

Facilitating value co-creation in networks

An empirical analysis of business networks in Ringsted Municipality



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Ph.D. Dissertation

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Acknowledgements

In 2007, I decided that the craft of leadership was too challenging and important to be done without theoretical insights, so I signed up to study leadership fulltime for a Diploma of Leadership. But having opened the books, I couldn't close them again, and suddenly I found myself finalizing a Master of Social Science in Economics and Business at Roskilde University and on my way to a Ph.D. It has been a longer journey than expected, but it has been a good one. What have I gotten out of these years? Apart from the knowledge that I gained, I feel that the years in academia have been a personal development process: reading, reflecting, wondering, thinking, feeling challenged, frustrations, being in chaos, hoping, writing and not writing, and laughing.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Making networking efforts valuable

It is widely recognized that firms can strengthen their ability to absorb and use new knowledge by taking part in inter-organizational networks. The phenomenon of inter-organizational networking has therefore gained increasing interest among organizational scholars (Ahuja, Soda, & Zaheer, 2011; Bizzi & Langley, 2012; Ebers, 1997; Möller & Halinen, 1999). Inter-organizational networks are framed in many ways, ranging from formal contractual agreements to loosely coupled systems. The more formal settings, based on standardized agreements and commitment, are often stressed, though it can be observed that learning and sharing of knowledge often take place within more informal network relations. Both practical experience and scholarly research have made it clear that participation in inter-organizational networks can have varied effects: It can affect knowledge creation and sharing in organizations (Abrams, Cross, Lesser, & Levin, 2003); it can enhance abilities to exploit knowledge for a wide range of purposes (van Ees & Bachmann, 2006); it can support strategic objectives on topics as different as product development, mergers and acquisitions, conglomerates, and knowledge-intensive work processes (Abrams et al., 2003); it can help companies meet the need for more than one specialized competence (Huxham & Vangen, 2005). Further, networks can be platforms through which new knowledge is created (Daft & Anand, 2007); they can be a way of pooling tradable resources (Mellewigt, Hoetker, & Weibel, 2006: 5); they can foster innovation when people share their knowledge with others (Christensen & Lundvall, 2004); and they can help companies gain access to complementary resources, acquire and integrate knowledge and possibly increase their legitimacy and cause them to appear in agreement with established rules, requirements, and norms of their business environment (J. S. Brown, Durchslag, & Hagel, 2002; Zucker, 1986).

Likewise, from the business world participation in inter-organizational networks is considered a key element of business strategies (Juel, 2014; Juhl & Ruskov, 2014). For example, Stine Bosse, former CEO at Tryg, Denmark, states, *“The crucial thing about networks is to establish relations to people with whom you can discuss daily challenges”* (Juhl & Ruskov, 2014); Henrik Gürtler, CEO at Novo Nordisk A/S, advises companies to *“go for networks with a professional and deeper content. These are the ones which create value”* (Juhl & Ruskov, 2014). The practical understanding is that participation in inter-organizational networks creates value for companies by combining resources and sharing knowledge. Yet, despite widespread recognition that companies need to participate in inter-organizational networks, most companies continue to struggle with this effort, and far from all experiences are positive. Many inter-organizational networks fall short of meeting expectations of their participants. The expected value from participation fails to arise. Exactly how and when it becomes valuable to participate in inter-organizational networks is left to participants to work out for themselves.

Hence, the area of inter-organizational networks has been extensively researched (Bergenholtz & Waldstrøm, 2011; Ebers, 1997). But questions about how and when participation in inter-organizational networks creates value remain unanswered. There is no reason to believe that value of participation emerges automatically. Thus, there is a need for more research on the dynamics that shape inter-organizational networks. Further, it is clear from the literature on inter-organizational networks that scholars and practitioners have realized that networks must be managed, led, and facilitated. However, even though the facilitating and orchestrating processes have received increasing attention in the literature, the research on the processes that make participation in inter-organizational network valuable is lacking.

The purpose of this study, which is based on nearly two years of ethnographic fieldwork in inter-organizational networks, is to contribute to the understanding of how participation in inter-organizational networks becomes valuable for participants. By paying attention to the micro-processes enacted among network facilitator and participants, the study intends to contribute to knowledge about how and when participation in inter-organizational networks can create value. Thus, the aim is to collect more nuanced knowledge about how inter-organizational

networks can be used to develop organizations, as well as how the facilitator's role can be developed to further support the processes of making participation valuable. The dissertation firstly develops a conceptual model for researching inter-organizational networks. Secondly by in-depth ethnographic studies, it analyzes how networks can be facilitated. The dissertation relies on a definition of Networks as value co-creators. This extends other concepts of networks such as Networks as channels and Networks as communities (Newell, Robertson, Scarbrough, & Swan, 2009). The dissertation explores how inter-organizational networks can be a context in which resources are developed, negotiated, and evaluated as a basis for participants' value creation.

The emphasis on how value of participation in inter-organizational networks is enacted has potential for developing theory and knowledge in organizational studies and can add to the understanding of inter-organizational network studies and networks as facilitated structures. At the same time, the research contributes to practitioners' knowledge by providing some useful insights into inter-organizational network activities without avoiding the complexities but serving as a guiding framework. The study is structured by a main research question guiding the overall research addressing the learning history of the empirical phenomenon.

The question guiding the research:

How do processes of network facilitation support value co-creation in local business networks?

In order to address the research question, I have carried out ethnographic fieldwork and followed the emergence of two inter-organizational networks that empirically seemed to take the form of Networks as value co-creators.

1.2 Outline of dissertation

The dissertation is composed of ten chapters and is structured as follows.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introducing the frame for the research and states the research question

Chapter 2: The empirical research setting

This chapter gives the first introduction to the research setting and how the project came to see the light. This introductory chapter sets the scene for understanding the context for the networks of study.

Chapter 3: Reflexive interactions among network participants and facilitator

This chapter explores how inter-organizational networks are understood in the research literature in order to position the dissertation within the field of network studies. Based on Newell (Newell et al., 2009) it is argued that two major streams of literature about networking can be identified: 1) Network as channels and 2) Network as communities. The chapter explores how networks can be seen as spheres for value co-creation and draws on some insights from the Service-Dominant (S-D) Logic to explain this. The chapter presents how networking efforts can be facilitated as a way to make participation valuable.

Chapter 4: Studying reflexive interactions in a framework of symbolic interactionism

This chapter explains how and why symbolic interactionism offers a solid perspective for empirical studies with a focus toward examining, understanding, and attempting to explain empirical phenomena in concrete social situations. The chapter includes a review and outline of the main concepts of symbolic interactionism with relevance for this particular study. Further, it points toward and discusses implications for studying the empirical phenomena of inter-organizational networks in this particular theoretical frame.

Chapter 5: Research methodology

This chapter describes how a reflexive and interpretive approach has been applied in order to meet the methodological implications for studying inter-organizational networks in a frame of symbolic interactions. Thereafter, the research design is explained, in particular the data collection methods and the data analysis. Finally, the chapter picks up on some reflections and validation of experiences and empirical data throughout the project.

Chapter 6: Network 1: CSR Network and Chapter 7: Network 2: Network for managing directors

Empirically the dissertation is centred round two ethnographic narratives that unfold in Chapters 6 and 7. These chapters set the scene for coming analysis and discussion and are the main body of the dissertation. The basic idea of the two chapters is to show how participants and facilitator in the networks engage in reflexive interactions while showing how the engagement in inter-organizational networks is a challenging affair.

The dissertation investigates the emergence of the following two networks:

- Network 1: CSR network
- Network 2: Network for managing directors

Each network is seen as having its own processes based on participant engagement, purpose, etc. It is narratives of these processes that I turn to in the narratives where it is explored how ongoing reflexive interactions among network participants and facilitator have the potential of making participation valuable. However, as we shall see in each chapter, collaboration in the networks is a challenging affair of negotiation, validating, and changing meanings. The ethnographic narratives include first abstractions and analysis.

Chapter 8: Network roller coast journey oscillating between imaginative and proper conceptualization of value

This chapter analyzes and discusses the networking efforts in the two networks. It applies the concept of “imaginative value” (Beckert, 2011) to explain the oscillating behaviors observed in the two networks, also considered an emotional roller coaster ride. Further, the chapter discusses the similarities and the differences of the networks and summarizes cross case learning.

Chapter 9: Elaborating the understanding of networks and facilitating processes

This chapter is a theoretical discussion of the findings. It discusses the understanding of networks and extend the understanding of networks by adding a fourth phases to Eide & Fuglsangs (2013) three scaffolding structures. Further, the supporting activities, and thus the role of the facilitator, is extended and rephrased as a socializing facilitator. It is discussed how the facilitator has a role in making the networking roller coaster journey less curvy and loopy. It extends Dhanaraj & Parkhe’s (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006) and Gausdal & Nielsen’s (Gausdal & Nilsen, 2011) theoretical understanding of the facilitator.

Chapter 10: Concluding remarks and perspectives

This concluding chapter revisits the research questions and posits answers to it. It addresses the premise of the dissertation and describes how networks can be understood as collaborative framework for value co-creation. The chapter also elaborates on the implications of applying the framework of symbolic interactionism to the study of the two business networks. Furthermore, it is discussed how boundary objects and trust are phenomena with importance for processes of value co-creation in inter-organizational networks. Finally, it points out some limitations, future perspectives, and practical implications of the study.

2 The empirical research setting

In the following I present a brief narrative to give a feeling of what kind of a local environment the Ph.D. project is situated in. This is not without interest because the scene hints at key characteristics that framed the networks. The entry is not just an entry into any given setting; it is an entry into a particular set of businesses, relations, work practices, established meanings, and given ways of doing things, etc. While the following, based on reflections written down in my logbook, provides insight into the area where networks are developed, it is worth repeating that it is the micro dynamics that take place in the networks that are of interest in the dissertation as such.

2.1 Exploring the empirical setting for the first time

Driving down A20 from Copenhagen, I wonder how the next three years will be and what challenges I will meet. Turning off A20 at junction 36, one of the first sights is Premier Outlet. The outlet was built five years ago and symbolizes to some extent the new parts and trends of Ringsted. Getting closer to Ringsted City Center, the buildings are older and more traditional, but some of them also empty. I park next to the Church of Sct. Bendt, considered to be one of Denmark's architecturally finest churches. It houses the tombs of some of Denmark's earlier monarchs and noblemen. Valdemar the Great, King Valdemar II, Queen Dagmar, and Erik Menved. Next to the church is Ringsted Town Hall, designed by the famous Danish architect Steen Ejler Rasmussen. This is the heart of

Picture 2.1: Ringsted from above



Picture 2.2: Ringsted Premier Outlet



Ringsted, and my base for the next three years. From my office in the Town Hall I have a direct view to Sct. Bendt Church. Upstairs at the other end of the building, the Mayor has his office allowing him to follow the life in the City Center from the view of his window. Ringsted is a city filled with traditions and a long history. Looking out of my office window, toward Sct. Bendt Church, I can sense the history all around me. A history telling about a proud city with old traditions. Ringsted is a city where the old established citizens and the newly arrived residents live together and at the same time are very much apart. It is also a story about a fast-growing city that got hit by recession. Postgården with its grace, situated just opposite the town hall, tells of former days of wealth. Today it is half-empty, underlining the point that Ringsted is a part of “peri-urban Denmark”. But at the same time, there is also a story of a municipality that changed the ways of working with the businesses by starting to involve them in creating local politics. Despite traditions, empty streets, and a tightknit citizenship, I am warmly welcomed by business managers and invited to participate and join ongoing discussions. The discussions are very much run by “the Old Guard” of Ringsted, and there is a distinct absence of the larger companies. This is the research setting for the next three years – an interesting city with traditions but with a wish of finding new paths for the future.

Picture 2.3: Sct. Bendts Church and Ringsted Town Hall



Picture 2.4: City Council meeting room



Picture 2.5: Postgården - Old Post Office



I wouldn't exactly say that I felt like an intruder when I entered Ringsted Municipality for the first time, but I did feel like an explorer. Not only had I never been in Ringsted before, but also I was employed to go searching for new knowledge in regards to inter-organizational networks as a mean of local business development activities. It wasn't that I was on a mission of doing traditional and solitude anthropological work, but I was on a journey in which I wanted to become a participative observant, getting under the skin of people participating in inter-organizational networks that were emerging in Ringsted as a means of local business development activities. I have set out to empirically explore the ongoing processes of making participation in a network valuable, paying attention toward activities enacted among network facilitator and participant in two networks. Shortly, I could say, that when setting up the networks, Ringsted Municipality aimed to create a sphere where participants could collaborate and work together by contributing with their knowledge and creative ideas. Creating the networks was a balance, ensuring that participants could meet their own interests and create value with relevance for their daily practice and at the same time meeting the wider goals as a means of local business development activity in Ringsted Municipality. Critically, from the perspective of this study, networks are more than knots or structures that connect companies; they are "working relations" in which participants in the networks meet in order to develop and discuss topics of mutual interest. Activities are focused toward problem-oriented topics for the primary use of sharing and developing knowledge with relevance for participants' practices. How the specific networks emerged is a narrative I will detail in Chapters 5 and 6. It is an ethnographic narrative based on approximately two years of observations, informal talks, 40 interviews, and 120 pages of logbook notes, resulting in thick ethnographic descriptions of reflexive interactions among network facilitator and participants.

2.2 Ringsted Municipality

As you know by now, the project takes its departure in Ringsted Municipality. Ringsted is a medium-sized Danish municipality with approximately 33,000 residents situated in the middle of Zealand. Ringsted is characterized by a broad industrial structure with many small- and medium-sized companies. The Business Development Department, with whom I was engaged, has four employees who advise local companies on issues concerning entrepreneurship, business start-up, business boards, mentors, leadership, business development, legal advice, networking, knowledge sharing, etc. The department has routines and rhetoric of the consultancy industry, referring to employees as consultants/advisers and communicates its mission in terms of “developing and connecting local capacity”. The work of the business consultants is knowledge intensive and diverse, and they are required to have knowledge about business development (e.g., dealing with local governments, partnership building, and management), advisory skills, and thematic knowledge in specific areas (e.g., local governance, tourism, etc.).

Even though the issue of making participation valuable when participating in inter-organizational networks is a challenging affair, the inter-organizational network perspective has emerged as a feature for local business development in Danish municipalities. So, in order to develop new, broader, and more sustainable local business development activities, Ringsted Municipality decided to go searching for new knowledge about inter-organizational network by taking initiative to present Ph.D. project.

2.3 How the networks saw the light

To understand why Ringsted Municipality in 2011 decided to create a new direction for their local business activities and develop networks as a mean of local business development, we shortly have to visit past activities of local business development.

