consequently something we have to orchestrate together.

Of these two different kinds of difficulties, the difficulty of the will is the most challenging to deal with, partly because we have to live with uncertainty and a feeling of lost control before we have landed in what we would like our future to look like. Partly this is also the case because we are less trained to deal with emotional and relational circumstances and more trained in thinking in analytical terms of what is the most reasonable thing to do.
Neither the Stenson family nor the Philipsson family spoke about their challenges in terms of a difficulty of the will and that they needed a new way to orientate themselves. They did not use this kind of vocabulary at all. This is rather my construction and a way of making sense of the family-meeting processes. In fact, when the Philipsson family started to see each other in the cousin meetings some of them reasoned along the line of the difficulty of the intellect; they wanted to decide on the owner in the next generation from the alternatives they knew at that point in time. This way of talking is not surprising given that this is what we are taught to do if we want to act professionally. As I noticed in my review of current family business literature (see Chapter 2), the idea of rationality and the need for planning has been the main discourse ever since the inception of this field of research. In other words, the idea that whatever difficulty the enterprising families are facing, they are supposed to act analytically and make a plan for their next step, which is a detached, sequential and linear way of thinking about problem solving.

However, as the cousin meetings evolved I noticed how a different kind of approach took shape, an emerging way of working together from within their current situation where some of the taken-for-granted rules were questioned and changed. I noted this in the first preparation meeting with Judith and Mark when the two discourses ‘this is how it is’ versus ‘it will crystallise’ were played out against each other. In the next cousin meeting, I further recognised how the family members’ committed responses to each other during the meetings created potentiality for new conversations – new possibilities – to be explored in their upcoming meetings. This way of orientating oneself can be understood as a process of wayfinding.

Also family members in the Stenson family reminded me to acknowledge this kind of continuous process. Rosie reacted strongly when she thought I had missed out on that in my first field account of them. In her feedback to me, she said:

*Fundamentally, there is one thing that can be good to have in mind. Sometimes there is much focus on, for instance, a specific year, and thereafter a big change takes place. This is how it used to be and this is how it is afterwards. But that is actually not how it is happening. If we, for instance, take this situation when Bertil became CEO and he started to do this and that and all kinds of things. In fact, there has been a group and a group process that has gone on like this [she shows ongoing and intertwined movements with her arms]. What I mean is that it is not one person telling us what to do. It is the same with the family. Somehow it is a current process. That is how fundamental it is. I want you to remember that. This more dramatic thing with regimes entering and leaving, like they usually portray us in the*
press as well, that is not something I am familiar with (Rosie Anderson, 16 June 2008).

She reacted because I had placed too much focus on individual achievements when it is in fact teamwork. She also reacted because I had pictured their work as too static; as if they first had ‘one regime’ that was then replaced by another. According to her, that is not at all their way of working together. Bertil too reminded me of how their ideas are emerging collaboratively in their work. When I asked him how having family meetings came about, he told me how the ideas came to them as they struggled with how to get the whole family involved in the business:

How can we make this work? How can we keep growing with just a few of us involved and when we no longer have the energy it [the business] is sold? [...] The ideas came while working on those issues. So those things with a family council or ownership council did not come as a flash of genius but rather when we tackled the problem of how we could get this to work. How can we get everyone on board and get going with this? (Bertil Stenson, 15 Jan 2008).

As Rosie and Bertil bring forward, their way of working differs from models that suggest a linear and unidirectional decision-making process. In contrast, in wayfinding it is in their work, when they are struggling with their current concerns, that ideas for how to proceed are created. As it seems, the inception of family meetings allowed for such a wayfinding process to evolve. I will now continue to explore some further characteristics of this process.

**Wayfinding in the uttering of the not-yet-spoken**

As I experienced in the Philipsson family, they are facing succession in a way they have not faced it before. They will go from three brothers as owners into a cousin consortium. While the current generation owners had already worked in the business when they became owners, the cousins have instead first turned to university studies and have not yet started in the firm (apart from Josefine who is employed). Moreover, while previous generations did not have any direct influence over the succession solution, this time they want everyone to have a say in the succession process.

Besides these differences (as well as other differences) they are making their way in this situation from within their shared circumstances of what they have at hand. For instance, they live in the midst of the heritage of being an owner family for nine generations. That means they are surrounded by distant voices echoing what is possible and impossible for them to do and think. In this, what seems to be crucial, as Mark pointed out many times when he reminded the
cousins not to be stuck in the way people were doing things in the ‘good old days’, is to try to think differently. But how can it be possible to think anew? And how can the family meeting be an arena where they find out about their next step? When I asked Stefan how he looks upon what is best to talk about in the meetings, he thought for a while and then replied:

I cannot put that into words. It has to crystallise. I listen to the others, I don’t know now yet what’s best to talk about (Stefan Philipsson, interview 2008).

What I hear him saying is that on his own he cannot (should not?) think out what is best to talk about beforehand. Given that this is a process that they are in together and where no predefined logics can determine what to address, they have to think differently. Stefan continued:

We have to be honest to each other. And listen to each other. [...] When everyone can say what they have on their minds. And when everyone is saying what he or she would like to say, then I hope that we will find out. That it will crystallise, because if no one sees each other and if no one says anything then you cannot listen and in that way nothing will happen (Stefan Philipsson, interview 2008).

Stefan reminds me that their way of moving forward departs from a relational realm where the important thing is to meet each other. And when they meet, they can listen to each other’s utterances and in that way their futures will slowly come into being in an emerging process where they eventually will find out what to do next. What Stefan says reminds me about Bakhtin’s (1993:13) idea that “[o]nce-occurent uniqueness or singularity cannot be thought of, it can only be participatively experienced or lived through”. This corresponds to what I noticed in their meeting conversations, that it is in the lived experience of spontaneously responding to each other in the dialogic moment that they can utter the previously untold. Therefore, it is in finding a way to utter the previously untold that new ideas and directions can develop. Or, in the words of Olivia:

Before [the meetings] we did not even talk about these matters. Therefore, I couldn’t address these issues because I did not know what to ask. But that has changed now (Olivia Philipsson, interview 2009).

Olivia brings forward how their cousin meetings have made it possible to explore their current concerns, which have given her a richer repertoire to act from. In these meetings where they have ‘moved
around’, talked about their concerns in different ways, she can now utter what she previously did not know how to say. As I understand her, it is not so much about learning new skills, in a traditional sense, but more how to utter what she somehow already knew but could not express. In that way she now has more resources to make use of in the sense that they have talked about the previously unspoken, which has given her a new vocabulary and a new possibility to make her voice come through in regard to their succession process.

**Wayfinding in the temporal unfolding**

Another aspect of dealing with that which is unknown is that it is not possible on beforehand decide on a date – a chronological punctuation – when it will be finished. How can we know when in time we will have landed in a new circumstance that feels at home? Without being possible to specify in time, the process of wayfinding seems to need time to grow and mature. Stefan says:

> I am happy that Mark had us all get going on this issue [the succession process] because I don’t know who otherwise would have done it. It is, as I have told you, nothing you do in a week’s time. On the contrary, it is a couple of years of talking and thinking until it will crystallise into what will eventually happen (Stefan Philipsson, interview 2008).

The document that Jennifer keeps track of where they have listed different issues to talk about in upcoming meetings seems to be a valuable resource for them. Towards the end of each meeting, when they look at the list, maybe add a new item that came up during this meeting and decide on the next move – such as the theme of the next meeting – their meeting agenda is being shaped in the temporal unfolding of the meetings.

According to Josefine, they need time because they have both to learn how to communicate together and to talk through a range of different things:

> It is so good that we have started to communicate about these things because we have never done that before […]. And that we know we can communicate about these things. I guess this will be a rather long process before we can talk about the most significant thing: who should do what? It is as if we have started along a small path and in order for us to talk about it we first have to learn how to talk about other things (Josefine Philipsson, interview 2009).

What Josefine brings up here is the importance of both talking about different things and the need for the family members to learn how to have enriching
conversations together. Since they are in this situation together, where their actions are intertwined with each other, it seems to be of importance to learn how they want to engage together.

**Wayfinding in the becoming of the unfinalisable self**

To engage in conversations about the future of the family and the business does things to the family members as well. Since we cannot separate the conversations we are engaged in from our own self, just as we cannot separate ourselves from others, the wayfinding process is not only about the becoming of the family business, but also about a becoming of the self.

The becoming of the self was sometimes explicitly addressed among the family members in the Philipsson family, for instance, when Olivia said in the first interview that for her the most important thing for the time being was to make up her own mind about what she wanted to do in life. Another occasion was in one of the meetings when she asked us to reflect on how we think of her. For yet other family members the becoming of the self was not as explicit. One example is Stefan who in the first interview said he knew in his heart he did not want to work in the sawmill but even so he could not let go of the idea that he one day would have to. However, in the follow-up interview one year later he firmly said he had no intention whatsoever of working in the sawmill. Somewhere in between those two encounters he had landed in how he wanted to be connected to the group. In the process of finding a new home for themselves, people reach “out into the environment along the paths he or she makes, advancing along a line of growth whose future configurations can never be fully known or understood” (Chia & Holt, 2009:179). In this process, the interactions with the others are fundamental. The significance of the other in the becoming of our self is what makes Bakhtin (1990) say that to be me I need you. The reason is that even if I can get a partial understanding of myself, we cannot actually see our “own exterior and comprehend it as a whole, and no mirrors or photographs can help; our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space and because they are others” (Bakhtin in Morson & Emerson, 1990:55, emphasis in original).

Based on this understanding of the self as unfinished, fragmented and always in becoming with the others that we meet, it is possible to recognise how “the self possesses a relational identity that shifts and changes, and that can be identified again and again” (Jabri, 2004:51). As I understand the cousin meeting conversations, they hold the possibilities for the family members to try out, over and over again, what a connection or disconnection to the group would mean for their own self and how they can cope with that.
A closing remark: Knowing as we go

In this chapter I have explored how the inception of a meeting practice can initiate conversations in which it is possible to find a new orientation – a new way of moving on together – which can be described as a process of wayfinding. In those situations where people deal with utterly complex issues at hand and no predefined answers can neatly be sketched out it seems to be of importance to allow for this kind of incremental and emerging process to occur. While current literature on family meetings has contributed with different kinds of rational and linear models, this chapter illustrates how the family meeting can also be an arena for dealing with issues that are not plannable in a traditional sense. This is important since it has been noted previously how families often fail to plan their next step, for instance during succession (see Chapter 2). What this chapter suggests, however, is an alternative way of proceeding that can be of relevance when the family is facing complex situations, what I here refer to as ‘difficulties of the will’.

One important difference between the analytical models that are often recommended and the wayfinding approach is that “wayfinding implies progressing tentatively and incrementally reaching out from one’s situated circumstance, using oneself, and not some independent external point, as the basis of reference” (Chia & Holt, 2009:166). Hence, it is about finding an orientation on the move, through our engagement with the world and the otherness around us, where we can find out what the appropriate next step would be only through engaging from within our circumstances. In reaching out from our own situated circumstance, a broader repertoire to act from, involving how we feel and sense in the process, seems to be just as important as analytic thinking about our current concerns.

The wayfinding metaphor is further interesting in that it acknowledges how continual small gestures and ongoing struggles may cumulatively over time have dramatic effects in the longer term. Yet, in traditional research, underpinned by a being perspective of the world where it is the end states that are focused on, all these hurly-burly everyday small steps are typically ignored. However, as we can see here, and as Judith strongly emphasised in her feedback to me, remarkable changes may just as well be the cumulative results of all these many small mundane efforts. Or, as Steyeart (2004:10) puts it, “[i]nnovation is not the Great Renewal but the daily effort of thousands of small steps which – after all – make a difference”. The wayfinding metaphor makes it possible to turn attention to these small steps and see how intertwined they are. However, what the future results of these mundane efforts will be about, or what they will mean to the family and the business, can never be fully known beforehand since this a kind of knowing together, as we move on.
Part III: Understanding meetings from a dialogical becoming perspective
10. The living moment of movement

This dissertation departed from the recognised need for the enterprising family to engage in conversations related to their business as well as family matters. I further noted how these conversations are about important and often sensitive issues for those involved, such as their work, family relations, identity and future wealth. In this setting, family meetings have been suggested as an arena where those conversations can take place.

In order to understand the often complex situation an enterprising family is facing where they live in the midst of different roles, expectations and priorities, and to understand how the family meeting can make sense in this setting, the first part of the dissertation developed a dialogical becoming perspective. Bridging organisation process studies (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010) with Bakhtin’s work on dialogue offers a perspective that emphasises the relational, unfinalisable and moving dimensions of social interplay. It is therefore a perspective that is useful for understanding the unique, once-occurring and ongoing nature of family conversations. In the second part of the dissertation I turned to the world of practice in a field study with two different families working with family meetings.

In this final part of the dissertation I shall bring together some of the threads from part one and part two. Given that “the action implications of process philosophy remain underdeveloped” (Gergen, 2009:385), the quest to better understand the “microscopic” (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002) processes of becoming, as well as the call for a greater focus on the detailed activities in family business practices (Nordqvist, 2011) this part will discuss some implications of this processual outlook for research and practice. In fact I will suggest something that at first may seem a little bit odd; that in order to understand processes and flow there is a need to understand the here and now moment.

