In the pursuit of understanding how to develop organizational capability to create consistency between day-to-day practices and changing demands

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Abstract
The purpose of this article is to explore how and under what conditions a highly skilled team of internal management consultants were able to create consistency between their day-to-day management development practices and new or changing demands. Findings from the explorative field study indicate that the observed consistency was an outcome of learning within an ecology of learners. Within this context, there are two types of learning involved in the change dynamics over time. The first type of learning is the adjustment to new, external ideas through a change in a collective mind-set – based on learning from the experiences of others. The second type of learning is the adjustment of internal routines and practices to the new mind-set – based on the consultants’ experiences from the translation of the new ideas into practice. The emergence of a temporarily situated, focused activity system that had linkages to the formal organizational context enabled a balance between the two types of learning. As an outcome, the team of consultants discovers the intelligence of a new mind-set, became committed to the mind-set, and became capable of developing routines and competence with respect to the new mind-set.

Keywords
organizational learning, change, management development

Introduction
This article focuses on a highly skilled team of internal management consultants who execute a new management development program for the middle-management group in a firm. The point of departure is a simple observation from this implementation process whereby, over time, the team of management consultants changes their shared thinking and acting regarding management development. A new perspective on what constitutes appropriate, rightful and legitimate management development emerged, and the management consultants acted consistently with this new perspective.

The observed change of logic of action suggests that the team of management consultants had developed the capability to balance conflicting demands for efficiency and alignment, on the one hand, and adaptability, on the other. With this assumption as the point of

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departure, the article represents a field study in the pursuit of understanding how and under what conditions the team of highly skilled internal management consultants escaped or unlearned a shared mind-set, how they discovered the intelligence of a new mind-set, and how and under what conditions they developed competence (human capital) to be able to act from the new perspective. The ability to achieve both efficiency and adaptiveness can be an outcome of several different processes (Argyris & Schøn, 1978; Levinthal & March, 1993; Levitt & March, 1988; Lewin, 1958; Duncan, 1976; March, 1991; Argyris, 1999; O'Reilly III & Tushman, 2004; Rosing et al., 2011; Kotter, 2012; Espedal, 2017). One of these processes is learning from one’s own experience and the experience of others (Levitt & March, 1988; Levinthal & March, 1993; Argyris, 1999). In this article, I choose the learning perspective because the team in focus was concerned with how individuals within the organization should learn. This article, however, focuses on how learning from experiences actually happened in the organization.

I define learning from one’s own experience is a process that involves a series of steps. The process begins with the taking of an action, followed by the monitoring of the outcomes of that action and the interpretations of those outcomes. These interpretations then result in certain modifications of the conditions to repeat or modify the action. Learning from the experience of others refers to learning from ideas and knowledge that are the outcomes of the interpretations of other learning actors’ experiences. This learning (from external knowledge and ideas) then result in certain modifications of the conditions to repeat or modify an action.

The article is organized as follows. First, the study case and its context are discussed. Second, the method employed in the explorative field study is discussed. This discussion is then followed by a presentation of the results from the study and a discussion about how and under what organizational conditions a balance between conflicting demands for alignment and adaptability might be achieved. The conclusion is presented in the final section of the paper.

The case and its context
The context for the explorative field study was a new management development program designed for a firm’s middle-management group. The point of departure for the study was a simple observation from the execution of this program whereby, over time, the team of internal management consultants changed their shared thinking and acting regarding management development. Thus, they changed their logic of action.

The case is about exploring the dynamic change process over time in order to develop an understanding about how and under what conditions the team was able to create consistency between their practices and new ideas or changing demands.

The firm had approximately 150 mid-level managers who were divided into three learning groups, each of which comprised 50 participants. The structure for each course or learning group consisted of three sets of four-to-five-day seminars, spread over nine months, with seminar homework being a well-integrated part of the course structure. The course had clear, well-defined goals and substantive course content that was administered via valid teaching methodology. The entire program period, which consisted of three management development courses, lasted approximately three years.