In 2006, management of Ringsted Municipality in collaboration with Ringsted Erhvervsforum¹ initiated three formalized working groups, each covering a specific topic: city development, entrepreneurship, and education. Each of the three working groups had participation from members of Ringsted Erhvervsforum, such as local businesses, educational institutions, and various municipality actors. All three topics of the working groups were aimed at local issues with the goal of integrating existing dispersed knowledge – and also an aim, as the former business development manager of Ringsted Municipality described it,

“To let the companies be heard and keep participating actors happy” (Interview: Former business development manager)

In many ways these three working groups seemed to do the job of “letting the companies be heard”. From a political point of view, this way of organizing the local business development activities was accepted and recognized as positive way of executing the obligatory local business development activities, and the town mayor at the time told me how he experienced the activities:

“What we created in 2006 with Ringsted Erhvervsforum has shown to be just right” (Interview: Town Mayor)

Thus, from 2006 until 2011 the local business development activities in Ringsted were dominated by this workgroup structure where participants in the small boards generated ideas and presented them to the municipality. Consultants from the Business Development Department would then pick up and work with the ideas as long as they fitted the current local

¹ Ringsted Erhvervsforum is an association for businesses in Ringsted Municipality. Membership fees are allocated to pay for the organizing of member meetings and activities. Employees at Business Development Department

politics. One could say that business development activities were one-sided, with a focus on developing the municipality instead of the businesses.

In spring 2011, board members of Ringsted Erhvervsforum and consultants from the Business Development Department started a discussion of how to develop a different focus for local business development, and they presented an initiative to explore the possibility of supporting interaction among local businesses based on some kind of inter-organizational network perspective. This new direction symbolized a shift in the understanding of local business development activities, which previously was formed in a direction of “What can the local businesses do to develop the municipality?” to a direction that implicitly framed a focus toward local business activities as a mean to develop the local businesses.

Ringsted Municipality decided to develop its knowledge about networking as a prioritized way of doing local business development. This was my opportunity to join an organization and emphasize research toward organizing practices in relation to establishing networks. One of the major challenges about applying this new direction was not only a lack of knowledge toward the (larger) companies in the municipality, but also how the inter-organizational networks should be conducted in more practical turns, and which topics and segments to focus toward.

In August 2011, when I engaged with Ringsted Municipality, I entered the discussions of a new direction with a focus toward networks. When I joined the municipality, it was not yet decided which kind of perspective should be taken toward developing inter-organizational networks or even who should participate and how the networks should be facilitated. Though one thing was sure, the networking activities should be considered as a part of the local business development activities. To do this, Ringsted Municipality wanted to develop the new activities by looking through the eyes of a researcher and in an ongoing process along with the research project gains knowledge about how inter-organizational networks could become valuable as a means of local business development (see appendix 1). The two networks that the research takes its departure from are 1) a network organized round the topic of CSR, and 2) a network for managing directors from larger businesses.

3 Reflexive interactions among network participants and facilitator

Research on inter-organizational network has been growing over the past many years (Ahuja, Soda, & Zaheer, 2011; Bizzi & Langley, 2012; Ebers, 1997; Möller & Halinen, 1999). As already described, scholarly research generally shows that inter-organizational networks in various forms affect knowledge creation and sharing in organizations, facilitate access to valuable ideas and knowledge, and can be more cost-effective than in-house development of innovations (Abrams et al., 2003). The importance of inter-organizational networks is acknowledged by practitioners (Juel, 2014; Juhl & Ruskov, 2014) as well in academic literature (Doz, 1996).

3.1 Structure of the chapter

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. Firstly, it explores how inter-organizational networks are understood in the research literature in order to position the dissertation within the field of network studies. Based on Newell (Newell et al., 2009) it is argued that two major streams of literature about networking can be identified: 1) *Network as channels* and 2) *Network as communities*. However, these say little about how networks are dynamically formed and create value for participants. Consequently, the chapter explores how networks can be seen as spheres for value co-creation. It draws on some insights from the Service-Dominant (S-D) Logic to explain this. Third, the chapter explores how networking efforts can be facilitated as a way to make participation valuable.

3.2 Inter-organizational network

Several disciplines have contributed to the field of network studies, for example, organizational economics, industrial marketing and purchasing, organizational sociology, game theory,

institutional theory, and social network theory. Research from the different fields has produced distinct explanations of inter-organizational network that partly overlap and partly compete (Bergenholtz & Waldstrøm, 2011; Borch & Arthur, 1995; Huxham, 2003; Mandell & Keast, 2009). The fragmented literature reflects the multifaceted character of inter-organizational networks. Reviewing the network perspective is challenging because there seems to be little agreement over the usage of terms such as organizational networks (Bergenholtz & Waldstrøm, 2011; Huxham, 2003; Mønsted, 2011), cooperation (Doménech & Davies, 2011; M. Levin, 1993), collaboration (Abramson & Rosenthal, 1995; Fjeldstad, Snow, Miles, & Lettl, 2012; Huxham, 2003; Jassawalla & Sashittal, 1998; Thomson, 2006), network (Bergenholtz & Waldstrøm, 2011; Murdoch, 2000; Obstfeld, 2005), joined-up arrangements (C. Huxham, Vangen, & Eden, 2000; M. P. Mandell & Keast, 2011), partnership (Johannisson & Ramírez-pasillas, 2010; Span, Luijckx, Schols, & Schalk, 2011; Thomson, 2006), alliance (Das, 2001; Doz, 1996; Todeva & Knoke, 2005), collaborative communities of firms (Bøllingtoft, Donaldson, Huber, Håkonsson, & Snow, 2012), social networks (Burt, 2004; Obstfeld, 2005) and inter-organizational relations (Bachmann & Inkpen, 2011; Borch & Arthur, 1995; Ellis & Ybema, 2010; Huxham, 2003; Wehner, Clases, & Bachmann, 2000). Due to these difficulties, this brief review is grounded therefore in some major perspectives that can be found in the literature and draws on Newell et al (2009). Newell et al divides the theoretical positions into two major theoretical approaches: 1) ***Networks as channels*** and 2) ***Networks as communities*** (Newell et al., 2009, p. 165+166).

- 1) ***Networks as channels*** (Newell et al., 2009, p. 165) is a network approach that we find in social network analysis in which the connections and channels between network-actors are studied as well as their impact on the actors' ability to gain knowledge and information. This approach has been extended to more strategic, behavioral studies of how people can be dynamically connected by connecting disconnected individuals or facilitating new coordination between connected individuals (Newell et al., 2009). Organizations can be interconnected with other organizations through a wide array of social and economic relationships, each of which can constitute a social network. Newell et al argue that this perspective of inter-organizational networks builds on an understanding that actions are

embedded in social networks of relations (Newell et al., 2009). Network relations are defined as a set of nodes (e.g., persons or organizations) linked by a set of ties in a rather static and passive way, with some exceptions. You can argue that the structural network theory is occupied with ties (Capaldo, 2007; Granovetter, 1973) and structural holes (Burt, 2004). Burt (Burt, 2004) describes how structural holes can be considered the absence of ties between companies. Berends et al define networks as *“a set of actors and the set of ties between them representing their relationships”* (Berends, van Burg, & van Raaij, 2010: 941), and show by this definition their structural understanding of inter-organizational networks. These theoretical understandings are considered helpful when wanting to describe why companies engage in inter-organizational networks and the structures that influence the formation of networks (Berends et al., 2010; Burt, 2004; Obstfeld, 2005; W. W. Powell, 1990; W. Powell & White, 2005; Provan, Fish, & Sydow, 2007). Within this approach, the network facilitator’s role is often defined as a knowledge broker and/or boundary spanner (Boardman, 2011; Macaulay et al., 2012).

- 2) **Networks as communities** (Newell et al., 2009, p. 166) is an approach that studies how networks can be a context for learning. Networks are seen as drivers of knowledge and learning. The attention is toward shared practice that makes it possible to study how participants share knowledge, even when tacit. Within the understanding of Networks as communities, focus is toward interactions within the inter-organizational networks. This understanding comes forth in the work of Swan et al. (Swan, Scarbrough, & Robertson, 2002), who pay attention to and try to grasp the interrelatedness of processes that support collaboration in an inter-organizational network. They argue that networks where partners with different backgrounds and interest are dependent on one another leads to innovation and define innovation as a process *“that occurs through relationships that are negotiated in an ongoing communicative process, and which relies on neither market nor hierarchical mechanisms of control”* (Swan & Scarbrough, 2005, p. 916). These kinds of studies of inter-organizational networks also emphasize that such networks are *“slower to grow”* (Newell et al., 2009, p. 169) because it takes time to attain sharing of goal. Newell et al. draw on

Wenger (Wenger, 1998) when trying to explain how these kinds of inter-organizational networks should be cultivated rather than controlled and at the same time agree with other writers who insist on finding new ways of managing *Networks as communities* (Newell et al., 2009, p. 174).

In the context of this dissertation, it is problematic that both approaches described by Newell et al as Networks as channels and Networks as communities have difficulties in explaining how value is dynamically created in networks. Both approaches could be seen as stressing the value of networking, but not how value is formed and created within the networks. The Network as channels approach shows how networks are valuable to actors by strengthening their access to knowledge and information. The Network as communities approach explains how networks are valuable in terms of learning. But neither stresses how value is created within networks. While both network approaches show how information and learning are adopted and absorbed within the networks, neither pays attention to the whole process of value formation within the inter-organizational network, i.e., the creation and co-creation of value. There is a rareness of research exploring the underlying dynamics that form and support the process of value co-creation. I argue there is a need for an understanding of inter-organizational network that emphasizes how participation in inter-organizational network becomes valuable for participants, and could be named ***Networks as value co-creators***.

Often participation in inter-organizational network is perceived as interesting, but not specifically related to how participation becomes valuable, and often it can be hard to describe the value gained from participation. The approach of Networks as value co-creators provides an opportunity to overcome the split between participation in networks as something interesting and to actually make participation valuable and meaningful for participants.

To make a clearer conceptualization of Networks as value co-creators there is a need to unfold the notion of value and define how value is created and emerges over time. When starting the study, attention was primarily toward the literature of inter-organizational networks. However, this literature did not contribute to the question of how value is enacted in the networks. Thus, I

started to look at literature that paid attention to the meeting between actors when wanting to create value. To develop the approach I draw on some insights from the Service Dominant (S-D) Logic literature about value co-creation, complemented with Grönroos & Voima's concept of joint value creation sphere. By gaining knowledge on how value is created, the study furthers the discussion within the literature of inter-organizational network.

3.3 Unfolding value co-creation

The field of (S-D) Logic has an interest in how provider and customer meet and interact to co-create value. I might not be discussing the provider – customer relation, but the stream of literature gives a possibility to unfold the meeting where value is developed. First, I shortly visit the (S-D) Logic to define how value can be understood and secondly, I unfold how value emerges in the meeting between provider and customer in a value sphere.

The notion of value has gained considerable attention in the (S-D) Logic literature and has often been related to the outcome of an activity which implied an interaction between customer and a product or service, and limited the value concept into measureable dimensions (Vargo & Lusch, 2007). Vargo & Lusch note the traditional view on value is making sure that the customer is better off (Grönroos, 2008; Vargo & Lusch, 2007). Recently, traditional views of value and value creation have been under revision (Grönroos, 2011; Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Voima, Heinonen, & Strandvik, 2010). The (S-D) Logic literature has experienced a transformation in starting to take an interest in concepts that did not naturally fit into the economic approach of the field and emphasizing the interaction between the provider and the customer as the locus of value creation (Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Plé & Cáceres, 2010; Vargo & Lusch, 2007; Voima et al., 2010).

Within this stream of literature value is defined in the following ways:

- Vargo and Lusch argue that value is defined as a judgment *“always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary”* (Vargo & Lusch, 2007, p. 9).
- Grönroos and Voima takes a phenomenological view toward value and says *“value creation is the customer’s creation of value-in-use during usage, where value is socially constructed through experiences”* (Grönroos & Voima, 2013, p. 137). Grönroos & Voima argue that customer value is not embedded in products. It emerges in customers’ individual value-generating process as value-in-use and is not a customizable and exchangeable offer but rather the customers’ process of extracting value from the integration of resources (Grönroos & Voima, 2013).
- While the customer is the one that creates value, the provider’s role is to offer resources that are used by the customer to create value. The provider can make value-propositions to the customer and co-create value, but ultimately value is created by the customer when using resources offered by the provider (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011).
- Echeverri & Skålén take an interaction view on value and argue that value is co-created during the interaction between the provider and the customer. They claim that *“value can never be reduced to monetary evaluation; rather it is a function of an individual’s articulated set of preferences”* (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011, p. 353)

Input from the above points toward how value is co-created in a social setting based on interactions and takes into account the meeting between customers and providers where they mutually enact processes of value formation. They emphasize value as experiences the customer develops with the service provider and as an on-going process that emerges over time through experiences during usages (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011; Grönroos & Voima, 2013). Value is therefore perceived and determined by the customer on the basis of “value-in-use”, where value is created in use and it is the whole activity and experience of in-use that is interesting opposed to “value-in-exchange” where people and firms add value to products in the production processes (Grönroos & Voima, 2013).

Vargo and Lusch suggest that there is now a critical mass in this “new” research sufficient to recognize it as a paradigm shift in marketing away from microeconomics and ideas of value as being created in transactions (Vargo & Lusch, 2007). This stream has continued to receive extensive research interest. It has meant a focus toward the role of interaction and co-creation of value, which is considered a social process where participants are involved in processes of mutual interest, even though they have different roles. The stream is in particular promoted by Grönroos & Voima, Vargo & Lusch and Echeverri & Skålén (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011; Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Vargo & Lusch, 2007) who establish a perspective toward value formation as not being bound to rational production processes, but toward processes as being more relational, fluid, and intangible. It develops a shift from products and firms as units of analysis toward social actions and relations as ongoing processes. Grönroos & Voima, Vargo & Lusch and Echeverri & Skålén argue for an understanding of the processual nature of value creation where firm, network partners, and customers co-create value.

