4 Studying intra-organizational dynamics in implementing supply chain partnering: a case study about work floor experiences in a Dutch housing association.

Author's notes

I am thankful that the University of Applied Sciences of Utrecht gave me the opportunity to do this research and to support me financially. For four years, I spent approximately three days doing this research and two days working as a teacher in Real Estate Management Studies. For me this proved to be a good combination of tasks, because what I experienced as a teacher inspired me to do the research, and the research inspired me to teach.

The housing associations that were the object of study in the first and second case of this thesis, were also involved in the courses that I taught. They were involved in several courses for undergraduates and graduate students of Real Estate Management at the Institute of Built Environment at the University of Applied Sciences in Utrecht. Besides the more technical and financial aspects of renovating Dutch housing, social aspects of supply chain partnering have always been a topic in those courses.

The second-year students, for example, were assigned to develop investment proposals for housing complexes in Amsterdam and other Dutch cities. Although knowledge about supply chain partnering – as an alternative for procurements – was part of this course, it was difficult to involve this in the development of the investment proposal. The dynamics of supply chain partnering at an abstract level were easy to teach. It is relatively easy to list the advantages and disadvantages of working with preferred partners compared to working with procurements. However, the underlying complexity of what actually happens at the work floor level appeared more difficult to explain to young students who did not see much yet of the actual work floor. The students themselves had no or little work floor experience to reflect on. For the professionals that we worked with, as well as for me as a teacher and researcher, it is not always easy to be in the middle of something and reflect on it at the same time. Explaining the complex

daily processes to a young person who had no experience almost seemed impossible at some points. Besides, as the articles explain, a lot of individual effort was put in applying SCP, but it did not affect formalities in the organizations yet. For example, the structure of investment proposals did not change due to applying SCP.

It was slightly different to discuss SCP and the effects of SCP with third and fourth-years students, who did an internship in the field. Therefore, they have practical experience and seen a part of the field from the inside out. Especially students that did the internship at a housing association, a contractor or subcontractor, were interesting for me as a teacher. My experience is that in informal conversations, students are often more critical and essential. A recent example is a graduate student who was asked to evaluate the internal supply chain of a contractor. In conversations with this student, he tells me about how detached from each other those departments operate, and how people's expectations of deliverables differ. How people start to get irritated, and how work processes end up becoming tedious. If I ask him if a planning or design tool will solve this problem, he answers a heartfelt 'no'. However, when I read his concept-thesis, it is a rather technical story about different planning and designing tools that can be used to plan and design. Apparently, it is difficult to describe his 'real' observations in his thesis.

I think, the example shows a broader underlying problem. This underlying problem, I think, consists of several aspects. Firstly, focusing and describing normal daily work life at operational level, puts the student as well as the employer in a very vulnerable situation. If the student would really focus and describe normal daily work life, there is no escaping from getting personal. Especially for a young student this is a real challenge to do. Abstracting from one's own daily work practice (by for example, focusing on planning and design tools) makes it less personal and therefore seems a lot safer. (A funny salient detail in this anecdote is that the student's supervisors from the organization ask for reflection on daily work life themselves. In a way, this can be seen as a way to abdicate their own responsibility to a student. Poor student, he is in a precarious situation!) Secondly, focusing and describing normal daily work life cannot be done entirely objectively and neutral. Therefore, I think this is often not seen as a serious way of doing research. Often, research is associated with a distant researcher, who collects evidence to objectively confirm or reject a hypothesis. I think that alternative ways to do research that adheres to our intuition should be explored more. Thirdly, I think that most people have a triangle-shaped image of organizations, and that problems can and should be solved at a strategic and tactical level, so that at operational level people can use the strategy and tactical tools to improve their operational performances. I think that there is a general denial and/or unawareness of how complex responsive processes (the ongoing interaction between people) constitute situations as they are.

Of course, as a researcher I experienced the three difficulties of taking normal daily work life seriously in research myself. I had to find my own way in this. I hope as a teacher that I contributed to increasing this awareness among myself, my students, and the participants in my research.

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§   4.1   Abstract

This study aims at uncovering intra-organizational dynamics in implementing supply chain partnering. Narrative techniques are used in a qualitative case study in a Dutch housing association. This study shows how project leaders of a Dutch Housing Association perceive relationships in the internal supply chain and the strategies that they develop to cope with these relationships. Furthermore, it is argued that key values of SCP as understood by the project leaders - such as sharing responsibilities and addressing feedback towards each other openly - are not applied in intra-organizational relationships.

§   4.2   Introduction

Supply chain partnering (SCP) has become an established topic of studies and is often advocated as 'good practice' in the construction sector. Nevertheless, it is hard to exactly pinpoint the concept of SCP. Many definitions, synonyms and connotations circulate and it seems that SCP has increasingly become a buzz-word that represents a paradigm shift in the industry. Furthermore, some scholars argue that SCP should be considered as an emergent practice which can take on many different shapes (e.g. *Bresnen, 2009*; *Hartmann and Bresnen, 2011*; *Marshall and Bresnen, 2013a*; *Marshall and Bresnen, 2013b*). *Bresnen (2009)*, for example, argues that the nature of partnering is subject to local interpretations and is 'likely to be a very specific manifestation of local practices [...] inevitably informed by a wider discourse and accepted practice within the sector'. *Bresnen (2009)* further argues that 'local practices

and negotiated interaction are likely to be much more important in creating a more emergent conception of partnering' and recommends 'adopting approaches to research that — like more interpretative and ethnographic methods — are able to tap into the "lived experience" of partnering as a way of developing greater understanding about the phenomenon'.