The new program presented the emergence of management as being an individual process and equated it with holding a formal management position. As such, the program intended to develop the cognitive, social, and emotional competencies necessary to become efficient managers. Efficient management was believed to occur when a manager's capabil-
Ities were consistent with the demands of the job. Hence, the program was designed to provide the course participants with the skills and prerequisites necessary to perform specific management tasks better than others and better than in the past.

The learning group of 50 participants was divided into seven subgroups, and each subgroup had a process consultant (subgroup leader). Hence, each team of management consultants consisted of seven management consultants who were selected on the basis of the following criteria: possessed a degree, had good reputations for performing well as management consultants, and were committed to the intentions that underpinned the new program.

**Method**

**Who participated in the field study?**

The starting point for the field study was to acquire accurate knowledge about the actual change process. Therefore, I contacted the internal management consultants and top managers who had been the key participants in the change process and asked if they were interested in exploring what had happened during their experience. They responded positively. Hence, the sources for the empirical evidence obtained to provide new insight were semi-structured interviews conducted with two groups of key informants, all of whom had experience and knowledge of the change process being investigated or who could provide detailed information that was relevant to the inquiry. The first group, the seven management consultants, had (1) a high level of education, (2) experience as management consultants: they were highly skilled consultants who had contributed to various management and organizational development programs within the firm, (3) reputations for having performed well as management consultants, and (4) they were highly committed to the intentions that underpinned the new program. Four of the informants were men and three were women. They were between the ages of 35 and 40 years. The second group, three new leaders from the top management group, had a high level of education and experience of leading change. One was a woman and the others were men, and they were between the age of 40 and 45 years.

**How was the research conducted?**

Each of the tape-recorded interviews took approximately one-and-a-half hours and was conducted at the workplace of the participant. The focus was on the key informants’ sense of what had happened during the specific change process and what the individual thought about the process from an experiential learning perspective.

In the conversation with the management consultants, I asked three broad clusters of questions regarding how and under what conditions the team changed their logic of action over time. The first cluster concerned how the management consultants learned from their own experiences. How did they interpret their own experiences and apply those interpretations to practical action? The second cluster of questions regarded how the management consultant learned from the experiences of others. How did they interpret the experiences of others and apply those interpretations to practical action? The third cluster of questions focused on the conditions that enabled learning and from one’s own experience and the experience of others.

During the conversations with the management consultants, I became aware that:

- Much of the conversation about the change was evaluative. The management consultants evaluated ideas, experience, the process, structures, etc.
• There was a tension between the observations of change and the ideas or metaphors of change (the informants liked to talk about ideas and metaphors); and there was tension between experience and consciousness.

• The team of management consultants had moved toward shared interpretations of experiences. They were team players who identified with a collective identity with respect to the cognitive, normative, and emotional connections that emerged from the social and professional interactions and communications between and among team members. Thus, they largely communicated shared descriptions, views, meanings, and understandings.

Therefore, the informants were asked to reflect critically on their practices and experiences in order to explore the underlying assumptions and norms that framed their thinking and their actions. I tried also to be aware of the paradox and the recognition of simultaneous, albeit not necessarily consistent, feelings, analyses, and commitments.

The conversation with the top management informants focused on three broad clusters of questions: (1) the role the top management played in the concrete learning and change process, (2) what they had observed and experienced, and how they interpreted their observations and experience, and (3) and how they applied those interpretations to practical action.

How were the data analyzed and interpreted?

The analysis of the data, for the most part, directly follows the interviews. The aim was to identify descriptions, arguments, views, ideas, reflections, etc. within the interviews that are closely linked in meaning to answer the questions that center on: how and under what conditions the team of highly skilled internal management consultants escaped or unlearned a shared mind-set, how they discovered the intelligence of a new mind-set, and how and under what conditions they developed competence (human capital) to be able to act from the new perspective. Insights related to these questions emerged while collecting and analyzing the data. In this way, alignment across the research question, the data collected, and the analytical processes was the intended objective.