In my attempts to better understand the family conversations in the meetings I have studied, I have noticed how important it is to pay attention to precisely that which is happening here and now. With that I mean a need to develop a kind of sensed awareness of the ongoing present moment. The logic behind this argument is that it is in this very moment that conversations are unfolding and a wayfinding process can emerge. I will here refer to these moments as ‘living moments’. ‘Living’, not because I mean that some moments are dead (even though some moments feel more alive than others, as I will get back to further down), but living as a reminder of the once-occurring and unique dimensions of a moment in the making. From this standpoint, the living moment is the moment that is most often not recognised, but still important,
since it is the moment in between two or more people in a conversation where everything from a dialogic becoming perspective is happening: where people’s utterances rub against each other in an unpredictably yet dialogically shaped way, creating a flow of unfinalisable processes of becoming. Thus, the ongoing living moment is the moment of movement.

In this final part I will primarily explore the living moment further and the implications of recognising this moment. It is structured as follows. The current chapter continues by offering some tentative understandings of the living moment. Thereafter, Chapter 11 proceeds by discussing the implication of acknowledging the living moment in regard to practicalities of having family meetings. The chapter suggests some questions that I hope can be of use to those who either currently work with, or would like to start having, family meetings. Chapter 12 thereafter turns to the issue of research practices for engaging in fieldwork from within the living moment. It especially focuses on how we as researchers can engage with those we do the study with if we are to better understand the living moment of movement. Finally, Chapter 13 closes the dissertation with a note on writing and suggests that the contribution of an academic text has to do with how the text makes the reader move and ‘think beyond’ (Nayak, 2008) in the moment of reading.

**Understanding the living moment**

The need for understanding how the living moment is unfolding originated from the field study, in which I emphasised that it is in conversations with each other that dialogic transformation takes place. It is the shift from being to becoming, and consequently, the shift from searching for ‘what is’ to envisioning ‘what might become’, that made me realise that it is in the lived experience of here and now, in this very moment of breathing, that we have to understand better. One of the benefits of turning attention to the living moment is that it acknowledges the shaping force of “words in their speaking” (Shotter, 2008a:114). That is why an effort to understand these moments is also an effort to understand the detailed moment-to-moment unfolding of the form-giving forces when social realities are yet to be. In the discussion of the living moment I will revisit the five dimensions that were suggested in the shift from a being to a becoming perspective: from stable entities to entities as patterns of interactions, from detached individuality to relationality, from the principle of sameness to preparing for difference, from time as mechanical to time as experienced and from language as representational to language as performative, as they help to put some more flesh on the bone in regards to understanding the living moment.
A dialogically shaped moment

The living moment is dialogically shaped. With that I mean that there is nothing like structures here and conversations there. As the dimension from stable entities to entities as patterns of interactions suggested, and as we could see more clearly in the field account of the Stenson family, the living moment of how we are coming together is continuously in the making, where the speech genre at play is dialogically shaping how the here and now conversations are unfolding. Hence, the dialogical shaping of the living moment influences the family conversations just as the conversations, in turn, develop the genres at work. Importantly, it is these speech genres that make it impossible to utter just anything because in the living moment there is a kind of expectation, or relational wisdom, about how we are supposed to act in this very moment. One way to think of the speech genres is that they serve as the background or the atmosphere that guides us in our relations with each other. In an attempt to describe the properties of such dialogically shaped living moments, Shotter (2008a:182) writes:

Activities in this sphere lack specificity; they are only partially determined. They are a complex ‘orchestration’ of many different kinds of influences. They are just as much material as mental. They are just as much felt as thought, and thought as felt. Their intertwined, complex nature makes it very difficult for us to characterize their nature. They have neither a fully orderly nor a fully disorderly structure, neither a completely stable nor an easily changed organization, their fully subjective nor fully objective character. They are also non-locatable – they are ‘spread out’ among all those participating in them. They are neither ‘inside’ people, nor are they ‘outside’ them; they are located in the space where inside and outside are one. Nor is there a separate before and after (Bergson), neither an agent nor an effect, but only a meaningful whole which cannot divide itself into separable parts. But, as living activities, they have a ‘style’ and ‘point’ beyond themselves toward both events in their surroundings, and what can come next in the future.

As I read Shotter, it is in between people, in the dialogically shaped living moment that a feeling for what is and a pointer for what might become, is co-created and experienced. With the acknowledgement of the living moment as dialogically shaped follows the implication that it is only those who are sharing the moment – those who are bodily experiencing this moment - that can fully understand how the dialogically shaped living moment is pointing towards the future.
A moment of offering differences to each other

Even though people are sharing the experience of being in the living moment that does not necessarily mean that they are experiencing this moment in the same way. Or, I would rather say that one of the features of a shared living moment is that we all experience this moment differently, and in the conversations we can offer our unique differences to each other. In the field study account of the Philipsson family, in which I studied their family meetings from within, it was possible to notice how the interplay of different voices in the living moment of seeing each other played a central role. In one of the meetings (Cousin meeting Jan 2009) I especially noted how their polyphonic conversations helped to develop new meanings in regard to notions that are important to them, such as active ownership. That is in contrast to much research on family business where family meetings are often suggested as an arena where the enterprising family can create a shared view (or in Bakhtin’s terminology, a shared voice) among family members in relation to different things such as their family vision, philosophy, strategy and so on. The habit of striving for sameness and the narrative of the healing capacity of unity are common also in general organisational studies as discussed in the suggested shift from the principle of sameness to preparing for difference.

Based on a Bakhtinian reading, the idea of shared understandings is quite complicated. What is shared is the experience of being in the living moment together. Moreover, in this moment, people seem to share the understanding of how this dialogical moment is shaped; they know what speech genre is at play and how it is appropriate to act in this moment. It further seems to be of importance to have a common focus in the conversations and to share the willingness to move on with, for example, the succession process. For a meaningful conversation to take place there also needs to be a shared assumption that people will understand each other (Garfinkel, 1967). However, that does not mean that people understand the utterances voiced in the same way. How would that be possible considering that dialogic meaning making is unfinalisable, always on the way and never fully completed (Shotter, 2008a)? Or, in the words of Bakhtin (1986:69), “[a]ll real and integral understanding is actively responsive, and constitutes nothing other than the initial preparatory stage of a response (in whatever form it may be actualized)” In this response, the listener does not duplicate the other’s understanding because we all, in each and every living moment, operate from a unique position in time-space that makes us see (feel, experience) something that is not possible for others to see. We have a “surplus of seeing” (Bakhtin, 1986). It is because of our unique positions that we have this surplus of seeing, which is basically a possibility to see something that the others around us do not see (feel, know, understand, etc.). And, in our responses, we can offer those differences to each other. It is against this background that Bakhtin (1993) suggests that we are always dependent on each other for a fuller understanding, a fuller seeing of the world.
The living moment of movement

This is furthermore how meaning making is an active, relational and socially orchestrated moving process. What this brings to the fore is that the centripetal and centrifugal forces that family members can offer each other in their responses are of great importance. It is when these forces are meeting each other, rubbing against each other without ever being transformed into a single voice, that movement can occur. Another way of phrasing it is to say that becoming evolves in the living moment “when two (or more) heterogeneous elements (each already multiple) come together and transform each other” (Clegg et al., 2005:159).

Hence, the suggestion to develop shared understandings and shared worldviews would imply putting the dialogic transformation to an end because a “complete fusion (a dialectical Aufhebung), even where possible, would preclude the difference required by dialogue” (Clark & Holquist, 1984:78). And, to force the many voices into one, where no one any longer has any surplus of seeing – any difference – to offer would mean that

If we transform a dialogue in one continuous text, that is, erase the division between voices (changes of speaking subjects) which is possible at the extreme […] then the deep-seated (infinite) contextual meaning disappears (we hit the bottom, reach a standstill) (Bakhtin, 1986:162).

What this points at is that the role of family conversations is not to mirror each other’s points of view:

Language is neither primarily for the representation of the world, nor for the achievement of shared understandings: it is used much more practically. As I see it, in its spontaneously responsive workings, it is primarily for creating relationships, and within those relationships, different ways of being for the participants, according to how they address each other (Shotter, 2008a:140 emphasis in original).

This is also what I encountered in the cousin meetings in the Philipsson family where they seemed to value how their relationships developed as they offered each other their unique gift of otherness. That is why an interplay of voices – an offering of difference - is one central feature of the living moment.

A moment in between talking and listening

But how does the interplay of voices make us move? To respond to this question, I need to go back to the suggested dimension from detached individuality to relationality since this dimension is fundamental for understanding the transformative power of the living moment.
What this dimension actually nails down is the recognition that no one and nothing is complete in itself, which implies that the focus on the individual or any other entity as independent and pre-packaged has to be reconsidered. Consequently, if we want to better understand processes of becoming, we have to focus on the in-betweenness, the heterogeneous links and connections from where organisational life emerges since it is in between the one and the other, “between what is already and what is not yet”, that processes of becoming evolve (Clark & Holquist 1984:65). Bakhtin (1986) further claims that it is utterances in their unfolding that one needs to understand better in order to grasp in-betweenness. Thus, it is not words, nor sentences, nor single utterances, but it is the very flow of utterances offered each other that needs to be emphasised. The reason is that is where the active meaning-making processes take place in between the one and the other.

Based on the field studies of the Stenson family as well as the Philipsson family I can now be even more precise and say that it is not only the utterances in the unfolding that need to be focused on but more specifically what I will here refer to as the voice of listening that we carefully have to tune in to in order to get a better understanding of how the inner becoming of dialogic transformation emerges in the living moment. Bakhtin (1986:143) writes, “I live in the world of others’ words. And my entire life is an orientation in this world, a reaction to others’ words”. I would suggest that it is the voice of listening that makes us take in the words offered by the other. But why so and what is the voice of listening?

The voice of listening is the voice we tune in to in the active, but still seldom recognised, space in between speaking partners. I call it the voice of listening because it is a force that touches us (although it is un-touchable), as we embrace the wholeness of what is expressed in the utterance just heard. To take in the wholeness means to embrace what the utterance is all about content-wise, together with the ideological and relationship undertones. In doing so, we are moreover capable of hearing the polyphonic sound of the distant, recent as well as potential future voices that are merged into the utterance and make sense of it in order to respond back from within all of this and to make a response that makes sense to conversational subjects in this very moment.

The voice of listening does not always hold a nice, kind or smooth invitation. It can just as well be a stab in one’s back, exclusion and discrimination. No matter what, we somehow take in and relate to the voice in our response. Hence, it is through the voice of listening that we intelligently take in the gift of otherness offered by the one we are having the conversation with without ever noticing that we did, which offers us a remarkable way of feeling the in-between, the fleeting moment of meaning-making that most often passes by unrecognised before someone makes a response to the utterance just made.

The voice of listening furthermore comes to us as a physical force, which highlights that when making sense of it, we are using more than our ears; it
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“includes all the ways in which people become aware of or notice themselves and the world” (Ford & Ford, 2003:142). It is a kind of bodily feeling our way into the other and ourselves. Without knowing that we do, we can see and feel how people are being touched by their own as well as others’ utterances. About this matter, Gehrke (2009:6) noted that the eye and the ear “rely upon one another, shape one another, feed sound-images to one another, and to try shut one off or close one out will inevitably alter the operation of both”. I would like to add that it is not only the eye and the ear, but rather all senses that can be involved in embracing the voice of listening.

This, in sum, is how I look upon the voice of listening as a force that touches us in the in-between, the in-between past and future, the known and unknown as well as the in-between the one and the other, in the living moment. Hence, the voice of listening is not a one-off event but an ongoing embodied relational act in between our utterances to each other. And, as long as we do not act totally monologically (not taking in the voice of listening), this voice will continue to move the inner becoming of dialogic transformation in the living moment.

Can moments be more or less living?

One of the contributions of the suggested shift from time as mechanical to time as experienced, is how it sheds light on the fact that time can be experienced differently compared to static clockwise timing. When we start to inquire into the living character of here-and-now moments, it is possible to notice how no moments are the same. Hence, contrary to what is often taken for granted in research, there is a qualitative difference between moments as they unfold.