Furthermore, most studies about SCP mainly focus on multi-organizational relationships or the relationship between client and contractor (*Bygballe et al., 2010*; *Eriksson, 2015*), although it is acknowledged that the functioning of the organization within partners involved in SCP affects the functioning of the whole supply chain and that implementation of SCP requires organizational change as well (*Briscoe et al., 2001*; *Eriksson, 2015*; *Gruis, 2011*; *Roders et al., 2013*). The intra-organizational relationships and the way in which SCP is experienced within an organization is not often discussed in detail in current literature on SCP in the construction industry. This could be partly explained from the specific, project based nature of SCP practices in the construction industry. As *Eriksson (2015)* puts it 'in an engineering project the client's internal functions of for example operations and purchasing are clearly external to the project, whereas external suppliers are internal to the project'. Indeed, these internal functions and departments might be perceived as external to the project. But the question is whether this perception is desirable. For example, the financial department of an organization might be perceived as external to the project, but is likely to have great power on the outcome and functioning of a supply chain as a whole. Since there is hardly insight in how these internal supply chain dynamics work, the influence of powerful individuals or departments within a partnering organization may be overlooked.

Therefore, this study aims at uncovering intra-organizational dynamics in implementing supply chain partnering. We expect that, by taking a phenomenological approach, an in-depth study of what happens inside an organization that is developing towards SCP can generate insights that can be beneficial to the supply chain as a whole. On the one hand the client can use these reflections to improve performance towards external supply chain partners. On the other hand, the supply chain partners can use these reflections to better respond to the client's internal practices, strengths and weaknesses.

The article starts with describing the theoretical framework we have adopted for our study, viewing SCP as an emergent practice. Section 4.4 describes our research method in which we have adopted a phenomenological approach. Section 4.5 presents the results of our case study. Section 4.6 discusses the results. Section 4.7 presents conclusions and recommendations.

Theoretical framework

Emergence in the field of organizational theory is not an uncommon phenomenon. *Mintzberg et al. (1997)*, for example, distinguishes intended strategies (which can either be deliberated or unrealized), and emergent strategies 'where a pattern realized was not expressly intended' (*Mintzberg et al., 1997, p. 11*). Nevertheless, as *Mintzberg et al. (1997)* argues, few strategies are purely deliberated, 'just as few are purely emergent' (*Mintzberg et al., 1997*). Related to this, the field of organization theory and strategic management knows a broad range of prescriptive and descriptive models and paradigms, some emphasizing strategy as an intended concept and others emphasizing emerging aspects. *Mintzberg et al. (1997)*, for example, describes ten schools of strategic management. Of those ten schools, the 'learning school' considers strategy formation as an emergent process. This school was, 'in some sense' (*Mintzberg et al., 1997*), founded in *Lindblom (1995)*, who suggested that policy making is a messy process instead of a controlled one, and in which policymakers try to deal with a world 'that is too complicated for them' (*Mintzberg et al., 1997*). Scholars within this school are concerned with prescription versus description, or formulation versus formation. They observed that only a small amount of strategies was implemented successfully. This may either be blamed on 'the doers', as the more prescriptive management schools would argue. A managerial respond to this would be to 'tighten up control systems'. It may also be blamed to bad strategy formulation. But the real problem could also be in the disassociation between thinking and acting (*Weick, 1995*).

Scholars sympathizing with the emergent strategy school argue that it is not realistic to expect that work floor professionals will silently obey and follow interventions, by for example their management, that are put upon them top-down in the organizational hierarchy. Instead, the work floor professional needs to place such interventions into 'frameworks, comprehending, redressing surprise, constructing meaning, interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding and patterning' (*Weick, 1995*). So, in between the managerial gesture and the work floor professionals' responses to it, there is inevitably a process of interpretation, or sense making, as *Weick (1995)* calls it. Processes of sense making can start with a managerial intervention. However, work floor professionals do not make sense of all managerial interventions. Sometimes, managerial interventions are just ignored by the work floor professionals.

Organizing and sense making are 'de facto very close to synonyms' (*Peverelli and Verduyn, 2012*). According to *Peverelli and Verduyn (2012)* both activities are concerned with 'the reduction of equivocality by actors through ongoing social interaction'. Sense making (and organizing) are reductive in nature, because actors

transform seemingly chaotic and unstructured information into manageable and understandable chunks. Throughout ongoing processes of sense making groups of actors gradually emerge, sharing beliefs on reality (*Peverelli and Verduyn, 2012*).

Processes of sense making and emergence might be influenced by many more aspects than just managerial interventions. Sometimes work floor professionals make sense of gestures that lie beyond the managerial scope and these external gestures might cause emergence of new strategies at work floor level. For example, the emerged strategy might be influenced by the wider discourse of SCP that work floor professionals pick up by going to conferences, reading magazines or talking to colleagues from other organizations. In that way, the work floor professionals are influenced by the wider discourse, and they can take part in shaping the wider discourse at the same time. External factors that influence the emerged strategy may be countless and for the work floor individuals themselves just as opaque as for the researchers that study the work floor professionals. External factors might be in the professional sphere, but might also be very personal such as personal history or character of the person. Thus, the emerged strategy at operational level is shaped by (and at the same time shapes) a wider SCP-discourse, the intended and emerged strategy by the management of their organization, and many other external factors.

If implementation of SCP is viewed as an emergent phenomenon, concepts of micro-power, as discussed by for example *Elias (1970)* play an important role in the emergence of organizational patterns (*Homan, 2013; Stacey, 2011*). *Elias' (1970)* suggests that micro-power is a dynamic phenomenon and is not something one owns, rather something that is produced through social processes. *Elias' (1970)* ideas about power and social dynamics plays an important role in understanding how it is possible that unintended dynamics emerge. As a thought experiment, *Elias (1970)* introduced game models to show how individuals together create society. He imagines a sport match, for example a tennis match, in which several players of different levels participate. It should not be visualized as a game of two people playing with each other, but multi-players are all playing against each other. The strength of players and the number of players influence the configuration of the field. People begin to realize that they are stronger as they cooperate. In that way, subgroups can arise. If the strength and number of players does not change, a more or less balanced game can arise. Changes in strength or number of players leads to reconfiguration of the field. For example, the subgroups increasingly estrange from each other, they form new figurations in which all players more or less play their own autonomous game, or they stay integrated, but form a new configuration with a high complexity in which different levels can be distinguished. Using game models, *Elias (1970)* argues that society (or organization) comes about through interplay of individuals.