To increase the credibility and authenticity of the data analyses and their interpretations, I employed two techniques. The first technique involved obtaining feedback from a colleague who reviewed how I had interpreted and categorized the data from the transcribed interviews. Based on this review, we discussed improvements regarding the interpretations and categorization of the data. The second technique was participant validation, which involved returning to the informants and asking them to read carefully through the data analyses to validate the interpretations. Positive feedback of the interpretations reinforced confidence in the reliability of the constructed categories.

The key findings are reported under main theme with subcategories using appropriate verbal quotes to illustrate them. These quotes illustrate types of shared descriptions, views, meanings, and understandings that could be categorized under the subcategories and main themes. The selected quotes were confirmed by similar quotations from at least seven of the ten key informants. From this view, the quotes are used to illustrate what happened in the dynamic change process, over time, and to create an understanding of why and how it happened.

Findings

The change in logic of action

The field study’s point of departure, along with its dependent variable, is a concerted context-specific observation whereby a team of internal management consultants who exe-
cuted a new management development program changed their shared bases for action (logic of action) during this implementation. Then the question is: How did findings from the study illustrate the change in the team of management consultants’ logic of action?

The findings show that in the first part of the new management development program, the team of management consultants defined management as an individual phenomenon that focused on the training and development of the behavior and skills of the manager. The ideas behind the program were associated with a language filled with ideas of visions and power: “The business is run by managers who take the initiative and act on the basis of goals, good oversight and information.” From this view, the program intended to develop competent managers, and organizational performance was assumed to be the result of the intentions and actions of competent managers. Since the consultants assumed that business success was a consequence of the manager’s insights and actions, the development of insight, understanding and competence had to be important, relevant and useful.

In the last part of the management development program, the management consultants focused on the context within which management is executed. When focusing on the management team-level context, the management consultant emphasized the manager’s capacity to recruit team members with diverse knowledge who could engage collectively in managing complex management functions that they could not achieve by acting individually. Focusing on the organizational level context, the management consultants emphasized the manager’s ability to develop the collective capacity of the people of the organization to engage in management processes. In other words, the consultants’ practice in the program for course group 1 was linked to one type of mind-set, and the consultants’ practice in the program for course group 3 was linked to another type of mind-set.

The difference between the two types of mind-sets illustrates the difference between leader development and leadership development (Antonakis & Day 2017; Day, 2000). From a leader development perspective, good management is expected to occur as the result of the training of individual managers and the development of their skills and competences. However, management is not just an individual phenomenon. Rather, it is a complex phenomenon that encompasses the interactions between and among the manager and the social and organizational environments. Thus, leadership development embraces the development of a broader and collective framework. Within this perspective, managers are responsible for building organizations in which people continuously expand their capacity to exchange knowledge, and in which multiple individuals with diverse knowledge and interests collectively achieve something that they could not achieve by acting individually.

As a conclusion, the two types of thinking illustrate the difference between (1) developing managerial competence related to demands and expectations associated with the middle-management role in organizations, and (2) developing leadership competence related to organizational functions that emphasize and focus on internal and external leadership aspects, stability and change, and efficiency and adaptiveness. The two sets of thinking are also linked to two visions of leadership. On the one hand, a vision of leadership as building unity of harmonious purpose and commitment. On the other hand, a vision of leadership as stimulating diversity as a source of creativity, innovation, and adaptability.

To elaborate the story about how and under what conditions the team of management consultants changed their logic of action, the findings from the change process must first be acknowledged.
The management consultants’ learning from their own experience in the first part of the new program

In the first part of the new management development program the team of consultants learned from experience. First, the management consultants learned from experiences through a type of learning known as additive learning or repertory expanding. This learning illustrates mutual, local feedback between experience and competence that led to increased competence with respect to existing management development perspective:

My experience produced context-specific knowledge that made me more competent as a consultant.

Second, learning from experience produced insight, awareness, and an understanding that could not immediately order behavioral changes in their role as consultants within the programmed management development setting:

I could have gotten new experience-based insight, awareness, and understanding, but I could not use it because I was restricted by the requirements and limitations beyond me… The knowledge became silent because it could not dictate behavioral changes within my role as a management consultant.