Even in everyday life we most often do not pay attention to the living moment as it unfolds into the yet-to-come living moment. But sometimes the moment of meeting each other seems to have a special character making the moment more memorable. I think many of us have experienced such life-enriching moments when it feels as if everything stops for a while. It is these moments when we are so ‘taken’ or ‘moved’ by what we hear that it feels we can hardly breathe. During these times, the voice of listening touches us so that we have no option but paying attention to what is happening in the here and now. I will here refer to those moments as ‘moving moments’. Exploring such special moments, what Shotter (2008a:131) calls “striking moments” he writes that they are significant because “in our lived experience of them, they unfold in such a way as to accommodate novelty or to resolve a difficulty”. The shared experience of these moments thereby changes the relationships between people and can be a valuable resource in the wayfinding process. The significance of these moments is that they can create a feeling for one another and an understanding for one another without trying to mirror one another’s beliefs or attitudes, which can help to provide a mutual orientation of how to move on together.
From time to time we experienced this kind of moving moments in the Philipsson family. In fact, already in the first interview I did, with Alex, I think we experienced such a moment. This moment began to emerge as he told me how he had suffered from the ongoing conflict between his father and his two uncles. As he got on he started to talk slowly, as if he was searching for the right expressions. When I saw the tears in his eyes and heard his tense voice I did not really know how to respond. I wanted to embrace him but I thought that would not be appropriate since we had never met before. Therefore, I just sat still and tried to listen to what he said. When he stopped talking, I think he himself was surprised by what he had just uttered and the strong feelings in the room. That we did not say anything for a while was not a problem. On the contrary, a pause can be the peak of a conversation (Bakhtin, 1986). And this pause from talking was not at all an inactive moment, but rather a possibility for us to take in and feel what was happening in this moment. Even though this was the first time we met I felt a strong feeling of connection at that moment. As we are experiencing those moments they can give a feeling of presence – of co-being – in the living moment. Bakhtin (1993) refers to these moments as “once-occurrent events of Being”. He says they are fundamental for the capacity of creating the feeling of an ‘us’. The lived experience of such co-being moreover makes it possible to feel a kind of ‘open wholeness’ in the moment (Bakhtin, 1993). Inherent in those moments are a kind of “vitality effects” that emerge as the moment unfolds (Stern, 2004). Those vitality effects bring about change for people experiencing them, which can be explained as “shared feeling voyages” (Stern, 2004:172). It is like a transformational force that touches all that is present. Hence, it is a unique transformation co-created between meeting participants. Furthermore, this is a kind of transformation that happens within as well as in between those that are sharing the moving moment. That is how those shared moments of strong feelings profoundly change the relationship between those involved. These moments can thereby create new resources between those who are present.

To develop a kind of consciousness of how we relate to each other and how we can let the moments of movement arise is to embrace what the shift from language as representational to language as performative can mean for the practice of having meetings.

Sensing more and seeing differently

Top management meetings, board meetings, budget meetings, planning meetings, strategy retreats and weekly updates – organized meetings are certainly common in contemporary organisational life (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008). A focus on the living moment can be understood as a way of zooming in, in the inquiries of meeting practices. At the same time this zooming in is actually a way of opening up and uncovering new dimensions of the
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phenomenon under study. What I mean is that a closer and more in-depth understanding of the living moment makes it possible to recognise more of the unfinalisable wholeness in this situation, the unique and momentary character of the living moment that is often not recognised in studies underpinned by a being ontology. That is also why a closer focus on the detailed particularities and once-occurring dimensions of the ceaseless flow in the ongoing conversations can help to acknowledge alternative insights. For instance, it becomes possible to note, as pointed out previously by Chia and Holt (2006), how unforeseen entwined actions and incompleteness are also significant ingredients in organisational life, besides analytical thinking and deliberate managerial action.

In the elaboration on the living moment I noticed how this is an ongoing moment that is on the one hand dialogically shaped by the speech genre at play. This is a shaping that gives a direction on how the processes of becoming unfold. At the same time, the living moment is a once-occurring and unique moment where the yet not told can be uttered. Against this background, one way to understand the practice of having meetings is to emphasise that the creation of a meeting can make room for an interplay of voices in the unfolding of here-and-now living moments. In these living moments a co-creation process can take place between participants as they offer each other their unique gift of otherness and respond to the voice of listening. When this happens, an interplay of stabilising and changing forces rubbing against each other in the conversations can create something that has never been before, will never take place again and would not have been possible without the others and the otherness around in this moment. That is why the outcome of a living moment is not fully in the hand of a single consciousness.

What I also noted in the discussion above is how meeting conversations hold a transformative capacity that can occur as people are experiencing a ‘moving moment’. These are moments that touch those who are involved making new connections and a feeling of an ‘us’ possible. The recognition of the moving moment helps to illustrate why there is a need to complement the understanding of time as a clockwise function and also be sensitive to the lived experience of what is happening in a meeting. In Stern’s (2004:4) exploration of what he calls the “temporal architecture of the present moment”, he underlines that, contrary to what is often assumed, when the present moment is thought of as made sense of in retrospect, this kind of moment is actually made sense of as it “plays out a lived emotional drama. [And] as the drama unfolds it traces a temporal shape like a passing musical phrase”. ‘Moving moments’ can thereby be understood as an intensive energy where it is possible to make connections anew - a broadening of our horizons (Ericson, 2007). That is, ‘moving moments’ can be understood as the moment “when the old is no longer as there—just so—as it was and the new is not yet in sight. It is a moment of undecidability and anarchy, a situation that cannot be controlled or planned; rather it is an emerging process. It is improvisation with an unforeseeable
ending (Hatch, 1999)” (Clegg et al., 2005:156). This is an understanding of the here and now that complements and contrasts chronological timing of the present moment with that of the lived experience of this moment, the passing moment in which something happens as the time unfolds. Hence, there is duration in those ‘moving moments’ when it is possible to actually experience how something is coming into being.
11. In the preparation of a meeting: Lessons learnt

The process approach suggested here, and the acknowledgment of the living moment, has implications for the practices of having meetings. That is what will be addressed in this chapter.

Current development in family business research can be described in three waves focusing on research on planning, professionalisation and performance (see chapter two). The significance of family meetings have been noted in this research where those meetings have been recommended as one of the most essential practices for family business longevity (Ward, 2004). That goes hand in hand with the recognition that the enterprising family should not always replicate general non-family best practices, but rather find ways to manage their firms where the influence of the owner family can be utilized (Miller & Le Breton Miller, 2005). There have been recent suggestions, however, that family business best practices need some further consideration where the unique and idiosyncratic nature of family businesses is better utilized (Dana & Smyrnios, 2010). There is also a growing awareness that there is a need to stop taking the philosophies underpinning those best practices for granted. For instance, in his speech at the yearly Family Firm Institute conference in New York in 2009, Ivan Lansberg, one of the prominent scholars and consultants in the family business community, was self-critical. He questioned his own earlier advice about implementing a complex web of family governance structures (including various types of family meetings). While he did not criticise the usage of these meetings per se, he called for a more critical orientation to the philosophies that underpin the advice that researchers and consultants offer. In short, he asked for greater awareness of what the philosophies that underpin current ‘recipes’ do to the proposed best practices, and what the proposed best practices do to the people.

This chapter can be read as a response to those concerns. Based on the experiences from the field study I will discuss meeting practices from a dialogical becoming perspective.

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28 According to their homepage, “The Family Firm Institute is the leading membership association worldwide for professionals serving the family enterprise field. It provides a global forum for practitioners and academics to acquire exemplary interdisciplinary knowledge while engaging in collaborative opportunities that facilitate their professional and business development objectives. Through its international journal, certificate program, educational endeavors, and preeminent international conference, FFI upholds the highest standards in family enterprise best practices.” (www.ffi.org).
Potential questions

If the family meeting can open up a process of wayfinding — a process that cannot or should not necessarily be managed or planned in the traditional sense — what then are the practical implications of this way of reasoning? And when it is argued that there is a need to better understand the living moment in the family meeting, what does that mean for the preparation of the next meeting? This chapter is organised around six questions, each of which addresses a theme that can, hopefully, provide further food for thought with regard to meeting practices. While the different questions and themes should not be read as some sort of technique for how to plan a meeting, they are ideas for how it might be useful to prepare oneself to participate more fully in the living moment.

Remembering that conversations are not on/off, but better/worse: Are the conversations enriching?

The first question is general in nature and has implications for meeting preparation at large. This question builds on Bakhtin’s (1984:293) pragmatic view on dialogue that holds that “to live means to participate in dialogue”. From a dialogical becoming perspective, throughout our lives, we are in dialogue: we respond, react, argue for and against, and so forth. In short, we make our everyday life in dialogical encounters. That is how the unfinalisable processes of becoming evolve and that is how we are becoming who we are. What is particularly interesting here is how Bakhtin (1984) underlines that even if we do not reply, that is also a way of responding. Thus, not raising our voice or not relating to the otherness around us is also an act of communication. From this it follows that as long as we live, we respond, we act, we communicate.

From this position I must question arguments that turn communication into something simple, something that is or is not. Thus, I challenge arguments such as those found in the family business literature arguing that succession planning does not take off because there is a lack of communication or that a lack of communication promotes resistance to succession (see, among others, Handler & Kram, 1988). While we understand intuitively what is meant by this way of phrasing, it is nevertheless an unfortunate way of talking about communication in the family business. The habit of thinking unthinkingly about communication in terms of black and white, on or off, limits communication to something that is either/or; either you communicate or you don’t. This reduces communication to something that is simple, which you do not need to understand better, because from this perspective the solution is simply to set up a meeting, ask people to start talking to each other, and everything will be resolved. Thus, no further effort is needed for making enriching conversations happen.
However, a dialogical becoming understanding of communication opens up a subtler and, possibly, a more fruitful way of thinking about meeting conversations. It does away with the question of whether an enterprising family engages in conversation or not. The question is rather whether the conversations are enriching for the participants:

The central implication of this onto logical character of dialogue is that there is a direct relationship between the quality of human communication and the quality of human life. How we speech communicate, in other words, directly affects who we are and who we become. Communication is not just instrumental and expressive; it is also, and most importantly, person building (and can be person destroying) (Stewart, 1994:xvii).

One possibility that opens up because of this redirection of bringing the communication process to the fore, is to pay attention to how conversations, as world-making activities, are intertwined with fear, hopes, dreams, memories and emotions that people bring with them in their encounters with each other.

In the Philipsson family, from time to time I noted how they started to have a conversation about the conversation they were currently having – a kind of meta-reflection – about the living moment they were encountering. This way of having a conversation about their conversation seemed to be one way to ensure they were proceeding in an enriching direction. I remember, for instance, how they discussed in the meeting when they had invited Dan (Cousin meeting March 2009), how important it was for them to have these conversations. When I asked them why, they answered:

Stefan:  
[...] To understand each other’s points of view, how everyone thinks and so on. As I understand it, we have all moved on and got to understand each other better in the ….

Josefine:  
To get to know each other in another way.

Jennifer:  
I guess you can talk about anything. If you just talk about everything then you’d better understand how people think and that makes it easier if you would like to bring something to the table. When you know that Alex and Maria are reasoning like this and Stefan like this, you can talk better.

Here, Stefan reflects on what their conversations do to them and brings forward the idea that he thinks everyone has been moved by listening to each other. Josefine and Jennifer, in their replies, underline how this way of talking helps them to know each other better. What is also interesting here is how Jennifer suggests that it is not always what you talk about that is most important, but that you have conversations where you can understand the others’ points of view.
Remembering that moments are dialogically shaped: How can we prepare the dialogic space?

This second question is clearly related to the first. Given that meeting conversations can be more or less rewarding, how is it possible to shape the conversations in an enriching way? Hence, this question underlines that, besides thinking about what kind of questions or issues to discuss in the meeting, we should consider how it is possible for the family members to engage in those conversations. As the field account of the Stenson family illustrates (see Chapter 6), the speech genres at play in family meetings guide or direct the family conversations and have implications for how meaning-making processes unfold. Drawing on Voloshinov (1973), Shotter (2008a:53) notes how “the immediate social situation and the broader social milieu wholly determine – and determine from within, so to speak – the structure of an utterance” (emphasis in original). Thus, the dialogically shaped atmosphere influences what is possible to utter and how to make sense of the utterances. In this way the atmosphere is inherent in the speech genre at play in each and every conversation. Against this background, it becomes vital to discuss, and not take for granted, such issues as when and where meetings should be held, how decisions should be made, and what tone of voice we would like to adopt in the encounters. For instance, what does it mean for the meeting atmosphere to work with a predefined agenda, take minutes, make use of PowerPoint presentations, etc? In short, how does the ‘official culture’ (Bakhtin, 1984) influence the dialogical moment? Or, the other way around, how does a more ‘carnival’ (Bakhtin, 1984) orientation influence the conversations?

What this question invites, accordingly, is to consider how to meet each other because of the recognition that, just as our dialogical encounters are shaped by the speech genre at play, they are at the same time developing in the ongoing dialogical interplay which is shaped by us. Hence, it is possible to shape the dialogue encounters by working on what kind of social milieu we create.

Remembering that processes of becoming unfold in between utterances and responses: How can talking and listening be acknowledged?

In one of the meetings with the Philipsson family I discuss how dialogic listening can be a transformational force in conversations (Cousin meeting March 2009). Likewise, in the exploration of the living moment (see Chapter
I draw attention to how the voice of listening touches us in between utterances. In current research, however, there tends to be little attention paid to how people relate and listen to the others around them in the living moment. While there has been much energy devoted to better understanding people's utterances – for example in surveys, interviews, diaries, focus groups, written texts – there has been less focus on how listening occurs. In addition, there is an unfortunate neglect of how listening and talking are intertwined and inform each other in general organisation research, as well as in family business research.