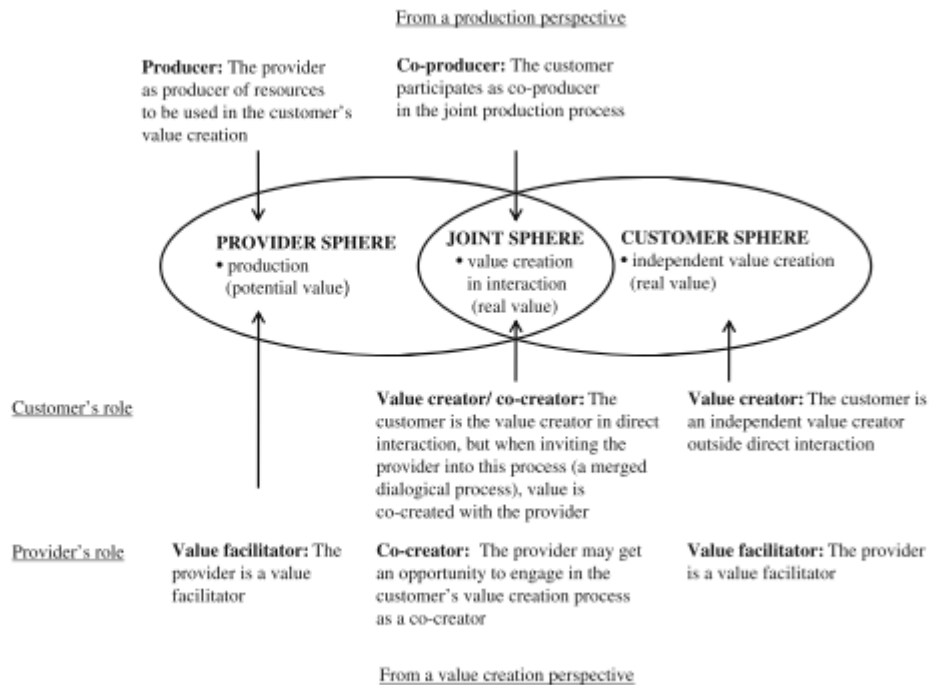
Echeverri and Skålén’s concept of interactive value formation implies the shift from the static understanding of value and explains the practice of co-creation and co-destruction and attention toward the processes where *“providers co-create services and products in collaboration with their customers”* (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011, p. 353). Echeverri and Skålén explain how the concept of value formation can be broken down in two intertwined processes value co-creation and value co-deconstruction (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011). Furthermore, they argue that when providers’ and customers’ engagement is congruent, value co-creation will be the outcome, and when it is incongruent, they provide value co-destruction (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011). They point toward how these processes influence how actors balance procedures and engagement, and what actors are able to achieve collectively (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011).

Grönroos and Voima point toward how value formation should be considered a mutual process that involves firms and customers in which competencies and knowledge are exchanged to support the value perceived by the customers (Grönroos, 2011; Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Vargo & Lusch, 2007).

3.4 Engaging in a joint sphere of value co-creation

The understanding of value co-creation as an interactive among provider and customer invokes a shift in the dominant understanding of the provider toward a position of the provider as expected to be *“facilitating interactive processes that support customers’ value creation in their everyday practice”* (Grönroos, 2008, p. 300). This approach has an interest in how customers and producers interact and combine resources, and how they collaborate in an ongoing way to create value (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011; Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Vargo & Lusch, 2007). In order to co-create value, the provider needs to interact with the customer to experience which dynamics foster the customers value creating processes (Grönroos & Voima, 2013), hence, engage in mutual learning processes with the customer. Normally the customer’s value creating process is considered as not accessible to the provider though Grönroos & Voima suggest a view in which customers and provider meet in a joint sphere where co-creation of value between the firm and the customer becomes possible (Grönroos & Voima, 2013). Grönroos & Voima distinguish among three value spheres: a provider sphere, a joint sphere, and a customer sphere, illustrated in the following Figure 3.1. This provides us with knowledge about how value-in-use emerges and how it can be managed (Grönroos & Voima, 2013). In the traditional view, the provider has ignored the customer sphere and the creation of value-in-use. By the theorizing of Grönroos & Voima, the advantages of accessing the customer’s sphere and meeting in a joint sphere have been recognized.

Figure: 3.1: Value creation spheres



Source: Grönross & Voima, 2013

Within the provider sphere there is as such no interaction between customer and provider, and activities in this sphere only potentially creates value for the customer. Similarly, within the customer sphere, the value creation is independent of the provider and the provider plays as passive role.

In contrast, the joint sphere involves direct interaction between customer and provider, and interactions form a platform on which value can be co-created. Even though interactions take place, it doesn't necessarily lead to co-creation, but it becomes possible. Interaction in the joint sphere describes the merger of provider and customer into a coordinated process in which both parties are active and capable of influencing each other's processes (Grönroos & Voima, 2013). The joint sphere is dynamic. The provider has the opportunity to join the sphere, create opportunities for interaction, and enable value co-creation. This moves the two separate

spheres closer to each other and increases the joint sphere as illustrated above in 3.1. Grönroos and Voima argue that interaction should be considered a process where potential value co-creation can take place. They argue:

“The customer is in charge of value creation in the joint sphere, but through the dialogical process of direct interaction, the provider may influence the customer’s value creation process and serve as a co-creator” (Grönroos & Voima, 2013, p. 141)

Developing an understanding of Networks as value co-creators with theoretical input from the (S-D) Logic can help us to formulate a theoretical model. In this model, value in a network is co-created through ongoing interactions between a network facilitator (provider) and participants (customers) within a joint network sphere. The network consists of other participants who contribute to the co-creation of value. The network acts as co-creator in relation to the individual participant by developing resources that can be used by the participant in her practice, but it is up to the participant to create value based on the resources made available by the network. Yet, through co-creation these resources can be made available to the participant in a relevant way. The understanding of value co-creation between network and network participant can be used to analyze the ongoing processes of making participation in inter-organizational networks valuable as dependent on the interaction of the network facilitator and the participants as belonging to both different and common spheres.

Even though the (S-D) Logic literature provides us with a comprehensive understanding of how value is co-created in a joint sphere among network facilitator and participants, it does not give us an understanding of how the facilitator can have an active role in supporting the interaction needed in order to create value. In order to expand our knowledge about the role of the facilitator, the following section starts with a short overview of the literature describing the leadership role within inter-organizational network.

3.5 Managing inter-organizational networks as joint spheres

In the literature, it is explicit how management of inter-organizational networks is considered a difficult affair because networks are complex (Human & Provan, 2000; Mønsted, 2011). However, despite the popularity of inter-organizational network, the leadership of these is still an understudied topic (Ebers, 1997; Ring & van de Ven, 1994). This lack of research is challenging because it is well-recognized that inter-organizational networks are difficult to develop and manage (Human & Provan, 2000; Mønsted, 2011) and that they need a facilitator to provide administrative services and to keep focus because *"[...] networks are not self-organizing entities but groups of people that need shepherds"* (Sotarauta, 2010). There is an accepted view that network failure often is related to poor management (Ebers, 1997; Kenis, Provan, & Kruijen, 2009; Ring & van de Ven, 1994).

In the literature on inter-organizational networks there are multiple notions of leadership, or facilitating role. Just to mention a few: orchestrator (Brown et al., 2002; Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006; Nilsen & Gausdal, 2012), go-between (Nooteboom, 1999), facilitator (Agterberg, Van Den Hooff, Huysman, & Soekijad, 2010; M. Mandell & Keast, 2009), broker (Macaulay et al., 2012), service provider (Bøllingtoft et al., 2012), manager (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001; Möller & Halinen, 1999; Mønsted, 2011), leader (Ospina & Saz-Carranza, 2010; Sotarauta, 2010), boundary spanner (Boardman, 2011), administrator (Human & Provan, 2000). These various notions not only cover different ways of phrasing the role but different ways of considering what the facilitating role consists of. In other words, the roles of the facilitator are many and vary with the approach and understanding of the inter-organizational network.

Mandell & Keast argue that network facilitators are a necessity for facilitating, supporting, and coordinating relations (Mandell & Keast, 2009). Nilsen & Gausdal emphasize that orchestrators have the task of building trust among participants and encourage participants by facilitating the dynamic process among organizations entangled in multiple ever-changing value-creating actions (Gausdal & Nilsen, 2011; Nilsen & Gausdal, 2012). In their study of a hub-firm as orchestrator, Dhanaraj & Parkhe describe how the orchestrator must be competent when

managing knowledge mobility, innovation appropriability, and network stability. At the same time, the orchestrator in the process of establishing the inter-organizational network must pay attention to knowledge about industries, companies, and products that are important to establishing links across businesses (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006). For Nooteboom the role of the go-between is related to revelation, spill-over control, and the management of trust (Nooteboom, 1999). Dhanaraj & Parkhe and Nooteboom argue that a necessary part of the role is building and maintaining effective personal relationships (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006; Nooteboom, 1999). Agterberg et al describe how the role as facilitator is designed to facilitate coordination, manage complexity, and improve collaboration form, and efficiency (Agterberg et al., 2010). Human and Provan (Human & Provan, 2000) discuss the need for building legitimacy, building trust, and managing conflicts in multi-lateral network. They describe how the manager needs knowledge of corporate roles, responsibilities, challenges, culture, professional norms, and standards. This is necessary so the network manager can identify common interests, opportunities, and dependencies, and the task is primarily to support the participants' activities (Human & Provan, 2000). Fuglsang and Scheuer (Macaulay et al., 2012) describe the broker role as one that binds and establishes relations in a formalized role with an effort toward coordinating, maintaining, introducing and facilitating relations among parties.

A great deal of the research explores what can be called management activities. These activities are related to planning, organizing, and control, and they are mainly oriented toward the structures and form (Herranz, 2006; Ospina & Saz-Carranza, 2010). This understanding is very explicit in the work by Human & Provan, who argue that the role of the network administrator can be compared with the lead organization model where all activities and decisions are coordinated through one organization (Human & Provan, 2000). In this understanding the network administrator is not as involved in discussions as in facilitating the processes (Human & Provan, 2000).

The more recent conceptualizations emphasize what can be framed as “leadership” and pays attention toward processes of interaction (Agterberg et al., 2010; Gausdal & Nilsen, 2011). These newer perspectives consider the facilitating role as one that emphasizes the collective

achievements rather than the thoughts of individuals and a role that facilitates activities stressing *“the collective constructions that emerge and shape actions”* (Ospina & Saz-Carranza, 2010: 406). These contributions are presumably the ones that offer the most relevant knowledge when seeking to analyze how value can be supported and facilitated in Networks as value co-creators. What seems to be needed is a strong focus toward the ongoing processes of negotiating and changing meaning, processes where value becomes explicit to participants, and processes in which the facilitator and participants engage mutually. Though what seems to be important knowledge from the above is that the facilitation role should include:

- Engagement in collaborative, interactive processes
- Support the negotiation of meaning
- Facilitate trusting relations

To dig even deeper into the conceptualization of Networks as value co-creators, I continue to unfold the three above-mentioned points of attention for understanding the facilitation role, and supplement with theoretical inputs about collaboration, boundary objects and trust.

3.6 Collaboration

For value co-creation in inter-organizational network to take place, there seems to be a need for some kind of commitment among network participants and the facilitator to collaborate; hence, they must do more than just meeting and spending time together. Value co-creation in networks seems to require actual collaboration within the joint sphere. Collaboration is derived from Latin meaning *“the act of working with another person or group of people to create or*

*produce something*². Correspondingly, collaboration comprises a process of shared activities where facilitator and participants engage in ongoing activities. Gray argues that *“collaboration is an emergent process rather than a prescribed state of organization”* (Gray, 1989, p. 14) and Wenger et al describes how collaboration takes place when *“groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, a passion about a topic, [and who] deepen their knowledge expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis”* (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). The theoretical inputs of collaboration give a more solid basis to focus the activities in the Networks as value co-creator perspective. The joint sphere becomes more than just ongoing business interactions; it is rather a joint sphere of social interaction and collaboration. It applies a more committing perspective, which engages participants to more than just business transactions. Overall, making participation in inter-organizational networks valuable calls for a process of collaboration that involves engagement of participants to solve a problem together; it implies trust and thus takes time, effort, and dedication. Trying to broaden the understanding of what the processes of collaboration includes Ellis and Ybema describe how participation in networks is a process where *“similarities and differences are [thus] articulated and negotiated”* (Ellis & Ybema, 2010: 280). Similarly, Gray points toward the process of collaboration, as a process where

“...parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go on their own limited vision of what is possible” (Gray, 1989, p. 5)

Considering the process of collaboration, it is argued that it emerges over time as organizations interact formally and informally through repetitive sequences of negotiation, development of

² <http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/collaboration>

commitments, and execution of those commitments (Gray, 1989; Huxham & Vangen, 2005; Huxham, 2003; Ring & van de Ven, 1994; Vangen & Huxham, 2003).

So, what is pointed out in the above is for participation in inter-organizational network to become valuable you need to participate in ongoing social interaction and negotiation of meaning, both in order to develop new understanding collectively, but also to justify and identify value. Collaboration is not considered a sequential process where each party independently applies its competences. It is a more integrating and committing approach where different competences are simultaneously applied in the same process; hence, the parties can learn from one another and develop new competences. But for these collaborative activities to create value, a shared cognitive point of attention can be needed.

3.7 Boundary objects

Participants in inter-organizational networks are characterized by boundaries that exist among their different practices. The participants have different interests, display varied perceptions of the world, and are engaged in different habits, routines, and practices that make it difficult for them to communicate and share knowledge.

Boundary objects can nevertheless create a shared point of attention among the participants when they engage in a common world. Research has found that boundary objects can assist the ongoing negotiation, development, and sharing of knowledge in inter-organizational collaborations. This is well-established in the literature on knowledge sharing (Carlile, 2002; Dirckinck-Holmfeld, 2006; Nicolini, Mengis, & Swan, 2012; Star & Griesemer, 1989). Yet the concept of boundary objects does not only concern knowledge sharing, but also it can also be used to explain how actors engage within one another without a very precise idea of what this relation means to them.

The concept of boundary objects was introduced by Star and Griesemer (Star & Griesemer, 1989) to explain how actors with different background or perspectives establish a shared point

of attention during interaction (Carlile, 2002). Carlile argues that boundary objects can support the sharing of knowledge among dispersed design teams (Carlile, 2002). Boundary objects, as defined by Star and Griesemer,

“... are objects which are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites” (Star & Griesemer, 1989)

Brown and Duguid (J. Brown & Duguid, 2001) argue that boundary objects not only enable collaboration but they also promote inter-organizational negotiation among the various practices in question. Extending Carlile's (Carlile, 2002) work, Dirckinck-Holmfeld (Dirckinck-Holmfeld, 2006) found that many different types of objects can function as effective boundary objects and facilitate cross-boundary negotiations. Dirckinck-Holmfeld (2006) suggests that effective boundary objects are situational and that the effectiveness of boundary objects in facilitating negotiations is related to the aims of the negotiating participants. According to Nicolini et al. (Nicolini, Gherardi, & Yanow, 2003), knowledge creation processes emerge at the boundaries between participants; therefore, new insights must be articulated across these boundaries in a way that knowledge is understood by different participants. Carlile argues that in the knowledge transfer, each form of knowledge needs to be translated or transformed into another, and it can be used as an support in developing new knowledge (Carlile, 2002). Further Carlile refers to the boundary objects as integrating devices through which knowledge is transformed and collective learning can be achieved (Carlile, 2002). Research has examined boundary spanning capabilities of objects, as “boundary objects” and “artifacts” in various collaborative settings (Kellogg, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2006; Wenger, 2010) and describes how network participants often share a mutual purpose for participation and how this purpose shapes their joint actions.

The notion of boundary object can also be used to understand how actors engage themselves in actions without a precise idea of what this means to them. In a study of the National Innovation System, Miettinen (2002) found that boundary concepts³ can function as a “discourse-organizing concepts”. In this way, boundary concept seems to function as frame for various stakeholders to discuss the same object without having a precise understanding of the object in question. Miettinen takes his point of departure in the work of Löwy and Canguilhem, who had diverse views on boundary concepts. Miettinen explains how Löwy regards a fuzzy and imprecise term as a boundary object because it broadens the understanding of a term to something many different stakeholders can relate to and the boundary object should stay imprecise. Contrarily, Miettinen discuss how Canguilhem considers a boundary objects as something that should be simplified by more scientifically rigorous concepts in order to emphasize the understanding. Miettinen extends Löwy and Canguilhem’s work and states that boundary objects should be fuzzy, imprecise, and simplified.