I learned, but my individual learning could have little effect on my own behavior in the management development context.

Third, learning from experience produced insight, awareness, and an understanding that could not immediately produce change in the management development program’s goal and routines:

I learned from experience, but in many situations, I learned as an observer or spectator.

Learning occurred, but what I learned had little effect – related to improvement of routines, techniques, etc.

Fourth, the management consultants learned from the process of acting rather than from the ultimate outcomes of the action. It was difficult to assess results, and therefore the process was considered instead. Sustained characteristics of the management development process became a surrogate for the results. From this perspective, the management consultants interpreted anticipations of positive consequences as though they were outcomes, and they learned from the anticipation of consequences.

The management consultants learned from experience and from the anticipation of positive consequences. As a team, they developed mutual trust, but they did not succeed in developing an appropriate arena that could facilitate exchange, common thinking, and common interpretation of experiences.

The findings indicate that the management consultants’ learning, during the first part of the management development program, was based on experience that was near in time and space. The management consultants adapted locally in time and space to the detriment of the more distant. Consequently, learning involved development and accumulation of competence related to the existing logic of action. Learning from experience involved development of capabilities, but only a small portion of the lessons the consultants learned involved improvement of the management development program’s procedures and techniques. Thus, it can be concluded that the learning was path-dependent, additive, and constituted learning within a mind-set or perspective that promoted stability, efficiency, and alignment. Thus, the observed change in the management consultants’ logic of action was not an outcome of their learning from their own experiences in the first part of the program. There were at least three reasons
for this outcome. First, the consultants learned from experience in ways that led them into a “competency trap” – as a consequence of mutual positive feedback between experiences (that were near in time and space) and competence (Levitt & March 1988). Second, the consultants were learning actors in a programmed management development course that limited their autonomy. Their learning was constrained by their formal role definition and routines. Third, this was a formal course in a hierarchical organizational context that emphasized efficiency rather than learning. Thus, the management consultants’ working and learning contexts were within organizational settings that restricted their ability to learn and utilize experience-based knowledge. They had clear instructions and were incentivized accordingly.

Learning from the experience of others and learning from one’s own experience in the last part of the new program

The new management development program lasted three years, and during the course of the program, the firm received a new, externally recruited, top management team. The new top management team, consisting of three leaders, appreciated management and management development from a new perspective. The new ideas highlighted that the scope of the previous management development strategy was limited by assumptions that portrayed management as an individual process and equated it with maintaining a formal management process. The new ideas challenged the old assumptions and highlighted the importance of team-level dynamics, shared cognitions, innovation, and contextual features as part of the emergence of new management.

The new ideas emphasized that management is not the activity of an individual alone. No one person could manage all leadership functions; hence, they had to learn to collaborate.

Management was seen as a collective team activity because no single individual could meet the tremendous demands of making trade-offs between diversity and unity, between variety and integration, between convergence and divergence, between efficiency and adaptiveness, between predictability and flexibility, and between stability and change.

We should develop managers who are able to maneuver in complex situations rather than having the illusion that they control the environment.

The new perspective highlighted the importance of feedback. Managers should learn from feedback regarding their behaviors and learn how their behaviors affect colleagues and employees.

The new top management did believe that the existing management development program had “increased the confidence of successful managers in their capabilities and subjective feelings of trust in oneself without greatly expanding their understanding.” They argued that “increasingly homogeneity in the pool of managers is good for efficiency but it is not good for innovation and adaptiveness.” They claimed also that “a management development program should provide insight into the role leadership play in cultivating human capital and organizational learning within the firm.”

In these ways, the new top management confronted the organization by introducing ideas which were different from what had been seen by the internal management consultants. From this view, the new top management were advice givers who emphasized strategic storytelling as a way to purposely spread specific, new ideas. While the team of internal management consultants responded cognitively and emotionally well to the new ideas, why did they do what they did and how did they justify it? The findings illustrate that there were several reasons for their positive reactions.
The new top management presented a new direction. It was a perspective that represented interesting and fascinating ideas. I could combine some of these ideas with my own ideas which had been silent because I had been acting in an organizational context that had constrained the utilization of the ideas.