Also, in everyday life, we often seem to be more concerned with the voice of talking than the voice of listening. This is something Shotter (2009b) brings forward when he notes how we often listen for opportunities to break in and express ourselves since “we feel we have a right for our voice to be heard” (Shotter, 2009b:21). Yet, he continues, even if we manage to make our voice come through, we still do not know how our utterance lands among those we are talking to. For us to be able to touch each other, we have to tune in to the otherness offered to us to be able to respond from within the ongoing conversation. Furthermore, we have to let people finalise their utterance as a whole in order to fully take in and respond to it in intelligent ways (Bakhtin, 1986). This is the kind of response that makes people feel they have been heard and seen.

According to Bakhtin (1986:70), it is the unfortunate spread of communication models, picturing an active speaker and a passive listener, that makes us focus on “speech” or “speech flow” rather than on conversations as co-created by speaking partners. Additionally, the entitative thinking where everything can be divided, separated and defined, has led in this direction, too. Since language has been approached mostly from a being perspective with the belief that the language in use can be broken down and analysed in separate segments such as sentences and words, there has been a tendency to favour speech instead of developing a more relational and holistic understanding of dialogical co-creation. What is problematic with this outlook is that it neglects the relational aspects of becoming since it fails to recognise the other, “the sort of relations that exist among rejoinders of dialogue – reactions between question and answer, assertion and objection, assertion and agreement, suggestion and acceptance, order and execution, and so forth [...]” (Bakhtin, 1986:72). These relations, and the difference between them, are only possible to recognise if we pay attention to the interplay between people.

What this question invites, accordingly, is the need to focus on speech and listening, and how these dialogic activities inform each other in the living moment. In practical terms, that means it is not enough to make sure everyone has a say in the meeting since it seems to be equally important that people have the possibility to listen to themselves as well as to others for new meanings to evolve.
Remembering that ‘moving moments’ are unplannable: How can we seize opportunities for ‘moving moments’ to occur?

In the discussion of living moments (see Chapter 10) I noted how some moments have some specific transformational possibilities inherent in them where new horizons can open up. I called these ‘moving moments’. Owing to their dialogical nature, these moments cannot be scripted or planned. Nevertheless, it seems to be possible to learn how to act wisely when we feel a moving moment is rising. That is at least my experience from the meetings in the Philipsson family. Not every time, but sometimes, people related to the others and the otherness around them in such a way that the emerging moving moment could flourish. During these times, it was possible to notice how the speed of the conversation was reduced, as if people subconsciously knew that what would be uttered next would make a difference. In this respect people seemed to relate bodily to each other, as if feeling that they were in this together and that how they move on next could open new connections. What I also noted was that the moving moment often evolved when someone acted surprisingly — they went outside of what was expected. Think, for instance, of the meeting between the cousins and Dan (Cousin meeting March 2009). In this meeting Dan opened up and shared his view on the conflict with his brothers. I think we were all taken by surprise and deeply touched by what he said. Not only we but Dan as well seemed to be moved by what he heard himself saying. When someone opens up like that it seems to be of significance that we respond respectfully and seize the opportunity to break with routine ways of relating, just as the cousins did at that moment.

What this question invites, accordingly, is an awareness of how we relate to each other and how we make room for moving moments to occur. What seems to be of importance then, is to slow down, tune in and stay in this moment. In that way it can become possible to explore further the potentiality of the moving moment.

Valuing different voices in interplay: How can otherness emerge?

When I discussed some of the characteristics of the living moment, I noted how this can be a moment of different voices in interplay (see Chapter 10). I also addressed that it is in the interplay of these voices that meaning-making processes unfold. However, much research into family business goes in the opposite direction: the family meeting is often suggested as the arena where sameness in different ways can be achieved among family members. In the rationally grounded analytical approaches (see Chapter 2), it is suggested that shared views between family members are a key to knowing how to go on together. For instance, the key benefit of strategic planning, according to Ward (1988:115), is that “the planning process helps all managers and family members to develop a common understanding – that is, the same assumption –
11 In the preparation of a meeting: Lessons learnt

about the world in which the company operates”. A few lines later, he asks, “To what degree should family differences be openly discussed and tolerated?” (p. 116).

Yet, as I noted in the discussion about the living moment, the idea that enterprising families would be more united and better off by developing one strong voice and one worldview is almost impossible and nor is it desirable. A totally shared understanding would ultimately mean dismissing or silencing the many voices of otherness. In that way shared understandings would lead to a unified authoritative voice where the voices that did not fit in would have no place. Interestingly, one of the few family business studies focusing on family meeting processes noted that “the effectiveness of family meetings is not found in simply generating consensus around a set of family beliefs, but in creating a forum for processing individual beliefs” (Habbershon & Astrachan, 1997:37-38).

What is important to note is that even though I suggest a shift in focus from shared output, in terms of a shared voice, to a shared living moment where difference can be offered, that does not suggest that enterprising families should stop engaging in discussions about values, goals, beliefs or dreams for the future. On the contrary, as we have recognised in the Stenson family as well as the Philipsson family, these discussions are important. However, the reason for having those conversations differs. It is the very work in itself, taking place in the living moment – in a “chronotopic similarity” (Baxter, 2010:196) – that is of central concern. As I understand Stefan Philipsson when he explains how they are in a crystallization process where they will eventually find out who will take over Brunnsala as they start to meet in the cousin meetings, I think he is aware of the importance of letting different voices play out in their meeting. As he says, he does not know beforehand what will be best to discuss because that is something that will come in the living moment, when they are offering their different points of view to each other (see Chapter 9).

What this question invites, accordingly, is to remember that family meeting conversations can offer possibilities for sharing otherness between each other. By listening to each other and being moved by each other without erasing the difference between voices, a feeling of each other’s situation and point of view can evolve. Moreover, it is in voicing different perspectives that ideas not previously thought of can take off.

Engaging with the unknown: How is it possible to utter the yet untold?

The wayfinding process (see Chapter 8) illustrates how complex issues often have to be worked out in many small steps as we engage with them in an emerging way. One implication of acknowledging the many small steps by which we can find a new home for ourselves along the way, is the importance of not trying to narrow down future possibilities by making urgent decisions
immediately, but rather trying to remain in uncertainty and ambiguity, because that can widen the possibilities and open up yet unknown directions (Chia & Holt, 2009). In so doing, the traditional questions such as “Where are we now?” and “Where do we want to go?” seem to take the conversations in the wrong direction since they are searching for a fixed, single route. Moreover, these questions presume it is possible to represent some territory that is known beforehand — before we engage with them. However, what is fundamental in the wayfinding process is that we know as we go where every step – every utterance – has the possibility to open up avenues, activities and connections previously unnoticed.

One illustration of how the Philipsson family started to utter the untold is in a meeting when Dan suggested it could be useful to think of where they were in relation to the family business (Cousin meeting March 2009). He asked: “Are you above, below, do you carry it on your shoulders, behind your back or in front of you?” (Cousin meeting, March 2009). This was a line of thought to which the cousins immediately related and they started to explore how they felt they were positioned with regard to the business. They also talked about how they had felt about the business previously, as well as about ideas of how they might feel in the future. Towards the end of this conversation they started to discuss how Ted (before he passed away) might have felt connected to the business. Interestingly, as soon as they started having these conversations about their relationship with the business, the cousins could immediately relate to it, as if they already knew this even though they had not talked about it before. To me, this is an example of how a conversation, born in the living moment, can help to utter the yet untold and thereby open up new perspectives on current concerns.

What this question invites, accordingly, is to remember how important it is to create prerequisites for conversations where the once-occurring and unique dimension of people’s utterances is encouraged and appreciated. Against this background, questions such as “How can we express the unsaid?” and “How can we create a safe enough atmosphere where the inexpressible can be voiced?” can be useful to consider in the preparation of a meeting.

In closing: An interplay of opening and stabilising movements

The main intention of the above questions is to be of help when preparing for a meeting. The questions are raised based on the assumption that how we relate to each other and how the conversations unfold is intertwined directly with the potential futures that are co-created in the meeting. Bringing this chapter to an end I shall say something about these questions viewed together.
Just as the living moment unfolds in the interplay between speaking and listening, the known and unknown, past and future, there is also a continuous interplay between stabilising (monological) and opening (dialogical) movements in this moment. What is possible to note, when viewing the questions altogether, is how they are sensitive to both opening and stabilising movements inherent in the ongoing living moment. An example of what I mean is how the ongoing living moment is always shaped in a certain way by the speech genre at play; this is a stabilising movement that directs how it is possible to interact. At the same time, there are forces of newness and openings in this moment, for example, through the offering of otherness to each other where new connections and novel ideas can arise. What are the implications of acknowledging that both stabilising and opening forces are inherent in the living moment?

When preparing for a meeting, both these forces and how they are interconnected need to be recognised. Still, this is a time when new thinking, new ways of working and creativity are highly valued qualities in the world of management (Styhre, 2006). In current research and practice there is a tendency to have a one-sided focus on how it is possible to bring about change in organisations, and stabilising movements are often forgotten. Considering how the being perspective is often taken for granted, in which the world is approached as orderly and stable, it is possible to understand why the quest traditionally has been to bring about change. Along this line of thinking, change agents and consultants are hired to make change happen in the organisation.

Yet, from a becoming perspective it is possible to understand how the world is in continuous flow and movement, and why change does not need to be forced externally because transformation is inherent in life. What seems to be of significance then, when preparing for a meeting, is to acknowledge how both opening and stabilising forces are part of the meeting processes.

What the stabilising movements have in common is that they bring about a temporary punctuation or a feeling of closure in the here and now. One of the contributions of stabilising movements is that they can create a feeling of leaving the past behind (a way of completing the uncompleted past), which makes it possible to open up new commitments for a different future (Ford & Ford, 2003). In this way, stabilising movements can be of value in that they give a feeling of wholeness; for instance, towards the end of a meeting where they can create a feeling of harmony for those involved.

My point in emphasising stabilising as well as opening movements is that the stabilising forces tend to be forgotten in the quest for how to bring about change. By recognising how these movements enrich each other it is possible to think beyond the often taken-for-granted misconception that newness and stability are dichotomies and, instead, embrace them as constituents of each other in the living moment.

What does this mean for consultants or others invited to facilitate meetings? As I see it, the role of the facilitator is, primarily, to think of how to make
enriching communication possible and create awareness of the transformational power in the living moment, rather than giving specific advice or suggesting solutions for the meeting participants. Thinking of the complex situation an enterprising family can be facing (difficulties of the will, to return to that terminology, see Chapter 8), how can someone external know what would be the best direction? And, when acknowledging that it is from within the very conversations themselves that transformation occurs, remember what it might do to the dialogical atmosphere if change is ‘forced’ from the outside. From this viewpoint, allowing the wayfinding process to unfold and relying on the “propensity of things” to realise its future potential can be one way of providing support in the meeting (Chia, 2010:128). From this follows a more hesitant stance towards confrontation, moving instead with the flow of events from within. In this, the facilitator can be of help by making sure everyone is invited to truly and fully participate in the wayfinding process. It can be the role of the facilitator to create an enriching dialogical space in which all involved can enquire about their new orientation. In this, the facilitator can also offer his or her own voice in such a way that as yet unexplored perspectives and otherwise overlooked potentialities can be brought into the conversation. It can also be beneficial to have advisers working in teams, such as lawyers with accountants and psychologists, to better respond to the complexity that the owner family can be facing (Thomas, 2002).
12. From stories told to stories lived: Research practices for understanding the living moment from within

On the one hand, it is noteworthy that current studies have paid so little attention to what is happening in the family meeting itself. Considering the importance of these meetings, greater emphases on what is happening in the meetings seem to be relevant. On the other hand, it is not that strange, considering that the difficulty lies in recognising how the everyday transformation is slowly coming into being, since it is so familiar to us that we take it for granted and, therefore, hardly notice it (Morson & Emerson, 1990). Wittgenstein (1953) notes how aspects of those things that are most important to us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. We therefore often fall short of noticing exactly that which is always before our eyes. What this leads to is that: “we fail to be struck by what, when seen, is most striking and most powerful” (Wittgenstein, 1953: para. 129). Bakhtin (1984) further notes the irony that we master the unique and heterogeneous multitude skilfully in our everyday interaction with each other, but when it comes to research, we fall short of embracing the richness of what is happening in the living moment.

In this chapter I will discuss research practices for understanding the slowly emerging transformation that occurs in the ongoing living moment. The chapter is based on one of my most significant aha-experiences during the field study, when I really took in how difficult it is or, to put it even more strongly, how impossible it is to understand processes of becoming from the outside. This is something I had read about quite extensively, for instance in cultural and dialogue studies as well as organisational becoming literature, and I had somehow grasped it intellectually. Tsoukas and Chia (2002:571) in their introduction of the term ‘organisational becoming’ note that researchers need to “experience reality directly” by being positioned “at the centre of an unfolding phenomenon”, in order to grasp processes of becoming. They also underline that it is only from there, in the participation of that particular time-space that it is possible to get a glimpse of the salient, constantly changing nature. The reason is because it is from this position “that you can bring yourself in touch with reality through intuition; get to know it from within” (Bergson, 1946, cited in Tsoukas & Chia, 2002:571). Also Bakhtin (1986) stresses the importance of studying dialogical processes from within. He labels communication studies that are not based on experienced communication as
“false science”, which is, according to him, “inevitably superficial” (Bakhtin, 1986:145).