We shall later see in the study of one of the networks how a boundary object was important for inclusion of actors into the network and further co-creation of value by making the object more simple and rigorous.

³ Miettinen (Miettinen, 2002) uses the notion of boundary concept but applies it and describes it in the same way as boundary object

3.8 Trusting

The trust concept is rich in meaning in everyday life, and it is a daily-used term in the descriptions of relationships among people. In the literature trust has been defined in numerous ways and is often described as a multidisciplinary, multifaceted, and multilevel phenomenon (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). Trust is considered a basic social phenomenon that is formed and developed within social relationships through repeated interaction. Organizational trust is derived from the broader trust concept but is aimed at trust relations within and between organizations.

The aim of this section is to develop a framework for understanding organizational trust as a part of the ongoing interactions in Networks as value co-creators. In the first part of this section I provide an understanding, which is explicit in the trust literature, that trust has a positive influence on a variety of outcomes in inter-organizational networks. Next, I elaborate on how trust is defined in the existing trust literature. Finally, I discuss how trust is related to the collaboration processes in inter-organizational networks.

3.8.1 Trusting in inter-organizational settings

The literature tells us that the benefits of trust in inter-organizational networks are many. The majority of the trust literature provides strong arguments that trusting relationships lead to increased knowledge sharing (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Krogh, Ichijo, & Nonaka, 2000; D. Z. Levin, Cross, Abrams, & Lesser, 2002; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). When there is trust, people are much more willing to share and to listen and absorb ideas (Mayer et al., 1995; Tsai, 2001; Zand, 1972). Trust in relationships supports dynamic organizing practice, and it facilitates collaboration in and between organizations (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Ferrin, Bligh, & Kohles, 2008; Heckscher, Adler, & Paul, 2008; Huotari, 2004; van Ees & Bachmann, 2006). Littler et al. (1995) find that the building of trust lowers both relational and competence risk in inter-organizational product development. Zaheer, McEvily, Perron (1998) found a link between inter-organizational

trust and performance. Jassawalla and Sashittal (1998) describes a positive relationship between trust and cross-functional collaboration in new product development processes. Trust has been shown to enhance knowledge transfer and to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of collaboration (Doz, 1996; Ellonen, Blomqvist, & Puumalainen, 2008; Zaheer et al., 1998). Provan & Kenis (2009) as well as Nooteboom et al. (2008) emphasize the importance of trust for collaboration. Trust is seen as a necessary precondition for sharing knowledge, for giving knowledge to the network, and for fostering good communication to get and understand knowledge from the other partners (Gilsing et al., 2008; Nooteboom, 1999).

3.8.2 Defining trusting

Trust has been conceptualized in many ways and often involves different kinds, or levels, of trust (see Rousseau et al., 1998 for a review). Möllering argues that since there is no generally accepted definition of trust, trust should be framed in regards to the context studied:

“In particular, as long as there is no single, generally accepted and universally applicable definition of trust and its concomitant constructs, researchers will adapt their scales and methods to the specific conceptualization of trust that they favor or to the individual context they study” (Möllering, 2006, p. 139).

The various definitions of trust are based on the researcher’s disciplinary focus. In order to define trust within this study, some of the most-cited definitions of trust are presented in the following Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Trust definitions

Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, 1995	<i>“Trust is the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectations that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control the other party” (Mayer et al., 1995)</i>
Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998	<i>“Trust is a psychological state compromising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intention or behaviors of another” (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 395)</i>
Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998	<i>“...define trust in terms of confident positive expectations regarding another’s conduct” (Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998, p. 439)</i>
Maguire and Philips, 2008	<i>“...define trust as the expectation that some other will act with predictability and benevolence” (Maguire & Phillips, 2008, p. 374)</i>
Möllering, 2001	<i>“Trust can be imagined as the mental process of leaping – enabled by suspension – across the gorge of the unknowable from the land of interpretation into the land of expectation” (Möllering, 2001, p. 412)</i>
Bachmann and Inkpen, 2011	<i>“The concept of institutional-based trust refers to the phenomenon that individuals or collective actors develop trust in the face of specific institutional arrangements in the business environment” (Bachmann & Inkpen, 2011, p. 284)</i>

As it comes forth in the above Table 3.1 there are a number of definitions and conceptualizations of trust, though most definitions seems to have a common conceptual core linked to two key dimensions: 1) *positive expectation*, which refers to perceptions, beliefs, or expectations about the trustee’s intentions and 2) *vulnerability*, which refers to an intention or a decision to take risk and to depend on the trustee.

These two key dimensions have not only appeared within the above-mentioned trust definitions, but across various references in the trust literature: (Bachmann & Inkpen, 2011; Blomqvist & Snow, 2010; Dietz & Hartog, 2006; Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Ellonen et al., 2008; Jagd,

2008; Kramer & Lewicki, 2010; Lewicki et al., 1998; Luhmann, 1979; Maguire & Phillips, 2008; Mayer et al., 1995; Mayer, Schoorman, & Davis, 2007; Möllering, 2006; Rousseau et al., 1998).

In Zaheer's book Möllering argues:

"When actors involved in an exchange share a set of expectations constituted in social rules and legitimate processes, they can trust each other with regard to the fulfillment and maintenance of those expectation. By the same token, actors can only trust those others with whom they share a particular set of expectations. Either way, trust hinges on the actors' natural ability to have a world in common with other and rely on it" (Zaheer, 2008, p. 358)

Meaning that for participants and facilitator in the networks to trust one another, there needs to be a shared set of expectations that are drivers for their ongoing interactions in order to have a "world in common". Möllering suggests that trust should be studied as a process because trust it is not a static object but an ever changing phenomenon. Thus, he argues that it may be more fruitful to talk about "trusting" rather than trust (Möllering, 2012). Compared to the more static views on trust, trusting implies processes of changing and negotiating in various situations. Similar to Möllering, Ferrin et al argue that trust is related to social processes and that mutual trust develops when people observe each other's verbal and non-verbal behaviors (Ferrin et al., 2008). What seems to be the case is that repeated interaction (Rousseau et al., 1998) is necessary when wanting to develop trust.

One question you can ask in relation to networks is, do you have to sit back and wait for trust to evolve, step by step, or can you actually influence the process of trust? Several emphasize the possibility of building trust relations in an organizational context (Ferrin et al., 2008; Ferrin, Dirks, & Shah, 2006; Gilsing et al., 2008; Kenis, Provan, & Kenis, 2007; Newell et al., 2009; Nooteboom, 1996). Dirks et al. argue that in contemporary dynamic business environment, organizational trust must be actively built and action taken for re-building when trust is at risk (Dirks et al., 2009). Along the same lines respectively Nooteboom and Heckscher & Adler state:

“Process trust, by definition, has to grow. It cannot be created directly, but it can be facilitated through favorable conditions for interaction and collaboration” (Nooteboom, 2002, p. 91)

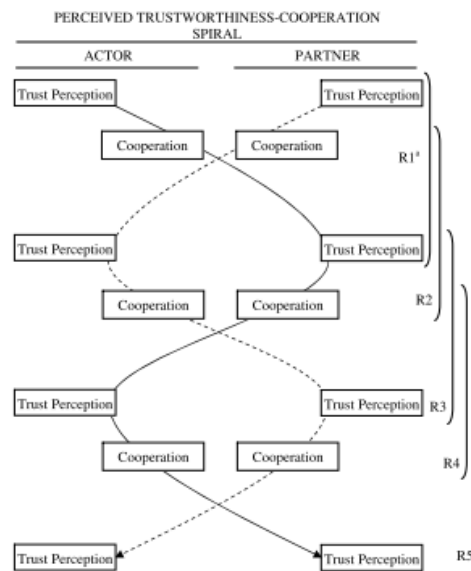
and

“Rather than emerging spontaneously from personal ties, relationships and trust are often built deliberately through organized discussions and explorations of motivations” (Heckscher et al., 2008, p. 44)

Further to that, Möllering argues that work can be done to actively develop trust instead of just waiting for trust to develop (Möllering, 2006, p. 79).

As shown below in 3.2, Ferrin et al.’s work on trust spirals finds that trust is typically strengthened as relationships unfolds.

Figure 3.2: Perceived Trustworthiness-cooperation spiral



Source: Ferrin et al., 2008, p. 2

Ferrin et al emphasize that *“trust perceptions and cooperation are intricately related in a complex dance that spirals over time and is fundamentally affected by partners’ initial moves”* (Ferrin et al., 2008, p. 15). Previous levels of trust seems to influence the following development of trust as actors mutually evaluate their counterpart’s trustworthiness, and trust perceptions become reciprocated over time (Ferrin et al., 2008). Ferrin et al. note:

“... The effect of an actor’s perception of the partner’s trustworthiness on the partner’s perception of the actor’s trustworthiness is mediated by the actor’s cooperation toward the partner. Conversely, the effect of the partner’s perception of the actor’s trustworthiness on the actor’s perception of the partner’s trustworthiness is mediated by the partner’s cooperation toward the actor” (Ferrin et al., 2008, p. 5)

Ferrin et al. argue that cooperation and perceived trustworthiness are intertwined. Perceived trustworthiness of one party will be reciprocated by another part. Perceived trustworthiness will be mediated by cooperation and vice versa. The basis of the model is that mutual trust develops when people observe each other’s verbal and non-verbal behaviors (Ferrin et al., 2008). Ferrin et al found in their study that that early stages of relationships are important for the future relationship (Ferrin et al., 2008). For the purpose of this dissertation Ferrin et al’s model explains how the level to which participant trust the facilitator it leaves imprint on the development of the level of trust in inter-organizational network. Ironically, this has attracted very little research to date. Trust seems necessary for collaborations in inter-organizational network. When understanding value as co-created among facilitator and participants, trust seems necessary if the collaborating activities are to be positive.

Within this dissertation trust is studied as a phenomenon found in relationships and as something that is enacted among participants and facilitator in networks. In the Networks as value co-creators, participants have the opportunity to *“engage in extensive signaling, communication, interaction and interpretation in order to maintain the continuous process of trust constitution”* (Möllering, 2006, p. 79). Trust is considered task-, situation-, and context-

specific, having implications for value creating interaction in networks. By focusing toward the ongoing interactions it becomes possible to describe trusting as it unfolds. Applying the processual understanding of trusting frames actions in social interactions where people develop expectations about what the others chooses to do and act according to these expectations. The processual approach provides important insights into the phenomenon of trusting in inter-organizational settings where participants interact on an ongoing basis. By exploring trust empirically I aim to contribute to the trust literature by emphasizing how trust evolves over time in ongoing interactions among network participants when developing expectation.

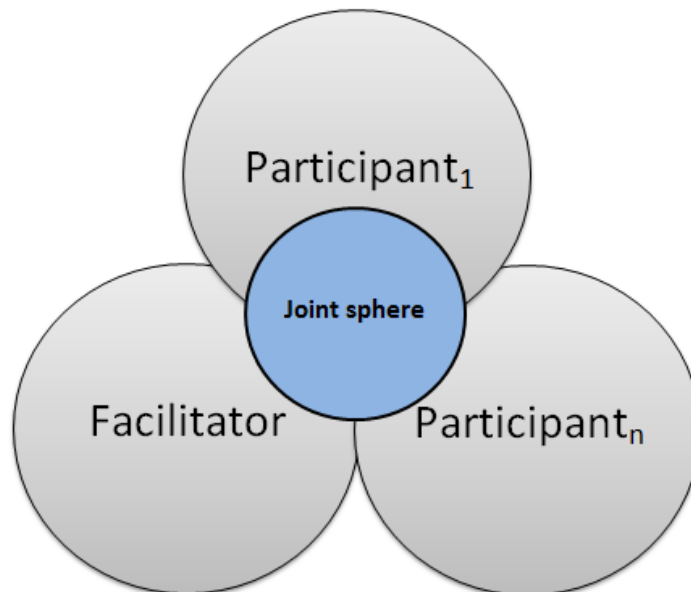
3.9 Toward a conceptual framework for studying networks

In the above sections of this chapter, I have developed a specific theoretical proposition. When putting all propositions together, I intend now to construct a research framework for studying networks. Consequently, the aim of this section is to generate a holistic theoretical framework for the research based on the previous theoretical understandings. The meaning of this framework for networks is to form the basis that will guide the empirical part of this study in order to extend our knowledge about how participation in networks becomes valuable. The Service Dominant (S-D) Logic literature has been chosen to pay attention to the interactive character of value co-creation among participants and facilitator as well as the boundaries between them. It informs my conceptualization of where and how value is created in inter-organizational networks.

Based on the inter-organizational network literature, I claim that Networks as value co-creators can extend our understanding of networks and their value for participants. In this understanding, networks are neither merely “channels” nor “communities”, but “interactions” among people coming from different spheres but joining forces in a joint sphere. The quoted marketing literature points out how a joint sphere can be conceived in which social interactions among the parties are possible. In a network context I argue that such a joint sphere is dependent on commitment to collaboration, trust, and boundary concepts.

Grönroos & Voima's conceptualization of value co-creation is a construct used in marketing and service research, but it offers an interpretation that is useful also for network research. Hence, we can consider the network facilitator as "provider" of a service and the participants as "customers". Networks as value co-creator includes a set of activities and interactions in which network participants and facilitator aim to co-create value with relevance for participants' individual practices. The following Figure 3.3 is a simplified model of the joint sphere in Networks as value co-creator approach. The circle in the middle shows the joint sphere where participants and network facilitator meet and engage in ongoing collaborative activities of value co-creation. The joint sphere is a sphere with changing expectations and activities, due to the relatedness to participant's individual practices.

Figure: 3.3: The joint sphere of Networks as value co-creators



Source: own creation

For inter-organizational network to become valuable for participants, the co-created value must be meaningful for the participants, which implies that it must in some sense be relevant for the

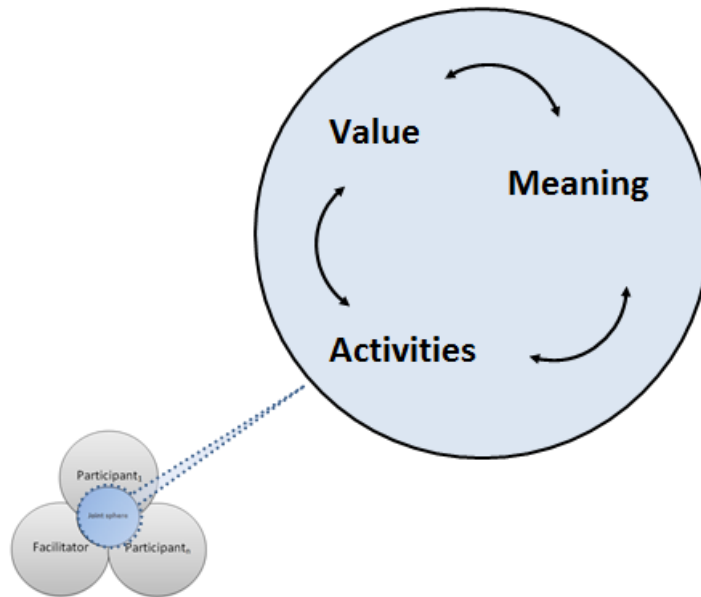
participants' own value creation. But the network can influence what the participant considers meaningful. For example, in one of the studied networks presented in Chapter 6, the meaningfulness of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is mutually affirmed in the network, thereby making it relevant for the participants' own value creation.