The new ideas provided alternative interpretations of our own experiences and possibilities.

I think the new ideas were relevant. They gave us a sense of progress.

I responded positively, and I thought, ‘This is what successful management consultants are doing or have to do in management development.’

We trusted the new top management and I think we saw and liked what they saw and liked.

The team of management consultants had earlier pursued what they thought was appropriate and aligned with their identity as consultants, but now they faced a new environment in which old ways of shared thinking and acting were no longer viable: “We had been selected as management consultants on the basis of presumed management development competence, but now we had to begin to reassess the basis for our competence… We had knowledge related to our existing conceptions of the basis for acting as good consultants, but not so much commitment to that knowledge that new ideas were rejected”.

A change or a form of unlearning occurred when the consultants imitated or adopted new and interesting ideas. The team of internal management consultants adopted new ideas from their environment because they identified with the top management, and they identified with the top management because they felt pressure to acquire and maintain legitimacy in relation to their task environment and clients: “We identified with top management in order to get legitimacy and influence in management development programs… Identification was achieved by having a culture of cooperation supported by social norms.” As a conclusion, the management consultants identified with top management because their legitimacy as change agents was central to their ability to lead development and change, and the construction of legitimacy involved continuous social interactions with the top management.

Imitation or identification was one mechanism that enabled learning from the experiences of others. Another beneficial mechanism was the commitment that came from a profound sense of self and the obligations due to the identity as internal management consultants. Acting as a consultant stemmed to a large extent from the fulfillment of an identity. “The basis for our action was our identity as consultants and the obligations associated with it… As internal management consultants, we were expected to act according to distinct organizational values, norms and rules… These expectations developed our identity as professional, internal management consultants… We had a conception of ourselves as identities seeking opportunities to fulfill the expectations of our role… When expectations changed, we changed our shared thinking and acting.” A third mechanism was trust. “We trusted the new top management.” In these ways, new ideas replaced or disrupted old ideas.

The findings show that the team of management consultants escaped their existing mindset and implemented a new mindset different from the existing one. This change was an outcome of the consultants’ learning from the experiences of others – learning that was facilitated by identification, trust, and commitment. In this way, the consultants became informally co-opted into a new mindset that had implications for management development practices.

The new mindset required and legitimated the rethinking of existing management development practices, which then destabilized existing routines and teaching techniques. Thus, “we needed to develop new routines as an instrument by which we could achieve new stability and consistency, we needed to develop new competencies…” Adaptation to the new ideas suggested change, the notion of change, in turn, suggested a shift to a new course of
action, to a new knowledge base, to a new set of practices and to a new form...In order to succeed, we needed to learn from our own experience that was near in time and space.”

**Enabling conditions for combination learning from the experience of others and from one’s own experience**

The management consultants learned from the experience of others. This learning created knowledge about *what* they should do and *why* they should do it, but the learning from the experience of others did not create knowledge about *how* to do it. That is, the management consultants faced challenges during the process as they tried to translate the new ideas into reality:

We gained new knowledge but also confidence in this knowledge. I think our gains in confidence were much more rapid than our gains in knowledge.... We became committed to a new and interesting perspective, but it was difficult to see what this perspective taught us with respect to putting it into practice.

Changes in the top management induced change in perspective which again induced changes in rules... It seemed to me that we could keep the program's formal structure, but we had to change goals, content and methods... We had to decide and implement a new order.

Thus, the management consultants experienced and understood that they faced problems. The first insight was that their understanding of the new ideas was incomplete. The second insight was that they had to develop new routines and techniques. The third insight was that they had to develop new competence in order to exploit the new ideas and to be able to act from the new perspective.

**Development of a temporarily situated activity system**

Due to the need to deal with challenges and tensions during the team of consultants’ adjustment to the new mind-set, arguments for a temporarily situated activity system emerged:

We faced new demands (associated with talk), and in one or another way we had to create linkages between talk, decision, and action.