Although I had read these calls for experiencing reality from within, it was not until I experienced the limitations of making studies from the outside (in my case, from outside the family meetings) that the words spoke to me in another way. And it was this experience that made it so important for me to change modes – from stories told to stories lived – in the continuation of my fieldwork. Therefore, I wrote about the importance of being with the people we study, instead of making a study about something or someone. In discussing a withness-approach (Shotter, 2005), I noticed the need to recognise everyday local practice, focusing on the moment-to-moment conversations in their unfolding and remembering the contextual surrounding (see Chapter 7). While these three reminders can serve as a useful departure for an in-depth real-time study, they do not, at the same time, say much about how it is possible to engage with those we study. And how we relate to and engage with those we study, I would argue, is what makes all the difference if we want to better understand the living moment in processes of becoming. Therefore, based on literature that I found helpful, together with my own experience from this field study, this chapter will offer some ideas of how it might be useful to think and act – some kind of research practices – for a researcher being in the living moment. Thus, I will not address the issue of how to find an appropriate object to study, the analysis or interpretation of data or how to write up the fieldwork account. Rather this chapter is specifically about making our way in the living moment – the essential moment when it all happens – but the moment for which there is so little guidance about how to orientate ourselves in our role as researchers.

The ambition is to keep the discussion down to earth, dealing with the everyday struggles of fieldwork. In doing so, I will suggest four stepping stones that can be useful when engaging in fieldwork from within. I thereby hope to explore further the challenges of embracing the fuzziness and unforeseen developments that evolve in studies from a strong process perspective (Hernes, 2008). At the same time, the stepping stones can give an idea about the possibilities of research as co-created, in which novel connections and once-occurring events can happen in the conversations between everyone involved.

Engaging from within the living moment: Four stepping stones

Before I turn to the stepping stones themselves, there is a need to clarify what I mean by this notion. I look upon the stepping stones as pointers or reminders that can be of help when engaging from within the living moment in fieldwork. I do not picture them as being laid out in a clear line, in the sense that you have
to use one stepping stone after the other. They are rather there to make use of when needed, in whatever way makes sense. This outlook on stepping stones is inspired by David Bohm (Peat, 1997). This much-acknowledged dialogue scholar explained, based on his own experience, why and how stepping stones are something to hold on to in the flow of movement. In his childhood, Bohm enjoyed playing outside with other children. Since he suffered from physical awkwardness and lack of coordination, he could not easily take part in games and sports with the others, which forced him to develop a specific strategy. He decided that by watching what the other boys did he should be able to remember, in his head, the bodily movements needed to catch a ball or climb a tree. In this kind of careful planning of each and every step he thought he would be able to control his body. One day, when he was around ten years old, he was in the woods playing with some boys when they came to a stream traversed by a series of rocks, which was the sort of situation that troubled him:

He would now have to plan ahead, note the position of the rocks, and decide where and how to place his feet. For David, physical security came in assuming trusted positions: he would move only when he had developed sufficient confidence. Yet as soon as he jumped onto the first stone, he realized that it was impossible to stop long enough to plan the next step. Crossing the river, jumping from stone to stone, could be done only in one continuous movement. If he tried to stop or even think about what he was doing, he would fall in. His only hope was to keep moving. This moment of insight became so significant to him that he told the story many times during his life. (Peat, 1997:35).

This experience deeply changed David Bohm. At that moment he realised “that security does not require control and stillness but can come in a freely flowing movement” (Peat, 1997:35).

In this story, David draws attention to the importance of allowing oneself to go with the flow, without having the possibility, or need, for security in terms of control. In the following section, I will suggest four stepping stones that I found useful when I started to explore how it is possible to move on in the flow of conversations that surrounded me in the family meetings I studied. Hence, these stepping stones come from my own experience of thinking of research practices, not primarily in terms of specific methods to employ in accordance with certain techniques, but rather allowing a researcher movement in the moment of meeting others and letting the fieldwork grow from there. This work often went in surprising, but still very promising directions.
**A relational foundation**

It has been underlined many times before, but is so fundamental that I have to bring it up again here: the relationship between the people in the field and the researcher is what makes the difference in fieldwork. Dutton and Dukerich (2006) go as far as saying that a relational foundation is a prerequisite for making interesting research at all. To them, this is far more important than asking the right research question or having a “clever theory” or “creative or rigorous method” (Dutton & Dukerich, 2006:26). They find that the relational practices of being vulnerable, being genuinely interested, seeking feedback and being trustworthy are keys to a relational foundation. According to them, “the relational processes one uses – how one builds and sustains connections to others – are pivotal to research quality” (Dutton & Dukerich, 2006:24). In the same vein of argument, Shotter proposes that we should initiate our inquiries by paying attention to the relationships we develop with each other:

> Instead of turning immediately, as we have in the past, to a study of how individuals come to know the objects and entities in the world around them, we must begin in quite a different way: we must study how […] we can first develop and sustain between us different, particular ways of relating ourselves to each other (Shotter, in Cunliffe, 2001:355).

In my initial relationship with Mark at Brunnsala I think he was very helpful in this regard. When he rang me up after our first meeting and initiated a conversation about what kind of relationship we had and wanted to have, with each other, he opened up a discussion not only about the subject matter (their cousin meetings) but also about how we wanted to work together. He said he thought it was important to talk about our relationship immediately, to make sure we knew what to expect from each other and make sure we were happy about how we were working together. In this phone call he also reminded me to get back to him if there was anything I wanted to address. Thus, he seemed to be aware that a relationship is something one has to work on continuously. To me, his way of immediately opening up a conversation about our relationship was a relief. By doing so, I think he paved the way for trust and openness, which is essential for a research project to grow.

The focus on a relational foundation is an implication of the switch from detached individuality to relationality (see Chapter 3). This kind of relational orientation guided me through the encounters with the Philipsson family. For instance, when I interviewed the family members individually, I did so from a relational outlook. This means that the interviews, to me, were a moment of co-creation where we could explore their current situation jointly (see, e.g. Melin, 1977 and Ericson, 2007 about the interview as a dialogical encounter and Harding, 2007, on the becoming-ness in an interview situation). Next, when we
co-authored and created interview summaries to share with the other family members, this became a process in which the individual interview account was part of the larger web of interview accounts. In this way, I had the possibility to be there in the dialogical moment and be part of the processes of becoming, even though the primary research practice in use was individual interviews.

**Direction through compassion**

Some of my struggles in the fieldwork were related to questions of what to focus on in the living moment, in order to not miss important aspects of the family conversations. What I found worked for me was to trust my ability to feel my way into the dialogues through compassion. Compassion is here used in line with Lipari (2009), who argues that it is a way of feeling together with others. This means that I did not necessarily need to understand the others immediately, nor what was going on in the living moment (to give an extreme example, how could I possibly fully understand what it meant for the cousins to say to the others that they wanted/did not want to be an owner in the tenth generation?). What I mean is that even though I cannot fully understand them, I can trust my own senses to feel that this is something of significance, sometimes even long before I have started to understand what it is all about. On this matter, Lipari (2009:52) writes:

Thus while many of us think we must understand in order to feel compassion, the engagement with alterity instructs that I may not, in fact, be able to understand. Events and experience may be unimaginable to me, beyond my comprehension. They may destroy my categories of thought or violate my beliefs about the world (emphasis in original).

In this way, compassion can make room for the other and thus for something that I do not necessarily understand, and that I do not immediately need to make sense of. Neither do I need to look in a specific direction to find something, but rather try to bodily and emotionally be in the living moment. And from there, some kind of understanding may eventually evolve.

To me, being with the family members and relying on my compassion for them guided me in the living moment in the sense that I basically tried to relax and to be there. In such a stance, just as Cunliffe (2001) notes in her study of management practices, the research project can become a two-way, emerging embodied process between the researcher and the people in the field. Interestingly, what I found is that when we started to engage with each other in this way, it is possible to develop a sense of mutual caring. The following text message that I received from one of the cousins is a sign of this:
Hello! I forgot to thank you for the interview some weeks ago. Thanks! It was very good for me to talk about those issues. I have never talked to anyone like that before. I hope it also gave you something … (Stefan, text message).

**Questioning softly**

Apart from engaging bodily with compassion, how did I relate and communicate with the family members? In hindsight, when I listen to the recordings from the meetings, I realise that those moments that seemed to make a difference – for instance, when we talked about things that had never been discussed before, or when we talked about old issues in new ways – were those moments when a specific way of asking questions was prevalent. This is what I call ‘questioning softly’.

Questioning softly is not about the grand, generalised and decontextualised questions that seem to come out of nowhere, nor is it about questions that presuppose a certain direction or gradual development. It is not a series of pre-programmed questions or just asking questions for the sake of it. I am definitely not talking about questions with the purpose of trying to cover everything in order to be able to map out a totality.

Instead, I am talking about the small questions: “What about ... ?” “What happens if ... ?” These are questions that arise intuitively in the flow of conversation, questions that come out of what is heard and seen, what is sensed and experienced bodily. Often these are questions that pass by unrecognised even though they are important for the dialogical flow. It seems to me that questioning softly is a relational way of being, where we are engaged in the living moment in such a way that the conversation itself becomes the author and provides opportunities for questions to be asked (Lowe, 2005). Therefore, this is a way of thinking that goes against the idea of preparing a set of questions beforehand. Shotter, who has long advocated letting the conversation itself lead the way, argues:

Thus, if it is the case that (in at least some of their aspects) all our activities are to an extent ‘shaped’ by our body’s ineradicable responsiveness to the unique character of their surrounding context, then any inquiry into their nature that fails to take account of this – any inquiry that is driven by ‘ready-made’ textbook-methods, say, or any ‘interviews’ conducted in accord with pre-established ‘schedules’ – will inevitably miss important aspects of our activities. Indeed, they will miss just those aspects that make people’s activities and their utterances unique, both to the persons concerned and to the situations within which they occur. (Shotter, 2009b:23, emphasis in original).
In such unique concerns and situations, questioning softly can be helpful as a reminder, in the sense that it brings attention to something in the flow of ongoing utterances. These questions can thus create a momentary pause during which it is possible to make connections anew in the flow of becoming.

**Interplay between stabilising and destabilising practices**

Let me speculate freely for a moment. My conjecture is that research practices in organisation studies are seldom thought of in terms of how they open up stabilising or destabilising forces. If that were the case I think we would be more sensitive to how our approaches influence and make sense in the living moments we explore. The most commonly used research practices (in qualitative-oriented approaches) are based on oral communication (interviews being the most common form, but also the study of meetings and focus groups as well as other speech-based ways of working). That is also how I started this project. However, over time we worked with written texts, and writing became an integral part of the research project as well, in and between the cousin meetings. Interestingly, the interplay of different ways of relating, where we changed from speech-based inquiry in interviews and meetings to text-based ways of working and then back again, seemed to make a difference for the family members as well as for me. One of the reasons is probably that speaking and writing do different things. In this project it seemed that the process of writing functioned as temporary stabilising, while our conversations were often more destabilising in character (except the more monological utterances when no response was supposed to be made, nor possible to make).

One interpretation of the difference between writing text and having a conversation is that one of the features of the externalisation process that takes place in the transformation from speech to writing is that it makes it possible to look at and edit the text; it creates possibilities for rewriting one’s account, thereby creating new meanings for oneself, as well as in the offering to others. In this particular study, the interview account became a way to stabilise or freeze the scene for a moment, which allowed the family members to look again at the interview accounts. A Bergsonian reading (Lacey, 1999) is that the written text helps to treat that which is essentially moving, so that it seems to be stable for a moment, which is needed in order to act upon it. For instance, when the cousins read each other’s accounts, they realised that one of their companies was seldom mentioned by any of them. That insight gave them the idea of making an appointment with the CEO of that particular firm to learn more about the business. They also recognised that they all felt quite insecure about how to go on in the succession process and they jointly explored areas that they wanted to continue discussing. Furthermore, reading about each other helped them view each other in new ways:
We talked about it, Chris and me, and we think these interviews are really good for us because they have such a personal touch. We talk about who we are. So I got a picture of who Dan is, and so on, things I did not know at all (Olivia, in a cousin meeting).

To work on a text can, therefore, be a way to give a feeling to a stabilised moment that can open up the possibility of noticing things that otherwise easily pass by unrecognised in the flow of a conversation. I also experienced how the discussion of the texts invited yet new voices and perspectives that were previously unnoticed. That is why I think different research practices, allowing for stabilising and destabilising forces, complement each other and can contribute to the ongoing conversation.