So, how can we define value co-creation in Networks as value co-creators when taking the above into consideration? First of all, value is not a specific outcome. Value is, I hold, related to the ongoing process of negotiation of meaning, which makes participation valuable for participants. Hence, I tend to attach even more importance to the joint sphere than is implied by Grönroos and Voima as a common sphere from which meaning is derived. Following this, I argue that the theory of self as a social becoming (Mead, 1934), from the position of symbolic interactionism, supports the understanding of value co-creation, with an attention toward meaning, which is perceived as an intersubjective process. This will be further developed in Chapter 3. By intersubjective, I refer to the ongoing negotiation and changings of meanings by participants in Networks as value co-creators. To develop the analytical model, Chapter 3 will present George Herbert Mead's concept of the generalized other (Mead, 1934). Mead's concept of the generalized other, and thus the ongoing conceptualization of meaning, can be related to the understanding of value co-creation. Thus, value is shaped by participant's negotiation of meaning that is an ongoing process, taking place intersubjectively among participants and facilitator in the Networks as value co-creators. The understanding of value, which is argued for here, is closely linked to what Beckert describes as imaginative value (Beckert, 2011). In Beckert's understanding, goods or services are valued for their symbolic qualities ascribed by the people who use them. Beckert describes how the meaning people ascribe defines the value, and

"imaginative valuations are fragile constructs of the mind that need constant reaffirmation in communicative practices if they are to be maintained" (Beckert, 2011)

When understanding value as intersubjectively enacted, it offers a way of explaining how the network context or the joint sphere is critical for value co-creation and the very meaning of value. In this sense it is not as much the network that becomes valuable but the activities taking place within the networks. This is illustrated in the following 3.4, which shows the joint sphere as frame for activities where value is negotiated, affirmed, and ascribed meaning. Participants develop a joint, situated understanding of value. Intersubjectively they negotiate appropriate understandings and align their individual actions.

Figure 3.4: Joint sphere; value, meaning, and activities



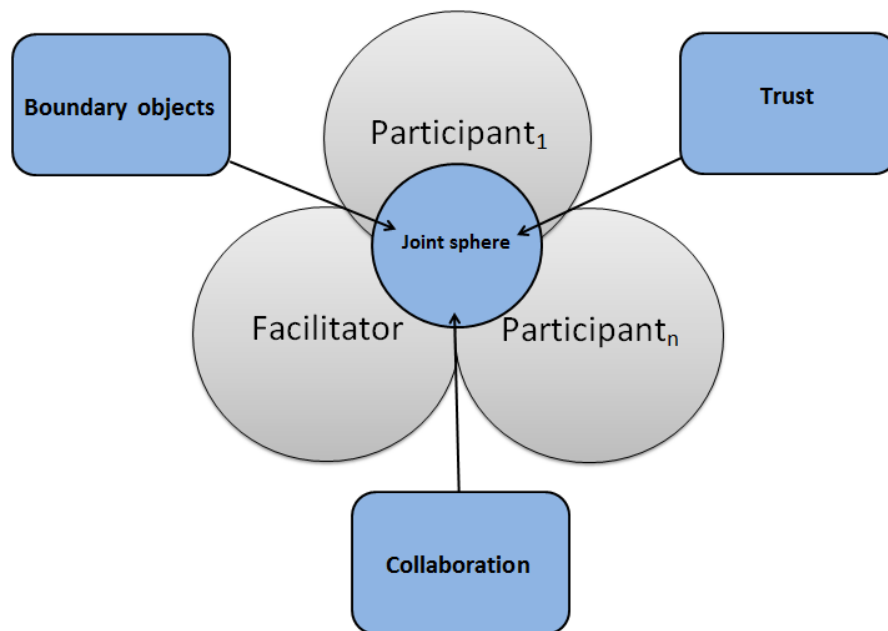
Source: own creation

Studying Networks as value co-creators in the light of a joint sphere where value is negotiated and affirmed may generate a different understanding than studying inter-organizational network as channels or communities. When wanting to facilitate the ongoing processes in

Networks as value co-creators, we have to rethink the way we understand the facilitator process. Rethinking leadership, and thus, the facilitating processes, in terms of co-creating value help us appreciate more fully the facilitator-participant relationship. But, to make it work it requires that we reconsider our present perspective about what leadership in network is and open our minds to new ways of thinking about and practicing leadership. In the above Figure 3.4 it is shown how value is linked to the ongoing activities, and how value co-creation is related to participant's ongoing negotiation and changing of meaning. The arrows pointing back and forth between activities, meaning, and value show how this is not considered a linear structure but a process that goes back and forth. As it will be discussed in Chapter 4, Mead suggests that the negotiation of meaning is an ongoing process, where participants intersubjectively change and negotiate their understandings mutually by mirroring each other's understandings. In the model, the relevance of activities is negotiated as a part of an ongoing negotiation of meaning, and hence value.

Using the important input from the literature, summarized in this chapter, for conceptualizing Networks as value co-creators, I have tried to extend the framework, as illustrated in 3.5, as supported by collaboration, boundary objects, and trust.

Figure 3.5: The joint sphere of Networks as value co-creators supported by collaboration, boundary objects, and trust



Source: own creation

I argue that these three supporting understandings can refine the conceptualization of Networks as value co-creators because:

- The understanding of collaboration seems to have the potential of engaging participants in activities that are committing and thus, supporting the joint sphere for participants and facilitator with a clear direction.
- Boundary objects can focus the activities and negotiation of meaning in ways that allow participants to generate process as value-in-use based on experiences in the network.
- The dynamic processual understanding of mutual trusting taking place among participants and facilitator in an inter-organizational network setting and benefits to the ongoing collaboration.

4 Studying reflexive interactions in a framework of symbolic interactionism

The review of literature in Chapters 1 and 3 pointed toward a lack of understanding on how participation in networks becomes valuable. The way that seemed workable, when wanting to get close to the networking efforts making participation valuable, was an interpretive and reflexive approach, and thus to see *“see the situation as it is seen by the actor, observing what the actor takes into account, observing how he interprets what is taken into account”* (Blumer, 1969, p. 56). Thus, a theoretical lens of symbolic interactionism is applied, based on thoughts of Mead (Mead, 1932) and one of his interpreters Blumer (Blumer, 1969)⁴, which is particular suited to offering a focus toward micro processes of interaction, emerging patterns, and meaning. By focusing toward processes where participants negotiate and change meaning, not only processes of change are grasped, but also the processes of *“forming, sustaining, and transforming meaning”* (Blumer, 1969, p. 12). Consequently, it is a perspective that requires an ethnographic approach enabling descriptions of the processes of interaction taking place among network facilitator and participants. These methodological considerations will be unfolded in Chapter 5.

⁴ Blumer was a student of Mead, and the one who coined Mead’s work under the notion of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969, p. 1).

4.1 Structure of the chapter

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I point toward existing research within organizing contexts that takes a symbolic interactionism turn in order to point toward the value of the theoretical frame. These studies indicate that symbolic interactionism offers a solid perspective for empirical studies with a focus toward examining, understanding, and attempting to explain empirical phenomena in concrete social situations. Secondly, I review and outline the main concepts of symbolic interactionism with relevance for this study and point toward implications for studying the empirical phenomenon of inter-organizational networks in this particular theoretical frame. The theoretical framework seems useful for studying networks because of an explicit focus toward the emerging reflexive interactions taking place among participants and facilitator when engaging in network as a joint sphere.

4.2 Organization studies framed by symbolic interactionism

Often organizational life has been described through a machine metaphor (Cornelissen, 2005) appearing hierarchal, structured, predetermined, and as stages developing from the top down, leaving little room for negotiation or improvisation. Interactionism develops a different perspective of organizational actions, highlighting how these actions are created, sustained, and renegotiated by social actors through social interaction. Lately, symbolic interactionism has gained improved interest in postmodern writings in the field of organization studies where researchers continue the work of elaborating the theorizing in various areas and issues. For example, Dionysiou and Tsoukas draw on symbolic interactionism and show how "role taking" (Mead, 1934) is an important process through which routines arise and recur. By exploring micro processes in a Meadian framework, they explain routine creation as a collective accomplishment of repetitive patterns of action (Dionysiou & Tsoukas, 2013). Sheffield draws on symbolic interactionism, under the notion of Complex Responsive Processes, in order to understand the ordinary, everyday experiences of people involved in work, which is novel for

organizations. By applying this perspective, Sheffield's establishes an understanding of how change occurs through human interaction by looking at micro processes (Sheffield, 2012). Hatch and Schultz show how Mead's theorizing about the relationship between the "I" and the "me" can be extended to identity processes at the organizational level of analysis. They show how identity expresses cultural understandings through symbols (Mary Jo Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Simpson and Marshall develop a theoretical position that integrates emotion and learning by drawing on Dewey and Mead. Simpson and Marshall propose an explanatory mechanism that frames both emotion and learning as mutually forming and informing practices that emerge out of social engagement and transactional meaning-making (Simpson & Marshall, 2010). Finally, Simpson (2010) propose a view of practice that draws especially on Mead's theorizing. Simpson argues that this perspective offers a *"holistic approach to practice, which challenges the dominance of those 'rational action' and 'normatively oriented action' theories"* (Simpson, 2010, p. 1330).

The above-mentioned studies show how the perspective of symbolic interactionism offers an important approach when wanting to study social interaction among people in the social world. Common among the mentioned studies is that they have brought symbolic interactionism to the center of their qualitative analysis and applied it on empirical studies, with a focus on examining, understanding, and attempting to explain empirical phenomena in concrete social situations.

4.3 Main concepts of symbolic interactionism

Mead positioned himself as a social behaviorist (Mead, 1934, p. xii), and he challenged the traditional behaviorism, which did not take into account joint actions⁵ (Mead, 1934, p. xiii + xiv). Mead proposes that when humans construct their understandings socially, they make sense. When individuals interact, there is a dynamic change of meaning as they engage in interaction (Mead, 1934). Blumer argues that symbolic interactionism, according to Mead's theorizing, is a theory about how *"human beings act toward things on the basis of meaning that the things have for them"* (Blumer, 1969, p. 2).

Blumer points out three premises on which symbolic interactionism relies:

- 1) *"...human being act toward things on the basis of meanings that the things have for them"*
 - 2) *"...the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interactions that one has with one's fellow"*
 - 3) *"...these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in the dealing with the things he encounters"*
- (Blumer, 1986: 2)

Mead argues that joint actions can be considered a platform for actors to construct roles and responsibilities in order to create a behavior required to meet shared goals (Mead, 1934). Joint action becomes possible when individuals construct their meaning in relation with others.

Blumer describes how joint action is formed in the following way:

⁵ Within symbolic interaction social act (Mead, 1934) and joint action (Blumer, 1969) are applied correspondingly. Here I have chosen to follow Blumers phrasing and apply the notion of joint action.

“As participants take account of each other's ongoing acts, they have to arrest, reorganize, or adjust their own intentions, wishes, feelings, and attitudes; similarly, they have to judge the fitness of norms, values, and group prescriptions for the situation being formed by the acts of others” (Blumer, 1966, p. 538)

Symbolic interactionism is concerned with joint actions because this is where you can study how meanings are organized and constructed. Joint actions are not considered a result of an individual meaning-making but as a mutual and collective change and adjustment in meaning (Mead, 1934). Thus, symbolic interactionism points toward an understanding where self emerges in interaction with other and from the responses to and from others. By paying attention to how participants in networks develop meaning and establish joint actions, the processes of change and adjustment become visible. These joint actions can be observed when participants in the networks interact and develop new meanings.

Mead argues that meaning is not an individual thing or even constructed by an individual, but meaning arises out of interaction and has implication for how actors develop joint actions (Mead, 1934). The emergence of meaning is central in the dynamic of joint action. The construction of meaning is a process as a result of interactions with oneself, with others, and with the society (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). Thus, meaning is dynamic, rather than static, and is always in process and under development. Meaning is constructed out of joint actions and is mediated by participants as result of their experiences.

Meaning in the networks can be observed through significant symbols and is associated with the processes of interpretation and joint action. Significant symbols allow us to see our actions as others might and to consciously shape our roles in different social contexts. Empirically, it emphasizes a focus toward the interaction process of adjustment and change where new meaning occurs. In simple form, people act based on symbolic meanings that they find within a given situation. In order to meet requirements from symbolic interactionism there is a need for empirical data showing this process of change and adjustment in the network. It is when participants and facilitator in the network intersubjectively develop new meanings that

participation in network has the possibility of changing participant practices, and thus participation becomes valuable.

Mead focuses on process in all social relations and regards social interactions as opportunity for change, development, and novelty. Thus, the source of meaning is collective, and this is a key point for symbolic interactionism. Mead argues that people imagine not only the likely position of others but also the position of oneself, and that position is changed through interpretive processes (Mead, 1934). Change of meaning involves interpretive processes during which individuals communicate with themselves based on interactions taking place within the collective setting.

Mead describes the processes of socialization that could be considered as taking place among participants and facilitator in networks.

"It is in the form of the generalized other that the social process influences the behavior of the individuals involved in it and carrying it on, i.e. that the community exercises control over the conduct of its individual members; for it is in this form that the social process or community enters as a determining factor into the individual's thinking. In abstract thought the individual takes the attitude of the other" (Mead, 1934, p. 155)

Thus, symbolic interactionism takes into account the interactions as they take place between human beings. Interactions consist of human beings' interpreting and defining each other's actions instead of just reacting to each other's actions and refer to the interactions taking place between human beings. Interactions are mediated by the use of symbols and interpretations and by reflecting the meaning of others actions.

4.4 Gestures as significant symbols

The perspective of symbolic interactionism is concerned with neither beginnings nor endings, as it focuses on continuous unfolding of experiences in the present moment (Mead, 1934). Social relations are explained by symbolic interactionism in ways that are interactive, complex, and ongoing (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). Mead considers the self as the fundamental capacity of human reflexivity; it is the effect of the internalization of interaction with other human beings (Mead, 1934). It is through interactive processes we become socialized and form mutual expectations of joint actions. In other words, social interactions could be seen as processes of adjusting and changing meaning. Mead points out that the self cannot exist without the other and explains that the self is fostered through a socialization with an exchange of attitudes with others (Mead, 1934). Mead provides us with a way of understanding these process of interaction in the form of gestures (Mead, 1934). Mead used the term significant symbols to refer to the vocal or non-vocal gestures that cause common responses.