A disconfirmation of our prior perspective and practices was established, and the task was to provide an environment that was safe enough for a constructive search for and development of new routines and techniques... The day-to-day practices in the formal organizational context could not provide such an environment... The management development context could provide conditions for experimentation but did not offer good opportunities for exchange and interpretation of experiences... We needed to develop an environment (arena) that facilitated development of knowledge gleaned from awareness and interpretation of fine details from experience of others, from own experience, from old and new experiences, and from general analytic thinking... We had to create an environment (arena) that had spatial and temporary distance to our day-to-day practices – as a means of giving space, time and resources in order to elaborate and concretize the new ideas – with a view to exploiting the ideas in the management development program.

In developing an environment or “arena” in which ideas, experiences, and insights could be shared, combined, and interpreted, the team of management consultants got support from the top management who wanted to cultivate human capital, social capital, and organizational learning in the firm. This support created the basis and legitimacy for the development of a temporarily situated organizational arena in which psychological safety, mutual trust, and autonomy emerged (Edmondson, 1999; Foss, et al., 2009; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998), and thus allowed for the emergence of common appropriate norms that emphasized
high-quality relationships, opportunities for open dialogue, an optimal balance between confrontation and support, disciplined reflexivity, the ability to manage the trade-off between intimacy and reach, and the trust or confidence that a job would be done well and with understanding of the job requirements of others.” These norms created “ways of engaging experiences, ways of creating, elaborate, and embracing experiences.”

The participants in the new situated activity system were the seven management consultants and the three new leaders from the top management. The findings show that these participants developed a learning network (group) that operated within the formal organization but outside the existing management hierarchy. That is, the learning network had linkages to the participants’ day-to-day work.

Within the temporarily situated learning network, the participants developed norms of appropriateness that were contradictory to the efficiency and control-related norms they followed in their day-to-day practices in the formal organizational contexts: “We developed a supportive social arena which abandoned the ‘mechanistic’ rules of conduct we followed in our day-to-day work.” In other words, the advantages of the temporarily situated activity system were related to the temporary dispenses of the formal organizational demands and rules of the everyday organizational life. The essence of the formal organization in which the management development program was executed, was routines, conventional behavior, bound by the standards of the time. The essence of the temporarily situated activity system, on the other hand, was to escape the routines, the standards, to develop and implement new ideas that confronted the existing program.

Thus, autonomy was a key feature of the temporarily situated activity system: “Autonomy allowed us to find time for knowledge sharing... Autonomy impacted our motivation to engage in knowledge sharing... Autonomy protected us from the uncertain success of new ideas... We had opportunity to examine ideas that did not appear to be justifiable in terms of the existing (old) organizational values and norms... We had both the opportunity and the legitimacy to be impatient with the old ideas and patient with the new ones.”

As an outcome, “We started to interact within an emerging arena that had an improvisational quality... We developed commitment to norms that communicated meanings related to mutual trust, safety and autonomy... A creative, collaborative climate that was beneficial for knowledge sharing, common reflection, and meaning creation emerged... The new ideas were leadership-driven through communication, but in exploiting the ideas, leadership became a quality of the participants in the temporarily situated learning context.” Hence, the findings describe a process in which the temporarily situated activity system emerged and changed itself through the experience of being used.

Knowledge sharing – exchanges of experiences
The participants in the temporarily situated system of social and professional interactions were the team of management consultants and the new top management members. The top management members shared experiences related to the new ideas. “We built on the lessons learned by the top management.” Hence, what became relevant as the object of learning and development was brought to the surface through the absorption of new, external ideas that challenged the existing mind-set. However, it was difficult to implement these ideas before the management consultants fully comprehended them and developed competence in them. Therefore, the participants searched for experiences and knowledge that existed in isolated kernels, they shared knowledge that been silent, they shared experiences from the first part of the new management development program, and they shared experiences from the experimentation with the new idea in the last part of the management development program:
We hold related information in different locations, and when we exchanged detailed information, we often discovered generalizations, ideas, and patterns that subsumed these details.