**Everyday research practices and ethics in the making**

In his insightful book *After Method*, Law (2004) concludes that, yes, things are on the move. Nevertheless, the research practices passed down to us tend to work on the assumption that the world is to be understood in terms of more or less stable and identifiable processes. Along the same line of reasoning, Bakhtin (1986) writes that it is unfortunate that enquiries into social phenomena start from theoretical constructs that are forced onto the social world. He calls this ‘theoretism’, which, according to him, is to begin at the wrong end since we cannot break into the world of events from the departure point of theoretical descriptions. That is why one must start from the very act itself and not its theoretical transcriptions. The problem with theoretism is that it falls short in recognising the ‘eventness of the event’ (Bakhtin, 1986), or the ‘living’ character of becoming since it confines social worlds into predefined, closed structures.

The above stepping stones should be looked upon as my tentative response to how it might be useful to think and act when one is interested in understanding the living moment. They have grown out of my interest in how it is possible to depart from within the living moment itself. And, just as Bohm (Peat, 1997) explained, when he realised he had to move from stone to stone in an unplanned way, these stepping stones are useful for allowing ourselves to move *with* the flow of conversations from *within*.
Table 12.1 Research practices for understanding the living moment from within: four stepping stones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stepping stone</th>
<th>Main idea</th>
<th>Example from the field study</th>
<th>Inspirational reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relational foundation</td>
<td>Becoming happens in the in-between, between you and me, now and then, and that is why a relational foundation is key.</td>
<td>I think of how the individual interview could be carried out from a relational perspective.</td>
<td>Dutton &amp; Dukerich (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction through compassion</td>
<td>To grasp processes of becoming we have to rely on our ability to sense the others bodily, with compassion.</td>
<td>I let compassion guide me in what to focus on in the living moment.</td>
<td>Lipari (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning softly</td>
<td>Spontaneous questions, raised out of the living moment.</td>
<td>I let go of scripted pre-prepared questions and instead let the questions arise in the living moment.</td>
<td>Lowe (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interplay between stabilising and destabilising initiatives</td>
<td>Writing and speaking are different in that they have different stabilising and destabilising forces.</td>
<td>We switched between speaking and writing, for instance in co-authoring of interview accounts that were later discussed in the cousin group.</td>
<td>Rhodes (2000)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Essentially, what I see when I look at these four stepping stones together is that when we are trying to understand dialogical processes of becoming we are no longer standing still in some sort of temporal or spatial vacuum. What seems to be important, then, is to allow ourselves to experiment continuously and find ways to let emergence occur in the field study. There is certainly also a need to include aspects such as researcher imagination, intuition and creativity; to be able to think beyond what is and prepare for what is yet to come (Nayak, 2008). In this, to be vulnerable to the others and otherness around us does also seem to be key to opening ourselves to the not yet known.
What we can learn from this kind of collaborative fieldwork is that predefined schemes and too detailed field study plans seem counterproductive. How can I possibly know where the living moment will take me and what will be relevant when I am focusing on processes on their way towards something in a dialogical flow? Furthermore, every research initiative is unique and needs its own way of moving forward at any particular moment. I am not suggesting that we should throw away everything we have learnt in methods classes about preparing for an interview or creating scripts before entering a meeting session. However, since these practices have not been developed with an acknowledgment of the living moment, they have to be used with care and consideration for what they do to the dialogical processes at work. Hence, these stepping stones underline the importance of not planning exactly what kind of method to make use of beforehand, but rather preparing oneself for being in the living moment and creatively letting the ways of engaging in the field emerge from within the moment. I think of it in terms of travelling research practices.

By that I mean that how we engage in fieldwork can emerge during the field study journey itself. This is also a kind of research practice where one way of working merges into another in some sort of emerging development in which it is not possible (or meaningful) to separate between different methods. For instance, when I started to meet the Philipsson family members, the one-on-one interviews merged into a first report that became a preparation meeting and, thereafter, a process of co-authoring which became a basis for discussion at a cousin meeting. And, during that meeting, the cousins recognised how much they worried about a family conflict, which they decided to do something about and therefore invited Dan to a meeting and so on. Importantly, the travelling, the ‘invention’ of what to do next, emerged out of the ongoing conversations. And it was not always I who came up with the idea of what to do next. When working with the family, I realised that when I trusted the moment to speak for us, the choice of path to follow came naturally. Travelling research practices, therefore, go hand in hand with the ongoing nature of dialogical becomingness, which implies that, continuously, we have to find how to relate to people in the field. These stepping stones also stress the importance of being more concerned with how we relate to the others in the field instead of being too concerned with what to do:

We are searching for a new way of understanding our relations to our surroundings while still moving around within them, instead of viewing them intermittently from fixed points of view — a new way of understanding that takes the ‘shaped’ sequencing of events in time, rather than the patterning of forms in space, as crucial (Shotter, 2008b:502).
In other words, to understand processes of becoming that are continuously in flux and flow requires research practices that make it possible for us to be part of that movement. Since processes of becoming will always be heterogeneous and unique in their unfolding, with no preformed logical order, the inquiry into becoming cannot take off from predefined schemata (Clegg et al., 2005; Cunliffe, 2001). Or, as Steyaert (2004) simply puts it, the research approach should not kill the social process it tries to study.

In sum, these four stepping stones question ideas and institutionalised ways of thinking that imply that researchers should not engage with those they do the study with, or ideas that limit the possibility for researchers to respond to those being studied, just as the latter should have the possibility to respond back. This is important, particularly from an ethical point of view, because, from a dialogical becoming perspective, the promise of ethics does not only reside in the end result of a research project but rather in its production:

The emphasis is not on what the action results in, the end product of action, but rather on the ethical deed in its making, as an act in the process of creating or authoring an event that can be called a deed, whether the deed be a physical action, a thought, an utterance, or a written text [...] (Clark & Holquist, 1984:63).

That is why a dialogical becoming perspective emphasises how ethical considerations have to be part of the study, throughout the entire process.

**From within and the inside-outside interplay**

I would like to close this chapter by returning to where it started, with the recognition of the importance of studying social phenomena from within, a finding reported many times before. This chapter, however, has focused on within in a specific context, the context of the living moment.

What I found crucial is that once we are there – in the middle of the hurly-burly of meeting conversations – there is a need to engage bodily and emotionally with those with whom we do the study. And this kind of engagement is not one that has usually been called for when the task of the researcher is to see the world through the eyes of the other. On this matter, Bakhtin (1986:7) stated:

There exists a very strong, but one-sided and thus untrustworthy, idea that in order better to understand a foreign culture, one must enter into it, forgetting one’s own, and view the world through the eyes of this foreign culture. This idea, as I said, is one-sided.
What he instead calls for is a dynamic orientation in which the interplay between ‘insideness’ and ‘outsideness’ is essential for a greater understanding of each other and our social worlds. The reason is that understanding another’s culture – another’s life world – takes a dialogical process in which

[a] certain entry as a living being into a foreign culture, the possibility of seeing the world through its eyes, is a necessary part of the process of understanding it; but if this were the only aspect of this understanding, it would be duplication and would not entail anything new or enriching […]. In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be located outside the object of his or her creative understanding — in time, in space, in culture (Bakhtin, 1986:xiii).

Thus, as I read Bakhtin, he calls for a dialogical back-and-forth manner of engaging with the people in the living moment. In this process it is essential to feel our way into their lives, their ways of thinking and experiencing, but also to take in the otherness offered to us by feeling our way into the dialogic interplay from our own unique position. The reason is that it is through our own unique otherness that we can bring something new into the meaning-making process. In this study, I found it useful to think about a way of being that allows me to be fully in the living moment and, simultaneously, to let myself move with the processes of becoming – with the new, with that which is different, that which is not yet.
13. A note on writing and the contribution of an academic text

How is the contribution of this text to be evaluated, judged or, should I say, assessed? In this final chapter of the rather long and winding path that I have pursued in writing, I shall make some remarks on the contribution of the outcome of this process, this text.

When I look back on how I first started to write I can see how the initial textualisation approach was mainly about the creation of a stabilised and coherent text. In hindsight, I can see that the driving idea, unknowingly, was to create an ordered and stabilised text where I could lay out my arguments convincingly and point towards (fixed) things. And, I suppose the assumption was that if I could do so successfully, the reader might get the point and understand what I meant.

In this stabilisation process I had a difficult time finding out the main point of my study. Since I took for granted that the contribution of the text was something I as an author had to be crystal clear about, in order to offer it to the reader, I chased the focal point of my dissertation story. In short, I wanted to make a contribution by offering an insight of some kind.

However, some way into the process I became hesitant regarding this focus on a stabilised text with a clear contribution. I started to wonder how that could do justice to the often fragmented, contradictory and loosely maintained conversations that I experienced in the family meeting room. When I wrote the field study accounts of the unique and once-occurring conversations in the living moments, it made me think of what I did to these conversations when I decoupled them from their initial context to put them together in yet another (con)text. In the process of writing, when I de-coupled and re-coupled, de-contextualised and re-contextualised, something new was created that could never be the same as it had been in the living moment in the field.

Since I adhere to post-representational thinking (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), I was not concerned with how I managed to represent correctly what actually took place in the specific moment when I met the family members. Being aware that my text could not mirror some factual reality taking place in the field, my concern resided more in a worry about how, in the creation of the text, I could retain the fluidity and ambiguity as well as the flow of many voices in the living moment. Struggling with those concerns, Raviola (2010:265), when reflecting back on her own dissertation, wrote how she wanted
to maintain the centrality of narration, while simultaneously rendering the plurality, the incompleteness and the fragmentation of the reality that I studied. The fact that these episodes do not conclude and that the disequilibrium created by the encounter of the alien does not lead to a stable new equilibrium is an inevitable consequence. This story and its stories terminate; they do not conclude. They are somewhat weakly emplotted, contradictory and broken, as chronicles tend to be. Perhaps this is a conclusion in itself.

Like Raviola, I was struggling with how the dynamically intertwined, incomplete and emotional voices were to be written about, so that the dialogical atmosphere in the living moment could be sensed by the reader. The answer eventually came to me unexpectedly when I thought about Chris Steyaert’s (1995) dissertation, published in the form of seven related, albeit separate, books. This format, which in itself reinforces the plurality and fragmentation prevalent in organisational life, reminded me that there does not necessarily need to be something like the main point.

I became interested in reading more about academic writing. When reading, I became even more aware of the limitations of a textualisation process in searching for some sort of stabilised essence, or completion, of the text. Following from this, the idea of the contribution of the text as an insight to be served by the author and received by the reader was also challenged.

The problem of reflexivity as retrospective and introspective self-assessment

Concerns about writing and how we represent organisational life worlds from our field studies are often dealt with under the heading of ‘writing and reflexivity’. Since these are important issues, they have been quite extensively dealt with over the years. Practices around reflexivity in organisation studies evolved as a response to the crises of representation, which implies a questioning of the researcher’s authority to know what and how to represent organisational realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In their review of existing literature on writing and reflexivity in organisation and management studies, Alvesson et al. (2008:497) concluded that “[r]eflexivity means thinking through what one is doing to encourage insights about the nature of social science”. They also found that the established norms of reflexive writing among scholars in the field are to engage in textual practices in order “to present their work reflexively” (Alvesson et al., 2008:481). In short, this is a kind of reflexivity that works from the premise that researchers have an ability to engage in a meta-commentary on their own thinking and their own biases, and to discuss that in
their own writing. It is a retrospective way of thinking, reflexivity based on self-examination.

While recognising the significance of this literature, I would like, at the same time, to draw attention to the problem of how some literature seems to have developed in an unfortunate direction. In fact, at the same time as reflexivity in writing evolved as a questioning of the researcher’s prime position in authoring organisational worlds, some authors also proposed “the institution of an additional and more far-reaching knowledge and self-authority – the presumed ability of researchers to be able to be self-present in their writing by revealing themselves” (Rhodes, 2009:664). Hence, “in such a guise, reflexivity does not so much question the character of truth and knowledge in research, as extend its ambit, while leaving the centre unchanged” (Rhodes, 2009:665). Bakhtin, too, reminds why this is problematic. One of his basic premises, which I have written about previously, is that we cannot fully see ourselves and our own deeds. On the contrary, what we have is a possibility to see others in ways they cannot do themselves, which is how we can offer each other ‘the gift of otherness’ (Bakhtin, 1986). And, according to Bakhtin (1986), the ethical deed – the ethical text – originates in what we do with the gift of otherness, what we make of our possibility to experience and make sense of things in ways different from those of others. That is what makes me propose that while much of the literature on reflexivity has contributed greatly to novel ways of thinking about the role of the researcher in authoring, the retrospective and introspective valuing of one’s own text needs to be balanced with something more. What I would like to suggest is to supplement with a more future-oriented and relational outlook on reflexivity embracing also the potential reader.

Embracing the reader to be: Meaning-making in the moment of reading

Concurring with Rhodes (2009:659), I understand academic writing as a triadic relationship, or a “dialogic relation between the self, others written about and the others to whom the text is addressed”. While current norms of reflexivity have developed practices concerning how we meet the others written about, there has been less concern with how to meet the reader-to-be. From a dialogical becoming perspective the engagement of the reader is just as important because it is in the act of reading that the meaning of the text evolves (Bakhtin, 1986). With the understanding of language as performative (see Chapter 3), meaning making is not simply a process of decoding an already finalised message; rather, understanding is an active process carried out by the reader in interaction with the text. This implies that
Just as a piece of literature is not equivalent to its ‘plot summary’, qualitative research is not contained in its abstracts. Qualitative research has to be read, not scanned; its meaning is in the reading (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2005:960, my emphasis).