Research approach

We view the implementation of SCP as a strategy that emerges in daily work life and the way in which it works out in practice cannot be predicted beforehand. That makes the standard method of accumulation of evidence (as is done in quantitative, positivistic scientific approaches) highly problematic (*Stacey, 2011*). Instead, complexity of daily work life can be dealt with by adopting qualitative research approaches such as narrative research (*Stacey, 2011*) or phenomenology (*Creswell, 2007*). Both approaches are interrelated and overlap, but whereas, according to *Creswell (2007)*, a narrative study reports the life of a single individual, a phenomenological study describes what participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon (*Creswell, 2007*). Because we wanted to involve several individuals in this study working in the same context, we adopted a phenomenological approach. In doing so, we employed *Creswell's (2007)* steps of conducting phenomenological research.

Having chosen a phenomenological approach (which Creswell identifies as the first step), the next steps, according to *Creswell (2007)* are 'identifying a phenomenon of interest and recognize and specify broad philosophical assumptions of the phenomenon'. In this study the phenomenon of interest was the emergence of supply chain partnering in a Dutch housing association that implements supply chain partnering. Housing associations in the Netherlands dominate the construction sector, owning about 30% of the total housing stock and at the same time, due to several reasons, they are under financial pressure and need to improve their cost efficiency (*Gruis, 2011*). Many housing associations see SCP in maintenance, renovation and new construction as a key strategy to reduce their management costs (e.g. *Bortel et al., 2013*). The management of the case organization had chosen to implement SCP and therefore we were able to study the experiences of the professionals that were about to experience the expected changes. Also, the management of the organization was willing to cooperate and expected the employers were willing to cooperate as well. Therefore, the case can be typified as a convenience sample: it had the necessary characteristics, there was a willingness to cooperate and relates to a wider development in the construction sector.

Figure 4.1 shows the main steps of the process of gathering and analyzing data in the case study. **Figure 4.1** implies that the process contained clear and separate steps. However, in reality the process was iteratively and fluid.

Step 1a in **figure 4.1** shows that, as *Cresswell (2007)* suggests, interviews were done in order to collect data. *Creswell (2007)* argues that data collection often consists of in-depth interviews with 5 – 25 respondents who are confronted with the phenomenon.

Creswell (2007) suggests that two open questions should be asked: 'What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon and what context or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon'? Therefore, we started our data collection with 15 semi-structured, 60 to 90 minutes, open in-depth interviews with participants from different departments, varying from project leaders, site supervisors, purchasers, forecast-men and managers, having all interviews transcribed verbatim. Respondents were selected randomly from all five sub-departments of 'maintenance and renovation'. Based on these interviews, we decided to interview two team leaders as well, since they were topic of discussion in many interviews with initial respondents.

There was no strict interviewing scheme, but all interviews more or less had the same structure. Creswell's two main questions were never asked literally, but the interviewer always introduced herself and her research by explaining that she is interested in work floor experiences of SCP and that she considered her interviewee as a work floor professional. Most of the time, this introduction leads to spontaneous reaction of the respondents which then evolved into a conversation about personal experiences with SCP. The researchers deliberately chose not to structure the interview, because we considered that the topics that the respondents would bring up spontaneously would say something about what they consider important in their experience of the situation. Nevertheless, the interviewing researcher made sure that some questions were always discussed. These questions were: what is your function within this company? Who are you working with? How do you define SCP or what do you consider SCP? Where do you experience successes and/or barriers and opportunities towards developing SCP?

Step 1b in **figure 4.1** shows that parallel to the process of interviewing, the researcher also did observations that were described in observation logs. Observations were of two types: The first type of observations consisted of spontaneous and personal observations that were done before, during and after the interviews. For example, she described how she heard frustration in the tone of voice among respondents, an important aspect of an interview that is difficult (if not impossible) to catch in an interview transcript. The second type of observations were planned observations with the goal to be able to get more understanding of a situation. For example, a respondent described that the team meetings were 'worthless'. Based on that, the researcher decided to attend such a meeting to be able to have more constructive discussion about it with the respondents as well as with the team leader. The journal logs are subjective by definition because they represent the researcher's interpretation of what was going on in the organization and therefore also biased by definition. For example, body language and tone of voice might be misinterpreted. Therefore, the logs were not used for formal coding. They were, however, used to provide context to some of the interview results.

After data collection, the process of analyzing data started. According to *Creswell (2007)*, this process includes that researchers 'go through data' and 'highlight significant statements' and describe the 'essence' of the phenomenon (*Creswell, 2007*) and the context or setting 'that influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon' (*Creswell, 2007*). However, these steps leave much room for researchers' interpretation. Within the process of analysis many methodological choices had to be made. For example, describing an 'essence' requires narrative methods, which can be done in several ways. To deal with this process of analysis, we used insights and methodological approaches from *Boje (2001)* and *Peverelli and Verduyn (2012)* as will be explained below.

Step 2, 3, 4 and 5 in **figure 4.1** show that the researchers took several steps to come from raw data to the narrative and reflections on the narrative. For step 2 in **figure 4.1**, the general coding, NVivo 10 was used. The general coding resulted in a list of seemingly incoherent list of codes. The researcher presented these codes to the respondents and with their permission, she presented the results to the management as well. Main topics of the presentation were: 1) differences and similarities about the assumptions of SCP, 2) the essence of the project leaders' experiences, and 3) characteristics of the internal social network in relation to the external social network. Although comments were made on details, in general the respondents felt that the findings were in line with their own experiences.