We got opportunities to talk more reflectively about ideas, experiences, errors, and feelings... I could ask, have you thought about that in this way? ... I had insight, but it required nourishing interaction to develop, elaborate, evaluate, and exploit a fledgling idea. We learned to interact in a manner that was appropriate for such a nourishing process... To encourage initiatives, I learned to be tolerant of deviations from what I would do in the same situation.

Knowledge became embedded in an interconnected social network.

Combination of experience
The temporarily situated activity system became an arena that created opportunities for combining one's own experiences with the experiences of others, new experiences with old experiences, etc. This blending improved the variety of the novelty of the process whereby the outcome was a common interpretation and understanding of a new mind-set that created a basis for experimentation and testing in the formal organizational context and, hence, led to the development of new routines and new techniques, and, ultimately, to the development of competence in these new routines and techniques. “We acted, interacted and experimented on the basis of a new, common understanding, and we gained new experiences… On the basis of the knowledge derived from new experiences, we developed new routines, we retrieved rules from previous experiences and reconciled them with the new experiences, and we changed our practices.”

The findings illustrate that the participants in the temporarily situated activity system developed a context that permitted the examination of and experimentation with new ideas, as well as the opportunity to develop competence in these ideas and create bridges between them and the subsequent actions through the development of new routines or prescriptions for action. Important conditions for this change and learning process included the development of mutual trust, psychological safety, and autonomy. However, a central feature of the change and learning process constituted another condition. “It was a joyful process and the pleasures of the process affected our motivation to exchange and combine experiences… The process created engagement and a positive feeling that we were capable of implanting the new ideas.”

Conclusion
Theoretical and practical contributions
The findings from the elaborated story show that the development of the organizational capability to create consistency between day-to-day practice and changing demands is an outcome of learning that occurs within an ecology of learners. Thus, the learning within the ecology of learners or organizational learning shaped the connection between new ideas or changing demands, on the one hand, and the development of routines, techniques, and competence on the other.

The basic premise behind ecological learning is that experiential knowledge is embedded in an interconnected network that provided an ecological context for exchange and combination of experiences (Edmondson, 2002; Levitt & March, 1988). From this view, the team of highly skilled management consultants was comprised of a collection of multiple actors, each of whom has the capacity to learn and whose learning would interact with that of others. The team was also part of an organization in which the team's learning was affected by the interactions of the organizational actors who were learning simultaneously. Hence, the management consultants were able to learn from their own experiences as well as from the experiences of others.
There were two types of learning involved in the ecology of learners. The first was the adjustment to new external ideas through changes in the team members’ collective mind-set. The second was the adjustment of internal routines and practices to the new mind-set.

The first type of learning describes *escaping a mind-set and implementing a new mind-set*. Thus, this type of learning illustrates “higher order learning” – associated with exploration (March, 1991), with double loop learning (Argyris & Schøn, 1978), with adaptiveness (Duncan, 1976), and with unlearning (Lewin, 1958). The findings show that higher order learning was an outcome of learning from the experience of others. New ideas which challenged existing thinking or changed a mind-set that was known, and which was used to develop a new perspective were an outcome of learning from the experiences of others or an outcome of external knowledge from the top management (learning actors outside the professional field of the consultants). The team of internal management consultants adopted the new ideas because (1) they felt pressure to acquire and maintain legitimacy in relation to their environment or their clients and thus they identified with top management; (2) they felt a commitment that came from a profound sense of self and from their obligations as internal management consultants; and (3) they trusted the new top management.

The second type of learning describes learning from experience *within a perspective* and illustrates “lower order” learning – associated with exploitation (March, 1991), with single loop learning (Argyris & Schøn, 1978), and with efficiency and alignment (Duncan, 1976). The findings show that lower order learning was an outcome of learning from the team of consultants’ experiences from the translation of the new ideas into practice – a process that produced context-specific knowledge within their professional field. In this way, the team of internal management consultants developed competence with a new mind-set or competence to be able to act from the new perspective.