The use of symbols and gestures enables a process of interpretation of meaning (Mead, 1934). Mead defines significant symbols as actions that call out the same response in the gesturer and the responder (Mead, 1934). For gestures to be significant, they must have the same meaning for individuals to engage (Mead, 1934). Whereas a gesture may suggest different meanings to different people, a significant symbol evokes a shared meaning. Mead argues:

“...Gestures become significant symbols when they implicitly arouse in an individual making them the same responses which they explicitly arouse, or are supposed to arouse, in other individuals, the individuals to whom they are addressed” (Mead, 1934, p. 47).

Significant symbols allow us to see actions as others might and repeatedly change the roles we adopt in different contexts.

“Only in terms of gesture as significant symbols is the existence of mind or intelligence possible; for only in terms of gestures which are significant symbols can thinking – which is simply an internalized or implicit conversation of the individual with himself by means of such gestures – take place” (Mead, 1934, p. 47)

Significant symbols are central to the joint actions as they allow us to take the position of the other during interactions and to anticipate likely responses to our own gestures. For instance, when the facilitator in a network make the gesture of clearing her throat out loud in front of the participants, participants and facilitator understands that the meeting is about to begin. However, this does not necessarily mean that all participants will pay attention immediately because although the significant symbol indicates certain conduct that might be anticipated in a given social situation, participants make their own choices about how to act.

Mead offers dogfights as a classic example of gesture. Dogs signal potential fights through their behavior, and this calls out a response in another dog (Mead, 1934, pp. 42–43). Gestures, when not significant, do not stimulate conscious response. The barking of a dog calls out for an immediate response that is instinctively more than conscious. This is much like a boxer who instinctively responds to a punch.

Significant symbols mediate the processes of meaning-making by identifying understandings that we hold more or less in common. In the absence of such significant symbols, our conversation would be reduced to a series of instinctive reactions that could not produce new meanings. Significant symbols should not be understood as developing exact meanings; rather, it is their potential for ambiguity that allows for alternative interpretations and ultimately for meanings to be changed through interaction. Mead describes how people when they make a gesture to others, they at the same time make them to themselves. In addition, they respond to their own gesture and expect how others will respond, in such a way that they put themselves in the position of the other (Mead, 1967: 96). Mead argues that there must be significant

symbols that arouse in the individual the response that she calls out in the other, and in such a way that the response may enable the caller to direct her conduct in turn. These processes of human interactions, based on significant gestures, give rise to the notion of the “generalized other”.

4.5 The generalized other and role-taking

According to Mead, the essence of self is its reflexivity (Mead, 1934). The self only exists in relation to others. When taking the role of the other, the self becomes an object of its own reflection. Mead considers the self as a process that constantly shapes and reshapes through social interaction. Thus, the self develops through internalization of the generalized other. Through the concept of the generalized other, Meads describe the process where we, based on interaction, act as social beings and learn how to adapt to norms of society. It is in these social processes that we influence one another and have the chance to learn and change our thinking:

“It is in the form of the generalized other that the social process influences the behavior of the individuals involved in it and carrying it on, i.e., that the community exercises control over the conduct of its individual members, for it is in this form that the social process or community enters as a determining factor into the individuals thinking (Mead, 1934, p. 155)

Thus, when individuals engage in role-taking, they seek solutions to problematic situations by taking the role of others. Taking the role of the other is seeing the world through another’s eyes. In order to learn, human beings must be able to take the perspective of others. It is a process in which participants view themselves from the standpoint of others and consider alternative actions from the standpoint of others.

“The very universality and impersonality of thought and reason is from the behavioristic standpoint the result of the given individual take the attitudes of others toward himself, and of his finally crystalizing all these particular attitudes

into a single attitude or standpoint which may be called that of the 'generalized other' (Mead, 1934, p. 90)

Mead points out that role-taking is a central premise of human action and describe how it leads to the development of a self. Socialization in Mead's perspective takes place based upon social interactions within groups and the testing of different roles. The development of the self is dependent on learning to take the role of the other. Role-taking requires that we imagine how our behavior will be perceived from the standpoint of others. For Mead, role-taking is an ongoing process that occurs throughout life, and because of this, self is constructed and refined (Mead, 1934, p. 135 + 254). Taking the perspective of the other is a consequence of getting engaged in joint activities and practices through which we orient ourselves toward future events, objects, and subjects. The ability of taking over another person's perspective could be considered an implicit but basic factor of success for fruitful and reasonable interactions in networks.

4.6 Processes of reflexivity between "I" and "me"

Mead emphasizes the reflexive nature of human behavior (Mead, 1934, p. 136), and he describes reflexivity in terms of an ongoing dialectic between the "I" and the "me". Thus, it is the tension between the "I" and the "me" that creates reflexive interactions. When a situation of socialization unfolds, the lines of acting are adjusted through the inner conversation of the "I" and the "me", where the acts of the "I" and the emerging attitudes from the others enters the "me" (Mead, 1934). According to Mead, the "I" responds to present social influences while the "me" is related to previous social interaction experiences over time (Mead, 1934). By an inner conversation between the "I" and the "me", we can imagine ways to solve problems based upon previous experiences. Mead argues that the acting "I" represents the socialized aspect of the self, whereas the reflective "me" represents the inner reflective self.

“The ‘I’ is the response of the organism to the attitude of the other; the ‘me’ is the organized set of attitudes of the others which one himself assumes. The attitudes of the others constitute the organized ‘me,’ and then one reacts toward that as an ‘I’”(Mead, 1934, p. 175)

The ongoing reflexivity between “I” and “me” is a kind of ongoing self-communication based on previous and present experiences. The reflexivity between “I” and “me” enables various perceptions of experiences to be considered. The “I” becomes the explorer who undertakes actions of inquiry. Thus, what Mead argues for is that

“the self is essentially a social process going with two distinguishable phases. If it did not have these two phases, there could not be conscious responsibility, and there would be nothing novel in experience” (Mead, 1934, p. 178)

Role-taking occurs in the present and applies past experiences to anticipated future outcomes (Mead, 1934). In this sense “me” relates to the past; “I” relates to the present. The “I” becomes a different “me” in the future. The response of the “I” occurs in the present, but it emerges from the “me” and is related to an anticipated future. The past and the future are (re)constructed in the present, it’s a view, which indicates that Mead anticipates that both the past and the future are in the actions of the present. Thus, Mead argues *“The past must be found in the present world”* (Mead, 1934, p. 116).

It is argued that we develop self and mind based on ideas that come from, taking the role of the other, imagining how we look to another person. In simple form, people act based on symbolic meanings they find within a given situation. The goals of interactions are to create a shared meaning collectively, which potentially gives rise to the generalized other;

“The organized community or social group which gives to the individual his unity of self may be called ‘the generalized other.’ The attitude of the generalized other is the attitude of the whole community” (Mead, 1934, p. 154)

Role-playing in childhood plays an important role for learning how to take the role of the other. Children put themselves in the other's place, and thereby develop the ability to take the other's perspective and take the role of the generalized other. Thus, by play the child learns to take the role of the other, and through these experiences the child learns how other see and reacts to different roles. Through this play the child develops the ability to imagine the reactions of others, understood as the ability to take over the role of the generalized other (Mead, 1934, pp. 152–155).

“If the given human individual is to develop a self in the fullest sense, it is not sufficient for him merely to take the attitudes of other human individuals toward himself and toward one another within the human social process, and to bring that social process as a whole into his individual experience merely in in these terms: he must also, in the same way that he takes the attitudes of other individuals toward himself and toward one another, take their attitudes toward the various phases or aspects of the common social activity or set of social undertakings in which as members of an organized or social group, they are all engaged” (Mead, 1934, pp. 154 –155)

Mead considers communication and other forms of social interactions as bases for change and development, both individual and in communities. The process of role-taking involves individuals' seeing themselves as others might see them and then adapting their behavior accordingly to the community (Mead, 1934).

The focus of symbolic interactionism is towards the dynamic becoming rather than the static being. Mead describes that novelty is happening all the time, and it is through the concept of emergence that you can observe and grasp novelty. *“Emergence involves a reorganization, but the reorganization brings in something that was not there before”* (Mead, 1934, p. 198). Empirically, novelty is constantly happening and getting its expression in the concept of emergence. Mead explains this in the following way:

“The attitudes involved are gathered from the group, but the individual in whom they are organized has the opportunity of giving them an expression which perhaps has never taken place before” (Mead, 1934, p. 198)

Thus, Mead pays attention to social interaction and how it develops over time and to how emergence occurs. This also relates to the emergence of self and points out that mind and self are a process and not a structure and are considered a social phenomenon rather than within individual (Blumer, 1966; Mead, 1934, p. XV). Mead explains this by pointing toward the relation between the past and the present:

“...There is and always will be a necessary relation of the past and the present but that the present in which the emergent appears accepts that which is novel as an essential part of the universe, and from that standpoint rewrites its past” (Mead, 1932).

The above quote also highlights that emergence takes place in the present but relates to previous experience; however, at the same time we form our step into the future by anticipating what might occur (Mead, 1932).

It is this process of role-taking that network participants and facilitator enact when engaging in interactions and reflecting upon mutual understandings that relates to participants' perception of value. These activities involve what Mead calls consciousness and are ongoing evaluations of what they are doing when they get together and engage in the joint sphere.

Blumer summarizes:

“One should recognize what is true, namely, that the diverse array of participants occupying different points in the network engage in their actions at those points on the basis of using given sets of meaning. A network or an institution does not function automatically because of some inner dynamics or system requirements; it functions because people at different points do something, and what they do is a result of how they define the situation in which they are called to act” (Blumer, 1969, p. 19)

Symbolic interactionism, as unfolded so far, points to some characteristics that have the possibility of gaining insights into social interactions with a focus toward how meaning is developed. Consequently, it is in the empirical setting, when joint actions are built up by participants in the networks, that it can be observed how participants adjust their responses to one another in social processes based on mutual reflexivity. When people interact with others, there is a dynamic formulation and reformulation of meaning when they engage. I expect these formulations and reformulations of meanings to come forth when observing actions taking place among participants and facilitator in the networks, and I expect this is where I can observe how participants have the opportunity to see their own understanding in a new light.

4.7 Framing the research with a focus toward reflexivity

Summing up, you can argue that the reflexive processes are interactive and social and that the self depends upon the existence of symbolic forms of interactions to emerge and develop in reflexive experiences. Based on reflexivity, experiences are modified and reacted upon by the self. The social processes are the experiences of participants involved in them, which enable the individual to take the attitude of the other toward himself and change her own perception. Mead describes this in the following:

“He becomes aware of his relations to that process as a whole, and to the other individuals participating in it with him; he becomes aware of that process as modified by the reactions and interactions of the individuals - including himself - who are carrying it on. The evolutionary appearance of mind or intelligence takes place when the whole social process of experience and behavior is brought within the experience of any one of the separate individuals implicated therein, and when the individual’s adjustment to the process is modified and refined by the awareness or consciousness which he thus has of it” (Mead, 1934, p. 134)

Thus, Mead identifies reflexivity as a process in the formation of mind and self (Mead, 1934, pp. 133–134). Mead discusses reflexivity in relation to the development of human consciousness in a social context. Further, Mead suggests that self is constructed in response to social environment:

“It is the social process of influencing others in a social act and then taking the attitude of others aroused by the stimulus, and then reacting in turn to this response which constitutes a self” (Mead, 1934, p. 171)

Mead as interaction-based and reflexive describes the process by which this evolves, and he explains how reflexivity emerges within a social process:

“It is by the means of reflexivity - the turning back of the experience of the individual upon himself - that the whole social process is thus brought into the experience of individuals involved in it; it is by such means, which enable the individual to take the attitude of the other toward himself, that the individual is able consciously to adjust himself to that process, and to modify the resultant of that process in any given social act in terms of his adjustment to it. Reflexiveness, then, is the essential condition, within the social process, for the development of mind” (Mead, 1934, p. 134).

When the process of reflexivity takes place, individuals become self-conscious and become aware of her relation to that process and to the other individuals taking part in it. In turn, she becomes aware of the process as changed by the reactions and interactions of not only herself but of the other individuals who experience it.

What is understood by Mead's suggestion is that reflexive processes enable us not only to be self-aware of the context we are in but also of the context the other individuals are in. Because of this, it is possible to adjust our understanding of ourselves within this process and to change and evaluate our meanings and actions as a result of it. Hence, this process changes the self in the process of social experiences and activities as a result of the commitment to that process and the individuals taking part in it. This requires the reflexive process, which Mead describes as *"turning back of the experience of the individual upon himself"* (Mead, 1934, p. 134), where the individual re-interprets her own experiences from a new perspective in a process that has the ability of changing understandings of the present.

Mead distinguishes between consciousness as "awareness" and consciousness as "reflective intelligence" (Mead, 1934). Consciousness as "awareness" is simply being aware, but when Mead discusses consciousness, he refers to it as involving reflective intelligence and as an outcome of social interaction. Mead explains how consciousness emerges out of the use of gestures and appears in interactions (Mead, 1934, p. 27). To become conscious in Mead's terminology, there needs to be significant symbols present, and the process of conscious actions must be *"one of conduct which is continually adjusting itself to new situations"* (Mead, 1936, p. 290). People learn about each other by translating what each other is doing based on gestures as signs of more overt behavior (Denzin, 1969). For instance, we read each other's overt expressions as signs of behavior to follow. It could be a person showing her fists or clenching her teeth, and we know trouble is to follow. Or opposite, it could be a greeting with open arms, which relates to a friendly action. After some experience, we might become able to read them as something else or more and adjust actions accordingly. When actions are routinized, they often run smoothly and without problems in a non-reflective mode. When a situation appears as challenging, changing, or different, we become conscious of stimuli and

react in order to *“get hold of that so we can deal with the problem of error”* (Mead, 1934, p. 29). Additionally, he argues, *“Delayed reaction is necessary to intelligent conduct”* (Mead, 1934, p. 99); it makes an intelligent and reflective choice possible among these possible alternative responses.

Thus, as we interact with others in society, we develop our self and our self-consciousness. When involving reflective intelligence, we are able to reflect upon the past and the future to act in the present. Consciousness is a part of developing the self. By reacting to society through an inner conversation, we keep developing our understanding of society. Reflective intelligence makes us aware of the meaning of the situation and possible future actions and is an effective way of solving problems (Mead, 1934).

4.8 Methodological implications deriving from symbolic interactionism

As a qualitative interpretive framework, you can argue that symbolic interactionism is dependent upon and requires careful observations, an ability to pay attention to details, a reflexive approach to examining how interaction occurs, and a questioning of meanings and routines. Symbolic interactionism, applied as an analytical grip, opens up for an analytical description and interpretation of how participants in networks engage and make participation valuable. Participants’ developing, negotiating, and valuating meanings as they engage in joint actions can be captured and described by a careful attention to what they say and do, as well as their reflections on how participation create value. In order to meet the methodological demands from symbolic interactionism, certain methods have to be applied, and these methodological considerations will be discussed in the following chapter.