The initial analysis, the feedback by the respondents and the feedback by reviewers of this journal to a previous version of this article, were used for refined coding and creating an ante-narrative, as step 3, 4, and 5 in **figure 4.1** shows. For the refined coding, we used *Boje's (2001)* insights of using narrative methods for organizational and communication research. We included 7 key interviews with project leaders and individuals from other departments in the process of refined coding. We analyzed the transcripts at sentence level with the purpose to analyze what was said about others in the intra-organizational supply chain. Each interview resulted in approximately 75 relevant sentences. We categorized all sentences. Categories were for example: 'Project leaders' experiences or opinions about Department of Purchasing in general' or 'Project leaders' experiences or opinions about person X'. Then we cross-analyzed all summarized statements in order to find inconsistencies, rebel voices, and topics that are swept under the carpet. We used Excel for the inventory, grouping and summarizing of statements. Other interviews, observation data and journal logs were used to verify our findings.

The final step was creating an ante-narrative based on our previous process of refined coding. To do that, we chose to follow *Boje's (2001)* method of network analysis. According to *Boje (2001)*, one of the applications of network analysis is that it seeks

to understand the complex dynamics of storytelling among people across their social networks. We expected that telling the stories of different actors within the internal supply chain would reveal dualities, ambiguities and different interpretations.

This is also the point, where the research got a more critical flavor. *Reisigl (2013)* argues that there is no such thing as purely 'descriptive' science, because that would be free of any attempt to explain and argue. The epistemological position in this study can therefore be characterized as none-positivistic, believing that 'neutral science' does not exist and there is no possibility of an objective view to the research object. Instead, researchers are aware, concerned and bring forth questions that make 'transparent opaque, contradictory, and manipulative relationships' (*Reisigl, 2013*).

Concerning presenting and creating narratives, *Boje (2001)* provides a framework that helps with the refining codes and creating and presenting the narrative. *Boje (2001)* distinguishes between narrative and story. According to *Boje (2001)* an academic narrative requires plot and coherence, while the work floor professionals' experiences are messy, fragmented, polyphonic, lack of plot, chronology, and have many open-ended story lines. To translate the experiences into a narrative would require 'counterfeit coherence and order on otherwise fragmented and multi-layered experiences' (*Boje, 2001*). Therefore, *Boje (2001)* introduces 'ante-narrative' (*Boje, 2001*). 'Ante-narrative is constituted out of the flow of lived experience, while narrative method is more meta' (*Boje, 2001*) and *Boje (2001)* considers ante-narrative as something in between lived stories and academic narrative. **Section 4.5** describes the results of this phase of creating an ante-narrative based on our refined coding.
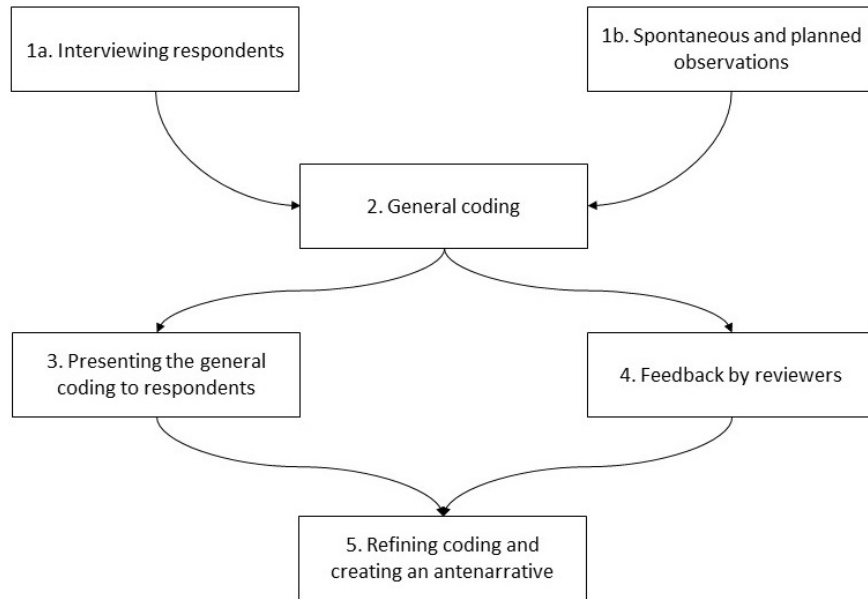
FIGURE 4.1 Research process

Results and discussion

In this section, we describe our results in three parts. Part one and two reflect the context and setting that may have influenced the project leaders' experiences. The intended formal management strategy that may have influenced the project leader's experiences is described. Further, this section describes the work floor professionals' interpretation of SCP. This interpretation may be influenced by the management's intended strategy and it may be informed by a wider SCP discourse. Lastly, this section provides the ante-narratives, which we consider the "essence" of the project leaders' experiences.

The context in which the study took place

This study focuses on getting insight in the way in which project leaders at the work floor of a Dutch housing association experience a process of implementation ideas of SCP. We especially focus on the intra-organizational supply chain. We conducted our study in a large Dutch housing association that chose to implement SCP in their

maintenance and renovation processes. Therefore, within the association, we focused on the department of 'Maintenance and Renovation'.

The housing association in this case owns 60.000 units in the Netherlands and had approximately 800 employees at the time the study was conducted. The selected department consisted of 75 employers and was responsible for maintenance and renovations of the total housing stock of the association.