In this active view on meaning making in reading, “meaning is understood as something still in the process of creation, something still bending toward the future as opposed to that which is already completed” (Holquist, 2002:24). That is why the meaning of a text can never be fully decided by the author, nor be set or final. Moreover, the meaning of a text will always be different in each and every encounter in which the reader, the time-space of the reading as well as the text in itself influence what meanings will be created in each and every moment of reading. In addition, taking into consideration that “in contrast to reader reception theory, which is usually concerned with how readers interpret the texts after they are made, Bakhtin’s dialogic model represents readers as shaping the utterance as it is being made” (Morson & Emerson, 1990:129, emphasis in original). This is a polyphonic way of understanding a text, in which a multitude of different, even competing, meanings of a text is possible. This understanding of meaning making as momentary and performed by the reader in interaction with the text at a specific moment in time has certain implications for how to think about writing, inasmuch as it reminds us that in evaluating the contribution of an academic text it is not possible to separate the text from the reader. Furthermore, the reader needs, in some way, to be embraced in practices of reflexivity.

With this understanding of the academic text, away from the idea of a single message inherent in the text, and, away from the perception that the text is a container of a specific meaning – because meaning is not a substance that resides in the text and neither does the text speak for itself (Rhodes, 2000) – the contribution of the academic text cannot only be based on what the text says, but rather on what it does, and how it makes the reader move, in the moment of reading.

The academic text as an offering of potentiality

Linking this discussion back to where I started, writing as a process of driving towards stabilisation needs to be reconsidered since it is a too one-sided and limited view of textualisation. That is also why traditional means of assessing academic texts need to be reconsidered. Approaching writing as a relational act, Gergen (2009) suggests that those traditional criteria for evaluating a text in social sciences, such as verbal economy, clarity and certainty, have to give way to ambiguity and ambivalence. And, he says, there must always remain space
I3 A note on writing and the contribution of an academic text

for the reader's voice. From this viewpoint, stabilising efforts are important for
the academic dialogue inasmuch as they create traces that give direction and
make the academic conversations speakable by providing us with accounts to
which to respond. However, a one-sided focus on stability drives towards some
sort of essence that stands still, like a freezing account in search of monologue.
And, if my suggestion here – that the contribution of an academic text should
be evaluated according to how it makes the reader move in reading – has any
significance to us, then the text must be open enough for people to do
something with it. This is of importance since, “[m]eaning, in essence, means
nothing; it only possesses potentiality – the potentiality of having a meaning
within a concrete theme” (Voloshinov, 1973, cited in Morson & Emerson,
1990:127).

From this way of reasoning, the academic text can be regarded as an
offering of potentialities and should, therefore, be evaluated in the face of what
kind of potentialities it might offer when engaging with it. Consequently, I as an
author need to ponder reflexively about how my text opens up to readers-to-be,
and, in doing so, ask myself where the text may take the reader in reading –
how the text can 'stretch out' (Fletcher, 2007) and invite the reader to 'think
beyond' (Nayak, 2008). In evaluating the text based on how it makes us move,
questions concerning where the text might take us and if that is where we want
to go, become of key concern. Drawing on Czarniawska (2004a), Borgström
(2010:72) suggests it is of significance to consider questions such as: Is it
interesting? Is it relevant? Is it beautiful? I think this is of particular significance
since the academic community has a tradition of making its claims through
voices of expertise, which means that an utterance produced in the research
machinery is loaded with a claim of exclusive quality (Gergen, 2009).

In practical terms, this shift in thinking means there is a need to abandon
the idea of textualisation as a process in which we should, primarily, present
strong and coherent arguments supporting the main point. Writing this
dissertation I noticed how I monologised the dialogical field study material I
had in front of me, where the unfinalisable conversations became dead and no
longer lively when I was searching for the story of my study. Mostly, I think,
because I had distanced myself, as if I wrote from an outside position, wrote
about the conversations rather than from within them. I figured that I had to
reconnect with the spontaneous and engaged mood I had felt in the fieldwork.
I had to get back to that feeling in writing. However, for that I had to move
beyond the idea of writing as a way of putting together my arguments of the
already known and instead continue enquiring into that which is yet to come.
For that, I also had to open up to ambiguity and an interplay between different
voices in the text rather than a strong voice with a clear contribution.

The problem with a closed, finished and in other ways monological text is
that it “pretends to be the ultimate word” and thereby “finalized and deaf to
the other’s response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any
decisive force” (Bakhtin, 1984:293). That is why authoring cannot only be
reduced to stabilisation attempts, but rather to a struggle in the dynamics of stabilisation and destabilisation, between the known and not known, in a dialogical interplay where ‘what is’ is not totally fixed but rather open to engagement and movement beyond the immediate reach. In short, the text has to live on the boundary between what is made and what is still in the making, in such a way that it provides space for the reader’s own response in reading. This means to transcend the search for ultimate answers and pre-packaged contributions and, instead, pay attention to how it is possible to create meetings between voices, voices of those in the field, of the reader and the author. Promising enough, that is when the academic text – as an offering of potentialities – will take us to places we would never even imagine being possible for us to visit.
References


References


References


Rober, P. (2005). Family Therapy as a Dialogue of Living Persons: A Perspective Inspired by Bakhtin,


References


## Appendix 1: Illustrative work in wave 1, Planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author, year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Type of paper</th>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Main content</th>
<th>Family meetings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beckhard, R, Gibb Dyer, W, 1983</td>
<td>Managing continuity in the Family-Owned Business</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>No explicit theoretical framework, based on ideas of system theory</td>
<td>1 case study</td>
<td>A planning process, starting with the family being needed for a successful succession.</td>
<td>It is wise to create a council of advisors who meet regularly with the family where they serve as ‘faculty’ and teach family members about ownership issues, social and economic context for their firm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ward, J, 1988</td>
<td>The Special Role of Strategic Planning for Family Businesses</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Strategic planning</td>
<td>A sample of 200 family-owned firms</td>
<td>Formal strategic planning is needed for the family business. Weak management communication practices are often a reason for not planning.</td>
<td>It is formal planning meetings and review help to promote the healthy, open, shared decision-making so often needed in the family enterprises’ (p.106).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lansberg, I, 1988</td>
<td>The Succession Conspiracy</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>No explicit theoretical framework</td>
<td>His own experience, consultancy work and his previous research</td>
<td>Succession needs to be planned. Planning does not start because the issues that need to be worked through are issues people do not want to discuss.</td>
<td>The family, managers, owners, environment (e.g. customers and suppliers) are different stakeholder groups with different objections to discuss. Solutions for each group are suggested. Family council, board of directors etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handler, W, Kram, K, 1988</td>
<td>Succession in Family Firms: The problem of Resistance</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>Family firm succession, based on ideas of system theory</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>It is important in the study of succession to take into consideration the factors promoting and reducing resistance towards succession. Lack of communication is promoting resistance and honest, informed communication is reducing resistance.</td>
<td>Family meetings and councils are suggested to facilitate open communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rogal, K, 1989</td>
<td>Obligation or Opportunity: How Can Could-Be Heirs Assess Their Position?</td>
<td>Consulting tool</td>
<td>Decision-making</td>
<td>Own family business experience</td>
<td>Even the heir (not only the current owner) needs to find out whether they would like to take over the firm. A decision-making model for that matter is suggested.</td>
<td>A family council can be useful.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 2: Illustrative work in wave 2, Professionalisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author, year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Type of paper</th>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Main content</th>
<th>Family meetings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Levinson, 1971</td>
<td>Conflicts that plague family businesses</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>No explicit theoretical framework, inspired by psychoanalytical theories</td>
<td>Undefined</td>
<td>Family businesses are troublesome with difficult conflicts. Professional management is recommended.</td>
<td>Fathers and their sons need to talk to each other about their troublesome relationships. To have meeting with a third party is suggested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnes, L, Hershon, S, 1989</td>
<td>Transferring Power in The Family Business</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>No explicit theoretical framework</td>
<td>200 interviews + multiple interviews in 35 firms</td>
<td>Families tend to stay in the business. A need to learn more about how the family can cope with succession in good ways. Open dialogue is crucial for this matter.</td>
<td>Suggests various ‘mechanisms for dialogue’. Those include periodic family meetings for family managers and relatives, informal get-together meetings are also suggested, such as lunches and other social events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyer, W, 1989</td>
<td>Integrating Professional Management into a Family Owned Business</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Several case studies and own consultancy experience</td>
<td></td>
<td>Three ways of professionalisation are suggested; to recruit non-family executives, to train non-family members that already work in the business, to train family members.</td>
<td>If a family member is to take over, open communication is needed to find out about career choices etc. That is preferably handled by external consultants. For non-family owners to take over, it is important to explicitly communicate the company values that are important to keep in the company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berenbeim, R., 1990</td>
<td>How Business Families Manage theTransition from Owner to Professional Management</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Stage models</td>
<td>Qualitative study of 20 large family businesses</td>
<td>Based on a stage model over company and family growth, a formal planning model for moving from family to professional management is suggested.</td>
<td>Family meetings are needed. An external party can be brought in to facilitate the discussion between the owner/founder and other family members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Astrachan, J, Kolenko, T, 1994</td>
<td>A Neglected Factor Explaining Family Business Success: Human Resource Practices</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>No explicit theoretical framework, depart from system theory</td>
<td>614 telephone interviews</td>
<td>The utilization of Human Resource Practices and professional governance practices are important for the success of the family firms.</td>
<td>To have regularly scheduled meeting with family members involved in the business is one of three constructs for the professional governance structure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 3: Illustrative work in wave 3, Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author, year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Type of paper</th>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Main content</th>
<th>Family meetings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leon-Guerrero, A, MCCann III, J, Hayley Jr, J, 1998</td>
<td>A Study of Practice Utilization in Family Businesses</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Life cycle, systems theory</td>
<td>Mail survey to owner/managers in 1,000 family firms</td>
<td>Investigates how the utilization of family and business practices is changing over the life cycle of the family and the firm.</td>
<td>Family board of directors, family council, family talent and resources, family mission statement are suggested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aronoff, C, 2004</td>
<td>Self-Perpetuation Family Organization Built on Values: Necessary Condition for Long-Term Family Business Survival</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>System theory</td>
<td>3 cases</td>
<td>The family business consists of two systems; the family and the business. Each of them needs to develop their own 'self-regulating and self-perpetuating processes with their own structure, leadership and communication systems' for long-term family business survival (p.55).</td>
<td>The family needs to be organized formally, for instance, in a family council, to make the best of the firm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibb Dyer, W, 2006</td>
<td>Examining the 'Family Effect' on Firm Performance</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>Agency theory, resource based view</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>Explores the potential positive or negative 'family effect' on firm performance.</td>
<td>Family governance can contribute to firm performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chittoor, R, Das, R, 2007</td>
<td>Professionalization of Management and Succession Performance – A Vital Linkage</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 cases</td>
<td>Investigates succession performance of succession to a non-family member compared to a family member. Succession performance is measured in terms of the average annual growth in revenues, the post-succession survival and satisfaction of stakeholders.</td>
<td>Family members in the owner family can take an active governance role through creating a family council which can serve as a communication channel between the family and management.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Appendix 4: Fieldwork activities