Although near-consensus exists regarding the need to balance lower and higher order learning, there is considerably less clarity regarding the conditions under which that balance can be achieved. Lower order learning leads to the more efficient use of existing competence within an existing logic of action, but runs the risk of sidelining a new and more appropriate logic. Higher order learning leads to looking for new ideas, but runs the risk of not looking at them closely enough to gain full benefits of mastering them. Therefore, the two types of learning are a contradiction in terms (March, 1991).

The findings show that the learning actors, within the ecology of learners, in a way managed to balance the higher and lower order learning, and this balancing depended on the *stability* of the contextual environment for the learning process. This stability emerged through the development of temporarily situated learning context which created the temporary abandoning of “mechanistic” rules of conduct of the everyday organizational life that were related to efficiency, cost effectiveness, time pressure, time constraints, and control.

Key features of the temporarily situated learning system were commitment to norms of appropriateness, the pleasure of the process, and autonomy. The norms of appropriateness, related to mutual trust, psychological safety, and the pleasure of the process created a stable and safe contextual environment for a process that enabled a balance between higher and lower order learning. Autonomy, associated with freedom of choice, impacted the motivation to engage in knowledge sharing and created room for creativity and discretion when it came to interpreting experiences, sense making, and meaning creation. However, the temporarily situated learning system had also linkages to the formal organizational context. The last part of the management development program represented an arena that allowed experimentation and testing of the new ideas.
The outcome of the described process was: (1) based on learning from the experience of others the team of highly skilled internal management consultants a) escaped or unlearned a shared mind-set, and b) discovered the intelligence of the new mind-set; and (2) based on learning from their own experience they develop a) routines and techniques that gained them the full benefit of mastering the new mind-set, and b) competence (human capital) that made them capable of acting from the new mind-set.

Strengths and limitations
This article focuses on a change of a particular logic of action in an organization and suggests that this change illustrates organizational capability to balance conflicting demands for efficiency and alignment, on the one hand, and adaptability, on the other hand. The explorative case study offers a powerful advantage point for examining the process that generated the balance. However, the article is clearly an incomplete exploration of the conditions for such balancing, and the limitations of the empirical data invite the usual caution when interpreting the generality of the results. However, the results do suggest an outline of ideas that may enhance our understanding of how such a balance may occur. These ideas propose that the development of organizational capability to create consistency between day-to-day practices and changing demands is a process which articulates the need of balancing: (1) adaptiveness and efficiency, (2) change and stability, (3) diversity and unity, and (4) explore new or unaccepted ideas and the capacity to apply known techniques efficiently.

Organizational capability to create consistency between day-to-day practices and changing demands is described as a functional requirement for organizational survival and a critical requirement of leadership. Therefore, successful organizations are seen as having capabilities for adaptiveness, and good leaders are widely praised for their strategic use of knowledge, and for their cleverness and will to change organizations by transforming a vision into reality.

Adaptiveness can be an outcome of several different processes. One of these is learning from one’s own experience and the experience of others (Levitt & March, 1988). The dominant story emerging from the explorative field study is one of organizational learning as a vital part in organizational adaptiveness. On the one hand, organizational learning illustrated a process for monitoring the experiences of others and producing changes in thinking as a result of that monitoring, i.e., higher order learning, while on the other hand, organizational learning illustrated a process for monitoring one’s own experiences and producing changes in behavioral propensities as a result of that monitoring, i.e., lower order learning.

However, some aspects require attention. The findings show that balancing higher and lower order learning was an outcome of learning within an ecology of learners. This article, however, hardly touch the ecological intricacy of organizational

Higher order learning was an outcome of learning from the experience of others – a process in which social identification was an important aspect. Therefore, there may be reason to assume that a change based on identification will last only as long as the social relationship is important to the learning actors. Hence, a mind-set may change when a social relationship changes.

Learning from the experience of others might be associated with power. The power in organizations belongs to those who can define the reality of others and who make others accept and act on this definition. The formulation and dissemination of interpretations of reality form the bases for organizational action. A leader is equipped with the power and words for this purpose.
References