At the time we started collecting data (starting February 2013 until October 2013) the department 'Maintenance and Renovation' had been reorganized since 6 months (officially October 2012); Four regional sub-departments (e.g. Amsterdam and Amersfoort), working relatively independently of each other, were merged into one structure. **Figure 4.2** shows the new structure of this department 'maintenance and renovation'. All departments consisted approximately 5 to 8 individuals.
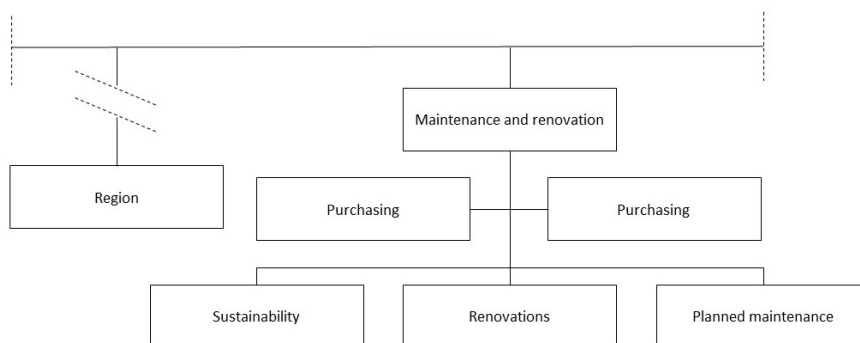

FIGURE 4.2 Formal structure of the department of 'maintenance and renovation'.

Sustainability, renovations and planned maintenance were newly founded sub-departments. The departments consisted of a team-manager, project leaders and planners. These departments used to work with more traditional forms of procurement, such as traditional tenders but also building team-structures were employed. At the time of gathering data, all project leaders were male and had at least 3 years of experience in this job. They all had a technical or business educational background and/or career path. In general, the project leaders' tasks were considered similar to the old situation.

Also, the sub-departments 'Purchasing' and 'Forecasts' were newly founded. In general, 'Purchasing' was (among other things) responsible for selecting contractors and developing a 'purchasing-strategy'. 'Forecasts' (among other things) was responsible for developing long term maintenance plans and budgets. Before the reorganization the members of both teams used to be project leaders and direct colleagues of the current project leaders. The sub-departments 'forecasts' and 'purchasing' did not exist in the old structure. These newly founded departments were composed mainly of people who in the old situation used to work as project leaders for this same organization. Therefore, the profile and background of the team members was similar to that of the project leaders. Applying for the new teams was voluntarily.

When we started collecting data, there was no clear vision on how to implement and perform the SCP strategy. The management team had divided views on whether SCP should be implemented top-down, bottom-up or through an iterative approach. The ambition was to cut down the costs of maintenance of the housing stock (approximately € 1.400,- for each unit each year) by 20%. How exactly SCP should contribute to this ambition and how it was measured by whom was not yet clear. No performance indicators were available yet. Part of the strategy was establishing a 'front runners group', consisting of members of departments sustainability, a team-leader, Purchasing and Forecasts. The Front Runners Group was said to have a pioneer status. Their target was to design a process model and then execute it in a pilot project. Along with implementing the SCP-strategy it was announced that human resources would be reduced by 20%, though without forced layoffs.

At the time we started collecting data the strategy of SCP echoed at work floor level, although no formal announcements of it had been made yet. The management presented their ideas formally in March 13th, 2013 (8 of 15 respondents were interviewed before this formal meeting). In general, work floor professionals reacted neutrally to this formal announcement, though they indicated the presentation as somewhat 'general'. The work floor did not indicate this formal presentation as a critical turning point into their process towards SCP. Indeed, no significant difference in the interview responses between before and after this presentation was observed. **Table 4.1** puts abovementioned organizational changes and our research process into a simple time line.

FORMAL REORGANIZATION	OCTOBER 2012
Start gathering data process	February 2013
Formal management presentation	March 2013
Presentation results to respondents	September 2013
End gathering data process	October 2013

TABLE 4.1 Time line organizational changes and process of gathering data

SCP as perceived by the project leaders

All respondents were asked to define SCP, but none of them was able to do that. 14 out of 17 interviewees believe that all colleagues define SCP differently. However, results show that respondents agree that SCP concerns establishing long term relationships with contractors in order to effectively use each other's sources and share responsibilities and risks. How these elements are to be realized in practice remains subject to differing interpretations though.

The respondents from all departments are able to describe important soft factors that support supply chain partnering. One respondent articulates that with SCP the targets are known beforehand, all parties together are responsible for reaching the targets, and difficulties and feedback are addressed openly. Also, most respondents have a clear vision of how they want to be treated as a project leader, by a contractor, in a SCP-situation. Things are described as 'the contractor needs to be interested in me. He needs to understand what our motives are', and 'you must give each other open and honest feedback. Even if they are in a dependent situation'. The preferred attitude of contractors is described as 'pro-active', or 'half a word should be enough to get the work done'.

Our data also show that the project leaders are in need for clear guidelines, tools, and vision about how SCP should be practiced in daily work life. According to the project leaders, this should be provided by the managers. Some project leaders feel that they are 'thrown in de deep' and 'trying to keep their head above the water'.

Intra-organizational patterns as perceived by the project leaders

Analysis of our data indicated four relationships in the intra-organizational structure that were most discussed. The relations were the project leader in relation to the 1) team leader, 2) Department of Purchasing, 3) Department of Forecasts and 4) Front Runners Group. In the next paragraphs each relationship will be discussed.

The first intra-organizational relationship concerns the team leader. In general, project leaders tend to speak rather negative about their team leaders. About one team leader it is said that the team leader 'frustrates instead of facilitates', and that 'team meetings are worthless', mostly because they 'don't discuss what should be discussed'. Moreover, as another project leader says, their team leader 'just does not understand what is going on' or 'they rely too much on the results of the Front Runners Group'. Another team member explains that when he tries to discuss problems he encounters in daily work life with his team leader, the team leader gives the project leader the feeling that he 'is whining' and that they 'need to get back to work'. One project leader argues that he does not 'need somebody who thinks we are whining. In order to develop we want to find solutions together. Then you can't use such a jammer.'