5 Research methodology

This chapter sets out to introduce and present methodological choices I have made during the research process. The first part of this chapter describes how a reflexive and interpretive approach has been applied in order to meet the methodological requirements for studying inter-organizational networks in a research context of symbolic interactionism. Thereafter, the research design, choice of locations, data collection processes, and data analysis are explained. Finally, I discuss the quality of the research.

5.1 Methodology supporting symbolic interactionism

A common theme within network literature (Bizzi & Langley, 2012; Halinen, Medlin, & Törnroos, 2012) is how to deal with the dynamics of networks that changes over time. Several authors have already suggested that the study of networks needs a process perspective when wanting to describe how they unfold. Langley and Bizzi suggest a process perspective on networks in order to consider networks as dynamic processes and relations that change over time (Bizzi & Langley, 2012). Similarly, Halinen et al argue for a process perspective since *“process research deals with how events come into being and unfold over time in a context”* (Halinen, Medlin, & Törnroos, 2012: 215). The process-oriented approach to networks takes into account the nonlinear and emergent nature of collaboration and focuses how networking efforts and relations evolve as parties interact over time. Process studies should explore phenomena, or clarify aspects of phenomena, that are less explainable through rational means because it takes into account the development over time. Hernes argues:

“Applying process thinking to seemingly obvious organizational phenomena can inspire some new ideas about how things are and how they become” (Hernes, 2008: xxi)

Thus, by applying a process methodology I focus on situated contexts of the organizing activities within the networks, which enables explanations of how events unfold over time. Hence, process studies have the ability to *“explain organizational matters in term of practices instead of simply registering them”* (Nicolini, 2012: 13). Process data provide a rich and nuanced understanding of emerging relations and are developed by processes of inquiries that recognize the characteristics of social actions and apply approaches designed to capture these ongoing processes. Blumer argues that social life is a product of individuals’ fitting their lines of action together (Blumer, 1969). A central concept of symbolic interaction is ongoing processes, taking into account that empirical data are to be collected in real-time for *“understanding how things evolve over time and why they evolve in this way”* (Langley, 1999: 692).

I seek to apply an approach that is consistent with the requirements from symbolic interactionism. An approach that Nicolini argues needs to be *“an observational orientation and the adoption of methods that allow an appreciation of practice as it happens”* (Nicolini, 2012: 14). Thus, to grasp value co-creation in the empirical setting the interaction processes must be studied so that it becomes a *“study of organizing as a social process”* (Nicolini, 2012, p. 11)

In order to explain the implications of symbolic interactionism, Blumer argues that empirical data should be collected where participants engage in social relations and where meaning is challenged and changed. He explains *“...that the play and fate of meanings are what is important”* (Blumer, 1969, p. 18). Knorr-Cetina, defines these situations as *“moments of interruption”* (Knorr Cetina, 2001: 175) where new meanings and sensemaking emerge in social interactions. Similarly Weick describes these unexpected situations as *“cues for sensemaking”* (Weick, 1995). “Interruptions” or “cues” can range widely from small changes at the micro-level or larger interruptions as changes in overall structure. Therefore, is it important to study how the participants in the networks experience interruptions when participating in the networks and how these interruptions influences value of participation.

5.2 Guiding the scientific practice

Gathering and analyzing data about social phenomena raises questions about the nature of the phenomena of study and how we get to know what we know about them. Guba and Lincoln argue that the position, or in their wording the applied paradigm, guides the researchers' scientific practice (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Using symbolic interactionism as a theoretical frame to understand organizational life guides the scientific practice.

Guba and Lincoln have put forward an approach they call naturalistic inquiry, which may be further used to explain the epistemology and ontology of (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). The epistemological and ontological position in naturalistic inquiry differs from the more positivistic understandings where the investigators role is to discover an existing reality based on certain collected data (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

They define epistemology as *"the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known"* (Guba and Lincoln, 1998, p. 201). Epistemology explains what kind of knowledge is possible to produce and focus on the production of knowledge. In the present dissertation, following naturalistic inquiry, the position is that the researcher must place herself and engage with the phenomenon of study (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 2007). The epistemology underlies the research process and will be implicit in the research question and form the choice of research methods employed.

Ontology is about the nature of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). The ontological issue of concern in this dissertation is to see reality as process. Focus is toward how actions emerge. Symbolic interactionism argues that people act in relation to intersubjectively enacted meanings that they assign to social phenomena (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Blumer, 1969). Thus, participants in networks, according to a symbolic interactionism perspective, would develop understandings about value of participation based on the meaning developed among participants and facilitator in the network. Participants' understanding of value is influenced by their interactions in and outside the network and by their interpretations of those interactions.

This interpretive research seeks to reach understanding through interpretation of meanings assigned to, for instance, actions, events, and processes. Interpretations are made both by the actors under study and by the researcher studying them in a continual conversation where interpretations establish arguments *“for a particular way of understanding social reality, in the context of a never-ending debate”* (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000, p. 276).

Given the focus of wanting to understand meaning, two important aspects for the analysis are emphasized: 1) Meaning is situational and is understood and related to the given context, accordingly actions are to be analyzed with reference to the given context. For example, knowledge created in this dissertation is related to the specific network, which establishes the frame of context and meaning. 2) The researcher stays open to new understandings and acknowledges that knowledge is preliminary and changing. Implying that an explorative approach is needed toward developing new knowledge as a continuous progress as long as the networks are developing.

Accordingly, I have chosen an intensive research design focusing toward the reflexive interactions taking place among network facilitator and participants, i.e., where contrasting experience meets and new understandings appear. Intensive is here understood as ethnographic and longitudinal, because as Watson argues:

“...we cannot really learn a lot about what ‘actually happens’ or about ‘how things work’ in organizations without doing the intensive type of close-observational or participative research that is central” (Watson, 2011, p. 204)

The methodological position of symbolic interactionism is empirical. Blumer argues that researchers must stay close to empirical material and must be somehow embedded into the practices of those being studied (Blumer, 1969). Accordingly, an ethnographic approach has been used in the study.

Ethnography has been applied in many fields of study. Within the past decade anthropological traditions have become very popular in management and organizational studies (M.J. Hatch & Yanow, 2008) under the banner of “organizational ethnography” (Eberle & Maeder, 2011). With the growing interest in processes (Czarniawska, 2008; Langley, 2007; Langley & Tsoukas, 2010; Weick, 1979, 1995) and practice-based studies (Gherardi, 2012; Knorr Cetina, 2001) and the call to pay greater attention to *“how things actually work”* in management and organization studies (Watson, 2011), the value of conducting ethnographic research has been increasingly recognized. Traditionally, ethnography was primarily concerned with understanding humans as cultured beings by exploring their activities, norms, and values in a way that provides rich insights into the cultural framework of their lives. Thus, rooted in an anthropological heritage, the primary purpose of ethnographers was to *“render the actual – and to do so persuasively”* (Van Maanen, 2011: 232) or, as Alvesson argues, based on activities where *“The researcher then works and / or lives in the setting and then uses the experiences, knowledge and access to empirical material for research purposes”* (Alvesson, 2003, p. 174). According to Alvesson, the advantage of engaging with the phenomenon of study is *“first-hand experiences – having “been there” – offer a deeper level of understanding and a stronger authority-base than sending out questionnaires and listening to people’s ‘stories’ in interview situations”* (Alvesson, 2003, p. 171).

Therefore, the traditional model of ethnography was often *“the single-site, year in the field, one-tribe-one-scribe”* (Van Maanen, 2006: 17). Organizational ethnography is a bit different from the traditional understanding of ethnography, as it is focused toward the everyday practice that people enact in their work life related to the phenomenon of study. Rather than seeking to understand rituals of distant tribes in remote locations (Sanday, 1979), organizational ethnographers find “strangeness” in organizations and try to capture the pluralism of meaning and interpretation of what characterizes organizations (Van Maanen, 2011). When doing organizational ethnography, you partly participate in the complexities of the everyday practice in organizational settings. Organizational ethnography aims to uncover and describe the ways in which people in particular work settings come to understand, account for, take action, and

otherwise manage their day-to-day situations (Van Maanen, 1988). This means that ethnography is strongly connected to fieldwork activity when the researcher enters an organization, gets to know the people, participates in the daily routines, developing relations with the people, and observes broadly what is going on related to the phenomenon of study (Van Maanen, 2011). Thus, participation and relations in the organizational field are central sources for getting access to develop those thick descriptions.

In the following quote Geertz describes how observations can be hard to handle and that they might not even make sense at the first glance.

“What the ethnographer is in fact faced with ... is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render” (Geertz, 1973: 10).

You need time to get behind those strange actions. By my engagement with Ringsted Municipality, I to some extent overcame the challenges of gaining access to the field, a challenge often experienced within organizational ethnography (Eberle & Maeder, 2011). I had the permission to enter, stay, and collect data as a participant-observer, not that I wanted to become a full member of the organization, but having the benefits of being a member of the organization without having to do the full-time work as an employee or a network participant. All along I have fully participated in the network activities, which has given me a unique position in gathering data. Being present has been a long and time-consuming endeavor where I became sensitive to actions of interest and where I had the opportunity to frame my focus and develop thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973).

I understand and apply organizational ethnography as a way of collecting real-time and longitudinal data and as a way of getting close to and unfolding the phenomena of study. This approach seems appropriate for this study. As Nicolini argues, *“...Learning requires engaging with the world, embarking on an inquiry which entails intervening in the world and giving it a chance of biting back at us”* (Nicolini, 2012, p. 216). Overall, the aim was to gain an in-depth

understanding of the processes of changing and negotiating meaning in networks when participants and facilitator was making sense of their participation, taking place in a particular network setting. The fieldwork activities are a combination of nearly two years of participative observations, informal conversations, and qualitative interviews with network participants and facilitators. The sum of observations, conversations, experiences, and interviews are integrated parts of the analytical process that resulted in the empirical description as a whole. Hence, the ethnographic descriptions to follow in Chapters 6 and 7 include data from interviews with participants and facilitators from the two networks in order to unfold some of the situations I observed.

5.3 Locations

5.3.1 Ringsted Municipality and the networks as research site

Having described the basic methodological issues related to symbolic interactionism, I move on to describe where and how the research in more practical terms was conducted.

The location for the research is Ringsted Municipality in Denmark and its policies for local business development. The research was conducted as an industrial Ph.D. with Ringsted Municipality as partner in the project. The question Ringsted Municipality was posing in the spring 2011 was: *“How can networks be a valuable part of our local business development activities?”* Ringsted Municipality wanted to qualify knowledge about network and how establishing networks would be valuable for its local business development activities. Ringsted Municipality questions were grounded in practical considerations, which I had to try to turn into an academic inquiry, which at the same time could answer some of the question of the municipality. At the time I could not exactly foresee how the questions of Ringsted Municipality would be answered, but engaging with Ringsted Municipality gave me a chance to do an ethnographic study following the implementation of networking activities as a part of the municipality’s business development strategy.

As already described in Chapter 2, my commitment with Ringsted Municipality gave me a good opportunity to observe how two business networks came into being and participate in the two networks right from their beginning. In this way Ringsted Municipality as a research site fitted the requirements for an ethnographic, longitudinal study of networking efforts. The two networks of study could have been situated and facilitated anywhere. The exact topics discussed in the networks might have their particular relevance in these exact networks. But when wanting to understand the processes that make participation valuable, the networking efforts as such do not differ from any other networking effort taking place somewhere else. Thus, the ethnographic narratives, which are established in Chapters 6 and 7, are examples of networking efforts seen from a process perspective that may have relevance in other contexts as well.

Before I move on to further describe the actual data collection methods, it's time for a short introduction to the two networks. I have researched meetings and activities taking place in two rather different networks. The two networks were created as a part of Ringsted Municipality's new direction for local business development activities, previously described in Chapter 2. In the following, I shortly summarize size, focus, activities, and participants of the two networks. The participants in the networks are somehow assumed to be typical network participants. They have different experiences of network participation, different positions, different goals for participating, and different ages and genders.

5.3.2 Network 1: CSR Network

Network 1 was developed because of a wish from board members in Ringsted Erhvervsforum. Participants signed up based on their interests toward the topic of Corporate Social responsibility. Some of the participants already knew one another from other local companies; others did not. Participants in the network are employed in both private and public companies. I participated in the network from the first official conference. Characteristics for the participating companies:

Number of employees:	2 – 100
Trades represented:	Public companies, social enterprises, retail shops, production companies, craft businesses, communication, and consultancies
Participants' work levels:	Managing Directors, managers, consultants, and employees at various levels

5.3.3 Network 2: Network for managing directors

Network 2 was developed due to strategic choices from Ringsted Municipality, which wanted to improve its knowledge of the larger companies in the municipality. The participating companies in Network 2 are among the largest private companies in Ringsted Municipality. I interviewed several managing directors of the larger companies in Ringsted before the network was established, and in these interviews some had expressed an interest in joining a local network to get to know one another. Characteristics for the participants' companies:

Number of employees:	Approx. 10 – 900
Trades represented:	Production within various trades, transportation industry, food, drainage industry, pharmaceutical, gift packaging, investment, contracting and service sector, etc.
Participants work level:	Managing directors

The following Table 5.1 summarizes facts and figures of the two networks.

Table 5.1: Network facts

Network	CSR	Managing Directors
Number of participants	Approx. 20	Approx. 11
Participants' work level	Various	Managing directors
Organized by	Steering Group and facilitator	Facilitator
Organized round	Topic based – related to CSR	Mutual learning processes
Meeting interval	Every 6 weeks	Every month
Meetings take place	Participants' and steering group members' companies	Participants' companies
Reason for participation	Signed up based on topic	Invited by Ringsted Municipality

Source: empirical findings

In the above facts, you get a first impression of the companies represented in the networks and participants' work levels.

5.4 Data-collection processes and methods

The empirical research has been conducted in two phases: an **exploration phase** and an **inspection phase** (Blumer, 1969, pp. 40–47). See Table 5.2 for a full overview.

1. **The exploration phase** is what provides the research with a firsthand experimental knowledge of the phenomena under study and accordingly shapes the point of attention of the study (Blumer, 1969, p. 40). Blumer argues that the exploration phase accomplishes two

goals: First, it provides the researcher with firsthand knowledge of the phenomenon of study; second, it serves as the empirical basis that anchors data, analytical relations, and interpretations (Blumer, 1969, p. 40). Exploration is not as such tied to any particular technique, method, or other manner of investigation. It requires a flexible method that can be marked as a *“careful and honest probing”* (Blumer, 1969, p. 40). Blumer claims that the result of exploration is a description of the phenomena under study that serves as the basis for further inquiry (Blumer, 1969).

2. This further work or inquiry is **the inspection phase**. While the exploration phase might develop the focus, the inspection phase produces data for analysis. The purpose of inspection is to develop analytical concepts when examining the empirical world.