## Orientation study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Day, Date</th>
<th>Activity, Place</th>
<th>Participant(s), Role</th>
<th>Briefly about the encounter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Friday, 17 March 2006</td>
<td>Interview, Brunnsala Sawmill headquarters</td>
<td>Judith Philipsson, CEO of Brunnsala Sawmill, married to Ted Philipsson, one of the owners</td>
<td>About communication in the family firm. She shared her views and experiences of the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Friday, 19 Jan 2007</td>
<td>Interview and lunch, Torås headquarters</td>
<td>Rosie Stenson, Corporate Communication Manager, second-generation owner</td>
<td>About their family and business in general and the family meetings in particular.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Wednesday, 24 Jan 2007</td>
<td>Interview, phone</td>
<td>Female owner manager</td>
<td>About the family and business in general and the family meetings in particular.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(this was planned to be a regular visit to their office with her as well as other family members. Unfortunately I had to cancel owing to pregnancy complications).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Friday, 16 Feb 2007</td>
<td>Interview, company visit and lunch, company headquarters</td>
<td>Male founder and owner acting in the board</td>
<td>About the family and business in general and family meetings in particular.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Wednesday, 28 March 2007</td>
<td>Interview and lunch, family office</td>
<td>Female owner manager</td>
<td>About the family and business in general and family meetings in particular.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Monday, 27 Aug 2007</td>
<td>Interview, company visit and lunch, company headquarters</td>
<td>Male owner, acting in the board</td>
<td>About the family and business in general and family meetings in particular.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Thursday, 8 May 2008</td>
<td>Interview, company headquarters</td>
<td>Male owner manager</td>
<td>About the family and business in general and family meetings in particular.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Wednesday, 18 June 2008</td>
<td>Interview, company headquarters</td>
<td>Male owner manager</td>
<td>About the family and business in general and family meetings in particular.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Stenson family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Day, Date</th>
<th>Activity, Place</th>
<th>Participant(s), Role</th>
<th>Briefly about the encounter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Friday, 19 Jan 2007</td>
<td>Interview, Torås headquarters</td>
<td>Rosie Anderson, Corporate Communication Manager, second-generation owner</td>
<td>About their family and business in general and the family meetings in particular.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Monday, 15 Oct 2007</td>
<td>Interview, Torås headquarters, visiting the corporate museum</td>
<td>Tomas Stenson, IT department, board of directors and second-generation owner; Rosie Stenson, Corporate Communication Manager, second-generation owner</td>
<td>About the family meeting structures and how the meetings are generally carried out. A guided tour of their museum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tuesday, 16 Oct 2007</td>
<td>Interview, in his home</td>
<td>Erik Johnson, administrative role outside the family business, married to a second-generation owner</td>
<td>About the family meeting structures and how the meetings are generally carried out. Reading minutes from their family council meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tuesday, 18 Dec 2007</td>
<td>Interview, Torås headquarters</td>
<td>Rosie Anderson, Corporate Communication Manager, second-generation owner</td>
<td>Continued conversation about the family work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Wednesday, 9 Jan 2008</td>
<td>Interview, Torås production facility</td>
<td>Lisa Spikes, production, third-generation owner</td>
<td>Her background, current working situation and the family work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Tuesday, 15 Jan 2008</td>
<td>Interview, Torås headquarters</td>
<td>George Stenson, Head of Logistics, board of directors and second-generation owner</td>
<td>His view on the family, the business and the family work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Tuesday, 15 Jan 2008</td>
<td>Interview, Torås headquarters</td>
<td>Bertil Stenson, CEO of the group, board of directors and second-generation owner</td>
<td>His view on the family, the business and the family work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Tuesday, 13 May 2008</td>
<td>Interview, Torås showroom and marketing facilities</td>
<td>Torsten Nicklasson</td>
<td>His view on the development of the business and important future issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Tuesday, 16 May 2008</td>
<td>Interview, Torås headquarters</td>
<td>Peter Larson, Tage Borg</td>
<td>His view on family and business history and how the business has been built up over time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Monday, 16 June 2008</td>
<td>Interview, Torås headquarters</td>
<td>Rosie Anderson, Corporate Communication Manager, second-generation owner</td>
<td>Feedback and discussion based on a case description I had written about Torås.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Thursday, 19 Feb 2009</td>
<td>Interview, Torås headquarters, visiting the corporate museum</td>
<td>Rosie Anderson, Corporate Communication Manager, second-generation owner</td>
<td>Her view on family and business history, corporate and family values and a guided tour of the museum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Day, Date</td>
<td>Activity, Place</td>
<td>Participant(s), Role</td>
<td>Briefly about the encounter</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wednesday, 7 Sep 2005</td>
<td>Interview, Brunnsala Sawmill head office</td>
<td>Ted Philipsson, owner in the ninth generation; Judith Philipsson, CEO of Brunnsala Sawmill and married to Ted</td>
<td>This interview took place because of a research project about continuously growing firms. Mostly about their family business history and current affairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Friday, 17 March 2006</td>
<td>Interview, Brunnsala Sawmill head office</td>
<td>Judith Philipsson, CEO of Brunnsala Sawmill and married to Ted</td>
<td>About communication in the family firm. She shared her views and experiences of the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Friday, 15 Aug 2008</td>
<td>Meeting, Brunnsala Coffee head office</td>
<td>Mark Philipsson, owner in the ninth generation, CEO of Brunnsala Group, board of directors; Jennifer Philipsson, daughter of Mark</td>
<td>An introduction to the company, family situation, their upcoming succession and cousin meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Wednesday, 20 Aug 2008</td>
<td>Interview, in his parents' home</td>
<td>Alex Philipsson, son of Ted</td>
<td>Cousin interview. About his background, upbringing, current occupation, his relationship to the business and other reflections on the succession and cousin meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Wednesday, 20 Aug 2008</td>
<td>Interview, in his home</td>
<td>Stefan Philipsson, son of Ted</td>
<td>Cousin interview. About his background, upbringing, current occupation, his relationship to the business and other reflections on the succession and cousin meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Saturday, 6 Sep 2008</td>
<td>Interview, in her parents' home</td>
<td>Josefine Philipsson, daughter of Mark</td>
<td>Cousin interview. About her background, upbringing, current occupation, her relationship to the business and other reflections upon the succession and cousin meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Saturday, 6 Sep 2008</td>
<td>Interview, in her cousins' home</td>
<td>Maria Philipsson, daughter of Ted</td>
<td>Cousin interview. About her background, upbringing, current occupation, her relationship to the business and other reflections on the succession and cousin meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Saturday, 6 Sep 2008</td>
<td>Interview, in her parents' home</td>
<td>Moa Philipsson, daughter of Mark</td>
<td>Cousin interview. About her background, upbringing, current occupation, her relationship to the business and other reflections on the succession and cousin meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sunday, 7 Sep 2008</td>
<td>Interview, in her parents' home</td>
<td>Jennifer Philipsson, daughter of Mark</td>
<td>Cousin interview. About her background, upbringing, current occupation, her relationship to the business and other reflections on the succession and cousin meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Sunday, 7 Sep 2008</td>
<td>Interview, in the home of his parents-in-laws</td>
<td>Nicklas Philipsson, CEO of Brunnsala Farm, married to Jennifer</td>
<td>Significant other interview. About his background, his role as acting CEO of the farm owned by the family, his view on the succession and cousin meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Day, Date</td>
<td>Activity, Place</td>
<td>Participant(s), Role</td>
<td>Briefly about the encounter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Sunday, 7 Sep 2008</td>
<td>Interview, in the home of his parents-in-laws</td>
<td>Richard Hansson, Josefine’s partner</td>
<td>Significant other interview. About his background, his situation as a next-generation potential owner of a farm that his family owns, his view on the succession and cousin meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Monday, 15 Sep 2008</td>
<td>Meeting, in Judith’s home</td>
<td>Mark Philipsson, owner in the ninth generation, CEO of Brunnsala Group, board of directors; Judith Philipsson, CEO of Brunnsala Sawmill, married to Ted</td>
<td>Preparation meeting before the next cousin meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sunday, 28 Sep 2008</td>
<td>Interview, in his parents’ home</td>
<td>Adam Philipsson, son of Mark</td>
<td>Cousin interview. About his background, upbringing, current occupation, his relationship to the business and other reflections on the succession and cousin meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sunday, 28 Sep 2008</td>
<td>Cousin meeting, in Judith’s home</td>
<td>Cousins, Mark</td>
<td>A focus on meeting structures, procedures and issues to address in upcoming meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Monday, 20 Oct 2008</td>
<td>Interview, in his home</td>
<td>Dan Philipsson, owner in the ninth generation, various positions in Brunnsala Farm</td>
<td>About his upbringing, his family, relationship to the business and his siblings, what he envisions for his future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Thursday, 13 Nov 2008</td>
<td>Interview, Brunnsala Coffee headquarters</td>
<td>Max Johansson, CEO of Brunnsala Coffee</td>
<td>About his various positions in the business where he started 15 years ago as a financial director at Brunnsala sawmill. He suggested different ways in which he thinks the owner family can contribute to the business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Sunday, 4 Jan 2009</td>
<td>Cousin meeting, in Mark’s home</td>
<td>Cousins, Mark, Judith</td>
<td>Mainly a discussion based on their cousin interviews, which they had read prior to the meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Wednesday, 4 Feb 2009</td>
<td>Interview, in her home</td>
<td>Sara Philipsson, married to Stefan</td>
<td>Significant other interview. About her background, her situation being involved in the farm owned her family, her view on the succession and cousin meetings, her feelings about possibly moving into Stefan’s family home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Wednesday, 4 Feb 2009</td>
<td>Interview, Brunnsala Coffee headquarters</td>
<td>Mark Philipsson, owner in the ninth generation, CEO of Brunnsala Group, board of directors</td>
<td>About Mark’s journey prior to, and in, the business as well as current ownership situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Wednesday, 25 Feb 2009</td>
<td>Interview, in a conference room at a restaurant</td>
<td>Judith Philipsson</td>
<td>About her current situation and decision to leave her position at Brunnsala Sawmill, her view of the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Sunday, 22 March 2009</td>
<td>Cousin meeting, in Dan’s home</td>
<td>Cousins, Dan, Mark, Judith</td>
<td>The cousins had invited Dan to a separate meeting. This was followed by a regular cousin meeting where Mark and Judith participated too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Day, Date</td>
<td>Activity, Place</td>
<td>Participant(s), Role</td>
<td>Briefly about the encounter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Saturday, 2 May 2009</td>
<td>Cousin meeting, Brunnsala Coffee headquarters</td>
<td>Cousins, Dan, Mark, Judith, Ivan Landström (chairman of the board)</td>
<td>First a two-hour session with their chairman of the board. He talked about board work in general and in their group in particular. Thereafter a regular cousin meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Saturday, 26 June 2009</td>
<td>Cousin meeting, at their four business locations + Brunnsala Coffee headquarters</td>
<td>Cousins, Dan, Mark, as well as Mark’s and Dan’s two sisters with their families.</td>
<td>This event started off with a half-day tour of their three businesses in the group including meetings with representatives from the businesses. Thereafter a regular cousin meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Tuesday, 28 July 2009</td>
<td>Meeting, Jönköping International Business School (JIBS)</td>
<td>Mark Philipsson, Annika Hall, JIBS Leif Melin, JIBS</td>
<td>The family will take part in a customized education programme called ‘active ownership’ to be started in November 2009 and offered by Jönköping International Business School. A planning meeting for the programme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Tuesday, 28 July 2009</td>
<td>Interview, in her parents’ home</td>
<td>Moa Philipsson</td>
<td>A follow-up cousin meeting. About her current situation, what has changed since the last interview, a reflection on the first year of cousin meetings and what she regards as important for their future work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Wednesday, 29 July 2009</td>
<td>Interview, in her home</td>
<td>Josefine Philipsson</td>
<td>A follow-up cousin meeting. About her current situation, what has changed since the last interview, a reflection on the first year of cousin meetings and what she regards as important for their future work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Wednesday, 29 July 2009</td>
<td>Interview, at my hotel room</td>
<td>Alex Philipsson</td>
<td>A follow-up cousin meeting. About his current situation, what has changed since the last interview, a reflection on the first year of cousin meetings and what he regards as important for their future work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Wednesday, 29 July 2009</td>
<td>Interview, in her home</td>
<td>Elisabeth Philipsson, married to Mark</td>
<td>About her background, her relationship to the family and business and her view on the succession and cousin meetings. A focus on her life as a mother as well as her professional career in politics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Thursday, 30 July 2009</td>
<td>Interview, in her parents’ home</td>
<td>Maria Philipsson</td>
<td>A follow-up cousin meeting. About her current situation, what has changed since the last interview, a reflection on the first year of cousin meetings and what she regards as important for their future work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Day, Date</td>
<td>Activity, Place</td>
<td>Participant(s), Role</td>
<td>Briefly about the encounter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Thursday, 30</td>
<td>Interview, at his parents’ home that he</td>
<td>Stefan Philipsson</td>
<td>A follow-up cousin meeting. About his current situation, what has changed since the last interview, a reflection on the first year of cousin meetings and what he regards as important for their future work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July 2009</td>
<td>is about to move into</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Thursday, 30</td>
<td>Interview, in her home</td>
<td>Olivia Philipsson, daughter of Mark</td>
<td>About her current situation, her hobbies, what she is passionate about as well as her views on the succession. Since she has Down’s syndrome, she will not take over the business herself. She nevertheless works during holidays at Brunnsala Coffee and is involved in the ongoing conversation about the succession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July 2009</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Sunday, 9 Aug</td>
<td>Interview, telephone</td>
<td>Adam Philipsson</td>
<td>A follow-up cousin meeting. About his current situation, what has changed since the last interview, a reflection on the first year of cousin meetings and what he regards as important for their future work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Monday, 10 Aug</td>
<td>Interview, telephone</td>
<td>Jennifer Philipsson</td>
<td>A follow-up cousin meeting. About her current situation, what has changed since the last interview, a reflection on the first year of cousin meetings and what she regards as important for their future work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Saturday, 15</td>
<td>Cousin meeting + barbecue, Brunnsala</td>
<td>Cousins, Mark, Judith, Dan</td>
<td>Celebrating one year of cousin meetings. Mainly discussions about the follow-up interviews, which they had all read prior to the meeting. Decided on action points for the next year of meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aug 2009</td>
<td>Coffee headquarters + Mark’s home</td>
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Appendix 5: The Stenson family

The first generation Torås' owners and their children.

Appendix 6: The Philipsson family

Ninth and tenth generation in the Philipsson family. Meeting participants in circle, when family meetings started 2008.
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