A strategy to cope with this perceived problematic relationship emerged in two branches. 1) On one hand project leaders begin to organize team meetings without presence of the team leader. Sometimes these meetings are planned, and sometimes the meetings arise spontaneously. These meetings are informally meant to exchange experiences, mostly concerning intra-organizational related issues, but also, for example, the selection procedures to select contractors are discussed. 2) Another strategy to cope with the perceived relation with the team leader is to avoid discussing perceived problems and not expressing criticism. An observation of a team meeting showed that the team meeting was about many practical daily work-related issues, like holiday data. The team leader works really hard to tick off all the points on the agenda and the project leaders cooperate, but do not initiate to discuss what they think is important, by, for example, asking questions.

When the most criticized team leader is asked how he sees his role in the team he responds that there is a nice atmosphere in the group. He refers to a day of team building where they had a good laugh together. According to this team leader, people in the organization learn arduously. 'Most people here are doers. What we forget is to evaluate. We don't do that.' When the team leader is confronted with the researcher's observations, the team leader says that he is aware that people talk when he is not there but he cannot seem to get grip on this situation. As he says, he is happy that he got the opportunity to become a team leader of this team and apparently the organization trusts him to do this. But he feels only a beginner in change management, and he does not know how to turn the situation.

The second intra-organizational relationship concerns the department of Purchasing. The relationship is characterized by three main themes: 1) The department of Purchasing was newly founded and the members of the department are still figuring out what their responsibilities are and what contributing procedures they need. 2) The department is perceived as an extra chain in the internal supply chain. As one project leader puts

it, 'an extra link appeared within the process. Instead of accomplishing more with less, it becomes accomplishing less with more'. 3) A perceived difficulty with Purchasing is that they potentially have power over the project leaders, because it is said that they are supposed to select contractors with whom the project leaders have to work with. As one of the project leaders formulates it 'I have difficulties with the fact that Purchasing makes certain decisions of which we bear the responsibilities'. For example, purchasers manage a list of approved contractors. Therefore, the project leaders bear consequences of decisions that were made by Purchasing. One project leader says that 'all of a sudden' a Purchaser has a saying in what the project leader previously did on his own. 'Now I have to ask, 'Can I please work with…?' That makes no sense to me at all.'

An exemplar illustrates the strategy of coping with the department of Purchasing. In an experimental process a project leader and a calculator, working as a couple, selectively forgot to involve the department of Purchasing in their selection process. Purchasing was involved in developing a list of contractors to invite, but was not involved in developing procurement and selection guidelines, neither were they involved in the actual interviews with the contractors. The purchasers knew about the experiment the project leader and the calculator initiated, but they are not involved and do not try to get involved either.

Members of the department of Purchasing acknowledge that they are searching for their responsibilities and how they contribute to the main production process. An external consultant was hired to guide the purchasers through that process. According to one of the purchasers, they are currently 'more concerned with daily issues, which causes that less attention is paid to developing a general purchasing policy'. Also, one of the purchasers says that Purchasing takes over some tasks that previously were done by the project leaders themselves. Some of the purchasers acknowledge that a project leader is the distinct figure to bear the primary project responsibilities, and therefore some purchasers experience difficulties with the division of tasks.

The third intra-organizational relationship concerns the department Forecasts. This relation is less discussed in the interviews and in a less intense manner than the relationships with the management and Purchasing. The core of this relationship is that project leaders feel that Forecasts is not really involved in their daily business. One of the project leaders indicates a problem that project leaders are supposed to establish long term relationships, but internally there is no long-term vision on which projects needed to be accomplished in future years. Forecasts is supposed to deliver such a long-term vision. As a project leader argues, he foresees problems in developing long-term relationships with contractors: 'At this point, I am wondering: where are those projects that we can expect the upcoming years? If they are not there, we cannot guarantee continuity to our contractors.'

None specific emerged strategy to cope with Forecasts was identified yet. The project leaders seem to perceive a dead end. A project leader argues: 'We don't hear anything. We pull and we reach out, but they don't make use of that. Nothing happens.' How the pulling and reaching out is established in practice remains opaque.

In an interview with a team member of Forecasts, the professional says that the relation with the project leaders 'is not close'. Also, Forecasts does not seem to feel involved in the SCP-strategy. One team member argues: 'Yearly I deliver a list of projects that need to be done, and it may not sound nice, but how these projects are established in practice, whether it is in a SCP-construction or not, I don't care that much'.

The fourth intra-organizational relationship concerns the Front Runners Group. The Front Runners Group consists of delegates from all mentioned departments. The project leaders don't know who exactly is part of the front runner group. According to the project leaders, the Front Runners Group hardly communicate about their ideas and experiences. The Front Runners Group is perceived to operate rather isolated. Experiences of the Front Runners Group and the project leaders are hardly shared. The project leaders generally think that the relation between the Front Runners Group and the management is strong. If a manager cannot answer certain questions, they mention the Front Runners Group as the group of people that will find out.

At the same time, the Front Runners Group is perceived as a threat, because 'in the end their ideas determine how we will work within the supply chain'. According to the project leader and a calculator that work in a couple they are successful in their experiments. 'However, we don't know what is coming next. Perhaps, eventually, the Front Runners Group develops something completely different and then we have to do it their way and everything we invented was useless'. The same couple think it is a missed opportunity that none of his team members is part of the Front Runners Group. He blames the team manager for that: 'He did not do his best for us. If somebody tells him that our team is not a member of that Front Runners Group, he just accepts it. If we ask him, he just does not give answers.'

In a plenary meeting with members of the Front Runners Group and the project leaders, the researcher presented her findings of a lack of communication between both parties. Members of the Front Runners Group, respond by saying that there was not much to present, because their ideas have not yet been fully developed. Moreover, as they say, 'It works both ways. We do not get any questions either.'

§ 4.6 Discussion

The previous section gives insight into how work floor professionals of a Dutch housing association deal with the managerial initiative of implementing SCP. As mentioned in section 4.3, the implementation of SCP can be seen as a mixture of deliberated and emergent strategies, and that seems the case here as well. A clear example of an intended strategy by the management in the process towards SCP was to form a Front Runners group that was among others to design a process model for SCP that could later be used by all project leaders. However, it is unlikely that the perceived lack of communication between the Front Runners group and the rest of the project leaders was intended. Moreover, it is unlikely that the management could foresee that front runners group was going to cause feelings of threat among the other professionals. Another example of an intended strategy was the establishment of the department of Purchasing that was founded, among other things, to help the project leaders with the selection of contractors. But it was not intended to have Purchasing being put on the side line, because the project leaders experienced this as an extra chain in the supply chain.

It is unclear whether it was an intended or emergent strategy that the project leaders experimented with forms of SCP. On one hand, the project leaders are encouraged to experiment with collaborating with contractors, by, for example the formal presentation on March 13th. On the other hand, the project leaders feel discouraged, because the project leaders feel that the managers rely on the results of the Front Runners group too much. Furthermore, project leaders are not only informed by internal ideas about SCP, but also by the wider discourse, as is shown in several cases.

Finally, another remarkable observation is that some dynamics did not emerge where one would expect an emergent strategy. For example, the relation with Region department is hardly discussed nor problematized. This department (that is also referred to by the project leaders as internal client) develops visions on, for example, quality, budget, and exploitation periods of the housing complexes. In relation to this department the project leader is the contractor, so it is a relevant department in the internal chain. The fact that it has not been brought up in experiences could point out that the interactions between the project leaders and this department are not experienced as problematic and/or that the interactions with this department are not very intense in daily work practice.

As mentioned in our literature framework, these gaps between intended and emerged strategies are neither to blame to the thinkers nor the doers, rather to a disassociation between thinking and doing (*Weick, 1995*).

On the one hand, this gap leads to unwanted emerged dynamics. On the other hand, some emerged strategies are promising (such as the successful project leaders' experiments).

Reflection would be helpful to overcome unwanted emerged dynamics or to profit from promising emerged processes. However, our case study shows that project leaders do not feel a platform to discuss their experiences and ideas openly. For example, in general the project leaders feel unheard by their team leader, because they feel, for example, to be considered as 'whiners' when they try to discuss topics that were important to them. Consequently, certain issues are not openly discussed. A strategy to cope with this is to gather around 'out of sight of the team leader' to discuss the topics anyway. In *Elias' (1970)* metaphor, the project leaders start a new game in which they exclude the team leader, while at the same time 'struggling along' (*Homan, 2013*) with the team leader's game. 'Struggling along' in this way can be seen as cooperating with the game at superficial level, while at the same time, out of sight of the team leader, the project leaders play a different game. This increases the experienced gap between the project leaders and their team leader and decreases the opportunity to overcome unwanted emerged processes and profit from promising emerged processes.

Lastly, related to the emergence discussion, it can be questioned whether our ante-narrative is solely about implementing SCP or that the results are mixed up with, for example, the reorganization strategy as well. In our case for example, it is debatable whether the emerged strategy as response to the new department of Purchasing is result of implementing the SCP strategy or implementing the reorganization. Also, the perceived functioning of the team leader would be a problem in a non-SCP environment as well. We think this debate is valid. However, for this study with this research approach, we argue that it is impossible to avoid these kinds of noises for two reasons. First, SCP is difficult to define and also in this case it seems that respondents believe that it represents more than just 'using another contract' or 'using a new process chart flow'. SCP can be considered as representing a bigger culture change towards certain values discussed by the respondents. That makes changing towards SCP comprehensive and affecting lot of aspects of the organization. Second, implementing a strategy is never done in a further blanc canvas. In every organization in which a strategy is implemented, other processes happen at the same time. All these processes affect each other. It is therefore difficult – if not impossible – to distinguish one process from the other, let alone to distinguish one-on-one cause and effect relations. Therefore, in studying changing processes towards SCP from a holistic view as chosen in this study, might affect the results but also increases comprehensiveness on this topic.

Inconsistencies
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In **section 4.5** we have discussed the values on which SCP is based according to the project leaders. The project leaders do not seem to practice these values in intra-organizational relationships. Project leaders mention and support values on which SCP is based such as openness, transparency, proactivity, equivalence and integration. However, intra-organizational relationships are perceived by the project leaders as restrained, vague, reactive, and disintegrated. For example, the relation with the front runners group and also with forecasts can be described as disintegrated, since they feel that they don't get information that they should get.

On the other hand – most probably without being aware of it – the project leaders do not always treat their colleagues according their own formulated standards of SCP. If the key values of SCP, as described by project leaders themselves, are compared to what the project leaders say about how they cope with internal relationships, inconsistencies are observed. We will give 4 examples of these inconsistencies: 1) In relation with the external contractor, the project leader thinks it is important to be open, honest and transparent. In relation to the team leader, these values are not expressed in behavior, since they act a lot 'out of sight of the team leader'. They also say that feedback should be addressed openly, but they stopped to give feedback openly to their team leader. 2) In relation with the external contractor, project leaders feel that half a word to the contractor should be enough to let them know what they want. Internally, the project leaders say that are in need of tools, frameworks, and uniformity and thus need more than half a word to be able to perform. Another layer in this inconsistency is that the departments that are supposed to develop the tools, uniformity, and frameworks are considered as a threat or an extra chain in the supply chain. 3) The project leaders say that a contractor should be pro-active. However, in internal relations the project leaders' strategy to cope with certain relations is characterized by avoidance, rather than proactivity. For example, in relation to Purchasing the project leaders chose to selectively 'forget' to involve the purchasers. 4) The project leaders think it is important to invest in the relationship, and to try to understand each other. But our data do not show that the project leaders invest expressly in internal relationships. In short, project leaders treat and don't feel treated by internal relations by their own formulated principles of SCP.

Our data do not provide clear reasons for these inconsistencies. A first possible reason is that the project leaders are not fully aware or disagree that the values of SCP could also be applied on the intra-organizational supply chain. When intra-organizational relationships are discussed it is mainly related to the reorganization. Related to this, it is also possible that the project leaders do not realize fully that (all) intra-organizational relations are part of the supply chain and therefore do not apply the same standards

on these relationships. Indeed, as mentioned in our literature framework, and observed by *Eriksson (2015)*, internal functions and departments might be perceived as external to the project. Because *Eriksson (2015)* observed this as well, this lack of awareness might be a sector wide, rather than a case specific problem. Awareness and acknowledgement that the intra-organizational dynamics is part of the whole construction supply chain can help to overcome this. This study hopes to increase this awareness and acknowledgement, among professionals in the field as well as among fellow researchers. More focus on intra-organizational dynamics in the field as well as in academic research is needed to increase awareness and acknowledgement even more. A second plausible reason for the inconsistencies is that the project leaders are aware of the inconsistencies but lack needed skills to change. For example, project leaders are aware of the perceived none-constructive relationship with the team leader, but they lack communication skills or skills of conflict resolution to solve this problem. Instead they develop different – less constructive – strategies to cope with this perceived problem. A third possible reason is fear. For example, it was announced that in future fte would be reduced and people would have to leave the organization. This might cause fear of expressing criticism towards, for example, the management and strategies of avoidance and 'struggling along' are developed. Of course, the observed inconsistencies might be a combination of above mentioned arguments. Furthermore, it is important to realize that the inconsistencies are most likely not intended.

§ 4.7 Conclusions

This study aimed to uncover intra-organizational dynamics in implementing supply chain partnering in a Dutch housing association. By taking a phenomenological approach, we showed that that the implementation of SCP becomes what it is as a result of mixture of intended and emergent strategies. Further we discussed that key values of SCP as understood by the project leaders are not applied on the intra-organizational supply chain.

This insight in how work floor professionals deal with managerial initiatives of implementing SCP can be used in a practical way by several parties. The recommendations, however, should not be considered as an attempt to abolish emergent strategies and to get more control. After all, this study adopted the insight that the situations in which the participants of our study are in, is the result of a combination of intended and emergent strategies. An emergent strategy is an accumulation of many daily social interactions. The way of coming out of this situation

(and handling the perceived problems) will also be a result of an intended as well as emergent strategy.

A recommendation concerning intra-organizational dynamics is that too many internal supply chain partners may cause more task specialization and fragmentation in the supply chain as a whole. This case study shows that it is fair to question the utility of some departments or functions and even more abolishment should not be a 'no go-area' for the sake of streamlining the production supply chain. However, in this particular case reconsidering a previously made decision might cause even more agitation in an already stormy phase in this organization. Therefore, this is not an easy area to discuss.

A recommendation concerning the emergent strategy is that awareness, acknowledgement and reflection on intra-organizational dynamics might be a first step in improving the situation and changing unintended and unwanted intra-organizational dynamics. An emergent strategy is a result of many daily interactions. Although emergent strategies are often unpredictable and as a whole not manageable, an emergent strategy is not a result of chance, because the individuals interact deliberately. A recommendation to cope with unwanted emergent strategies is to analyze one's own daily interactions and analyze how these interactions contribute to maintaining the situation as it is. It can be a personal process, in which the individual should be willing to face one's own share in the situation. This is much easier said than done and there is no winning recipe for doing this. However, much literature on self-reflection can be found, and also many individuals benefit from help from a peer or a coach.

The reflections on internal relations bring forth various ethical issues as well. For example, the project leaders experience a form of injustice, because they bear responsibilities that are caused by other department's decisions. Another example of potential injustice is that the Front Runners Group potentially influence the project leaders daily work heavily. But there is no actual reason to assume that the Front Runners Groups' ideas and experiences are better than those of the project leaders, because the project leaders' experiences are not discussed openly. A third example is that the project leaders do not seem to treat their intra-organizational relations in the same way as they would like to be treated themselves. Apparently, the Project Leaders seems to practice different values for different groups of people. Further, as discussed, they might have plausible reasons because they are put under pressure and it might be caused by not having the right competences to turn the situation, rather than the wrong intentions. A fourth ethical issue is that reflecting on organizational dynamics in the way we did in this paper puts people in a vulnerable situation. Especially in a situation where jobs are at stake it is important to handle the delicate information

well. This is done in several ways. For example, data are processed anonymously in this paper and in working with the respondents, researchers should constantly be aware of the political arena he or she is working in and take that into account when reflecting with the respondents themselves. This issue is common in organizational studies, but therefore it is not less important. Further inquiry can help to unravel these ethical issues and stimulate debate about it.

When taking into account the insights generated by this study, of course, one must also take into account the limitations of this study. First, the results of this study are obviously limited to one Dutch housing association that was in the middle of an implementation process. A recent reorganization shook up old existing routines, which may have caused chaos and unestablished relationships. Second, by no means we try to claim that we presented the one and only truth. Although we involved respondents closely in analyzing data, we are aware that potentially several stories could have been told about this particular situation. Still this study is valuable because critical reflection of a situation is a first step to improvement. The insights of this study also help to improve the scientific discourse in a number of ways. The adopted research approach provides insight in how barriers have been created through interplay of participants locally. For researchers, it might be easier to rely on abstract, but clear and understandable, models, blueprints, and strategies. However, in these abstract images of daily reality, there is a danger of denying complexity of daily experiences. Embracing complexity of daily work life is a first step in understanding and therefore improving of it. Therefore, further research applying similar approaches is recommended in organizations that are implementing SCP, including other parties in the construction supply chain.

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