“The procedure of inspection is to subject such analytical elements to meticulous examination by careful flexible scrutiny of the empirical instances covered by the analytical element. The empirical instances are those that appear in the area under study; their careful flexible scrutiny is done in the context of the empirical area in which they take place” (Blumer, 1969, p. 44)

The inspection phase proceeds by identifying observed points of attention with abstract concepts. Blumer describes the inspection phase as a process of understanding in which previous perceptions are challenged and questioned and the phenomena of study are looked at over and over again:

“... We may pick it up, look at it closely, turn it over as we view it, look at it from this or that angle, raise questions as to what it might be, go back and handle it again in the light of our questions, try it out, and test it in one way or another. This close shifting scrutiny is the essence of inspection” (Blumer, 1969, p. 44).

Blumer explains that when the research moves beyond the exploration phase, the researcher moves into the inspection phase and brings in analytical elements, examining them in relation to the empirical context. Analytical elements are brought forth by the researcher in relation to theory and used to make sense of and reflect upon the phenomena of study.

In order to develop “*thick descriptions*” (Geertz, 1973) in the exploration phase as well as the in the inspection phase, I have applied a combination of observations, informal conversations, and interviews. Thus, combining observations in the context of ongoing situations with interviews is, as Alvesson & Sköldberg (2009) argue, necessary in order to gain a richer understanding of what is “going on.” Thus, I have conducted a qualitative study, where a significant data source is field notes in which observations, experiences, and reflections continually are written down.

5.4.1 Observations and field notes

Blumer argues that it is through empirical inquiry by direct observations that analytical elements can be refined (Blumer, 1969, pp. 21–47). Right from the beginning of the study, participative observations (Spradley, 1980) had a great impact on focusing the research, see Table 5.2 for an overview. I participated in activities in Ringsted Municipality related to local business development in order to understand the context of the networks. The first six month I spent approximately two to three days a week in the Business Development Department following activities initiated by the employees and participating randomly in meeting and seminars. Through the process I developed a kind of collegial relation to employees in the Business Development Department. Not collegial in the sense that we worked together but more in relation to social relations where I got accepted as a part of their “everyday life.” These six months were characterized by what Blumer (Blumer, 1969) coins as exploration; whereas, the time to follow was characterized by inspection. Inspection phase progressed as the networks emerged. I participated in the CSR Network as well as the Network for managing directors, as a participative observer. I was introduced as a Ph.D. student with an interest in networks, and participants were informed about my motivation for being present. From time to

time I was directly invited to participate in discussions, especially when topics had some kind of relationship to the project.

In both networks, I have also been invited to do small lectures about networks and presented preliminary findings. All participants knew I participated as a researcher, but at the same time they integrated me in their discussions and expected me to participate if I had special knowledge about topics discussed. Participants interacted with me when they felt like it; see described situations in Chapters 5 and 6.

In the exploration phase of the study, field notes were widespread. I wrote down conversations and discussions taking place at meetings, in the office, and even at the lunch table. At the same time I had the opportunity to pose questions as a part of the continuous interactions. The field notes from the exploration phase have formed my understanding of the context the networks are in. As time passed, a more tight focus toward the emerging networks was developed and the inspection phase started more precisely when the networks were established and they became my main focus. I observed all network meetings and the facilitator's planning and evaluating of meetings. By the "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973), I tried to take into account the underlying layers and meanings of interactions to understand means of collaboration and value created. The field notes taken during observations provided substantial data about the emerging networking efforts, the facilitator's considerations and planning, and the unfolding of relations and interactions. At the same time the field notes included descriptions of atmosphere and personal impressions. The field notes form the basis for analysis.

5.4.2 Interviewing

Interviewing makes up an important part of my fieldwork activity, as a supplement to observations. See Table 5.2 for overview of participants interviewed. I draw on interviews in the analysis; hence, interviews support the attention toward participants' meanings and experiences. Interviews focused toward how actors interpreted and made sense of situations and events related to the networks processes. In this way it became possible to elaborate on

situations and understandings based on participant's interpretation, which I didn't have access to when only observing. The interviewees were selected with an empirical and theoretically driven strategy (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014)

The sensemaking and interpretation of the networking efforts, made by participants, were explored through semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews were suitable for the study, as they opened up interactions between interviewer and interviewee (Becker, 2008; Spradley, 1979). So even though I prepared interview guides (Appendices 3 and 4) that contained specific themes and questions, I was open to let the network participants take part in shaping the interviews, which to some extent gave the interviewee the possibility of freely telling their expectations and experiences from participating in the networks. At the same time it was important for me to touch upon certain themes and situations that had occurred during the networking meetings, so I made sure that I was asking the questions that could enlighten the research.

Thus, the interviews were helpful because participants took the necessary time to re-visit particular situations, and they shared their interpretations of these concrete situations. In this way they participated in the interpretation of concrete events and experiences, which has been used to further unfold my observations. As Czarniawska (2004) argues, such accounts are useful for answering the questions of how everyday situations are experienced and interpreted because they relate to concrete, not generalized or hypothetical, events. Furthermore, because of the observations of the networks I had come to know the actors, their businesses, important events in the networks, etc., and I could relate the questions posed in the interviews to what I had experienced and observed from a position as neither network participant nor network manager, but as a researcher with access to the networking activities.

The interviews were carried out as openly as possible in order to let the interviewees talk about issues they found important. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. See Table 5.2 for numbers of interview and whom I interviewed. I started by telling participants that I was interested in hearing their experiences of participating in the network and how and when

participation became valuable. I told them that even though I had experienced and observed the network myself, it was important for me to hear their version. For instance, what it had been like for them to participate and how it had stimulated new understandings. I did create interview guides/notes specifically for each interview to remind myself of particular situations or issues I wanted to hear about. I recorded all interviews for further use. I focused the questions toward the progress of making participation in the networks valuable. Also questions were used to clarify specific actions that caught my attention during observations. The interviews were useful in my reflections on what was actually going on. In this way, I validated my observations by reflecting them back to participants.

5.4.3 Referring to data

When referring to data collected, I refer to data from either logbook or interviews. The ethnographic narratives in Chapters 6 and 7 are based on the logbook notes but extended with quotes from network activities and interviews. All companies and participants have been made anonymous in agreement with the people involved; thus, the names used in the empirical descriptions in Chapters 6 and 7 are fictitious. As the ethnographic descriptions develop, participants are named when they are quoted, and, of course, the same names are used repeatedly. When quoting participants from the logbook, I make it clear by referring in the following way: (log: xx name). Subsequently, when referring from interviews, I quote as follows: (interview: xx name).

5.4.4 Overview of data

The following Table 5.2 provides a chronological summary of events and activities that generated data for the analysis. The dates of the events, elements of the data, and the particular methods applied are included.

Table 5.2: Data collection events and activities

	Entering the field	Network 1: CSR network	Network 2: Managing directors
	Explorations phase	Inspection phase	
Start	August 2011	April 2012	November 2012
Focus	Activities in the Business Development Department related to local business development	Participants' negotiation and change of meaning making participation valuable	Participants' negotiation and change of meaning making participation valuable
Field notes	All together 120 pages of logbook notes during the project		
Observations (See Appendix 2 for observation guide)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department meetings • Panel meetings • Activities in Ringsted Erhvervsforum 	2 CSR conferences 8 network meetings 8 steering group meetings	8 network meetings
Interviews (All recorded) (See Appendices 3 and 4 for interview guides)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town Mayor, Ringsted • City Manager, Ringsted • Former Business Development Manager, Ringsted • Chairman, Ringsted Erhvervsforum • Former Chairman, Ringsted Erhvervsforum • 18 interviews with managing directors from larger companies in Ringsted 	Primo, 2013 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lars • Irene • Paul • Adam • Lis • Facilitator Ultimo, 2013 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signe • Hanne • Else • Irene 	Ultimo, 2013 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter • Ole • Rikke • Maria • Oscar • Facilitator

Source: own creation

5.4.5 Transcription process

As recommended by Smith (Smith et al., 2007), all interviews and observations were transcribed from respectively audio recordings of the interviews and logbook notes of observations. I typed each of the transcripts as soon after the interviews / observations as possible. It was an advantage to do the transcriptions because it included the ability to recall what a participant said if the audio did not capture a comment and the opportunity to remember pieces of the interview and observations beyond the words I had written down. Where I recalled these non-verbals, I noted them in the transcript. I read through the documents following transcription and corrected any misunderstandings and for the observation's misinterpretations.

Once the transcript of the observations was completed, I printed a copy and highlighted and made notes in the margins at those places where I had a question about what went on. During this process, I focused on the places where I had questions about understandings and what went on; this allowed me to qualify interview questions and kept framing my focus. Since all notes from observations continuously were registered in my electronic logbook, I also had the opportunity to go back and forward in these on a regular basis. Thus, the data were searchable, which optimized the going back and forward, finding interactions statements that supported creation of knowledge.

Interviews were recorded, and immediately after they were conducted, I made, not strict transcriptions, but detailed summaries. Writing up these summaries gave me a good understanding of the empirical data. These writing processes was already a part of the process of inquiry, as described by Richardson (Richardson, Laurel, & Adams St Pierre, 2000). It opened up for immediate reflections that continuously focused my view.

It should be mentioned that all activities have been in Danish with Danish participants and, thus, field notes and interviews have been conducted in Danish. The quotes used in the dissertation have been translated into English in the process of writing, and I have tried to be as faithful to the original quotes as possible.

5.5 Data analysis

The search for the mechanisms making network participation valuable has been an iterative and on-going process. The work of analyzing the data is inspired by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which is a specific hermeneutic approach committed to exploring how people make sense of experiences in their lives (Smith et al., 2007). IPA research is phenomenological in its attention to a particular experience, with a hermeneutic approach to the analysis of the text of interviews and field notes. The IPA approach differs from other qualitative approaches because it focuses on participants' processes of making sense of their experiences as much as it does on the experiences themselves. IPA especially focuses on understanding lived experiences and how participants make sense of their experiences (Smith et al., 2007). It is taking the perspective of participants' perceptions of events, which in this study includes network participants' responses to participation in the networks. Further, it is interpretive as the access to participants' experiences depends on and is complicated by the researcher's understandings, adding the interpretive dimension to IPA (Smith et al., 2007).

Accordingly, IPA involves the researcher who plays an active role making sense of the data collected. The researcher must over and over again read and work with the data, taking in participants' experiences, in order to identify meaning and analysis themes. The researcher is required to make sense of the data by engaging in an interpretive relationship with the empirical data. It is through this process the researcher tries to imagine and understand parts of the network participants' and facilitators' worlds. When working with the data in this way, the researcher must also reflect upon her own actions and understandings so bias is discussed and interpreted along with the data. Thus, this method of analysis involves careful and detailed analysis and the researcher carries a great responsibility showing how conclusions are reached. The aim is to understand and interpret participants' experiences by observing and listening to stories through the filter of the researcher's experiences.

The theoretical frame, and epistemological and ontological understanding has already been elaborated prior in the chapter and the following builds on these understandings when outlining

the particular steps in the analysis. Although it was alluring to let the analysis go with the flow of the writing, I realized that I needed some structure in order to manage the vast amount of data constructed. IPA gives flexibility in the work with the data, though establishing a focus always on *“how participants are making of their personal and social world”* (Smith, 2007, p. 1).

The following describes the analytical process, framed by an IPA approach, which supports the aim of producing an ethnographic piece of work where interpretations and reflections guide the way.

5.6 First steps toward an analysis – writing ethnography

I began the early analysis of the data already in the logbook. Often I was puzzled by experiences, and these puzzlements formed the first inquiries into the data (Weick, 2002). As puzzlements occurred, I noted them and they sharpened points of attention and, thus, the research question. In this way the analysis was already in process while the data were collected, as advised by Miles et al. (Miles et al., 2014). This meant that when the more structured writing process of the analysis began, I had already drawn some lines and considerations in my logbook that formed and framed the narratives presented in Chapters 6 and 7. The raw logbook notes and transcribed interviews offered important data. When taking the notes during the observations and developing the interview questions, a selection process had started and, thus, the first steps toward an analysis. Since it is not possible to note every detail of the observed situations, the collection of data is guided by the assumptions of the researcher. Because it is when these assumption are challenged by what occurs that the researcher is puzzled and this is recorded (Weick, 2002). Based primarily on the field notes, small narratives were written in order to focus the substantial data. As discussed earlier, knowledge is constructed and developed in a relation between researcher and the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2007). Similarly Blumer argues that data are socially constructed in the relationship between researcher and research context (Blumer, 1969). This perception of knowledge includes both the construction and the interpretation, and acknowledges that knowledge is constantly negotiated. Constructing and interpretation of the

knowledge have been an ongoing process, which has been closely related to the emergence of the two networks. Thus, there were no predetermined and objective understandings of how participation in the network became valuable. Understandings were continuously constructed through going back and forward in collected data, often in parallel with the data collection. This was done through close interpretative readings of logbook notes and transcriptions in order to identify recurrent themes that emerged from the interpretation of actions of network participants. The same process was repeated across the two networks. Throughout the research I tried to keep an open mind toward the field and context of study, but at the same time understandings were framed by the research question and theoretical perspective.

Interpretation started as a search for themes and recurring patterns in the material. These themes are built from participants' expectations and experiences of value (framing the first part of the written up analysis), and how this is interrelated with facilitator practices that support value creation. So in essence, it is an exploratory and descriptive part of the work, building the case story guided by the question "how." It thereby creates a particular value creation framework for researching the networks, based on the empirical material rather than theory.

Throughout the iterative process of analyzing the empirical material, interview transcriptions were read and re-read in the search for different ways that the network participants expressed how participation became valuable. The logbook notes and transcribed interviews were studied, and situations and statements where participant enacted or discussed process of value creation were highlighted. This produced a systematic starting point for understanding the value creation process and its variations in networks. The process resulted in various patterns, references, raw codes, concepts, and notes.

The analysis has been a process where I continuously developed my understandings by having discussions with network participants and facilitator about their experiences – and mine. Accordingly some points of attention were derived directly from observation while others emerged from moving back and forward among the various data. Though it was when actually writing up the ethnographic narratives that the analytical points of attention finally emerged,

and thus Chapter 6 and 7 established the framing for the analysis and discussion. How this writing process took place is described in the following sections.

5.7 Writing ethnography framing the analysis

Much ethnographic research has been criticized for being overly narcissistic. Even though the interpretations in ethnographic accounts is the researcher's own and much attention is placed upon the researcher's own experience while in the organization, it is not believed that this negates the value of such accounts, when the aim is to provide rich, thick descriptions of life in the networks. The reflexivity of ethnography allows the researcher to intimately connect the personal experiences to the research question at play. Ethnography exposes the reader to stories that otherwise wouldn't have been uncovered because it provides firsthand accounts of the studied phenomena. Getting deeper data through reflexivity can allow for more understanding of the topic and can voice issues that otherwise would not be explored in more traditional research.

The quality of ethnography is in the thick descriptions, which establish an explanation of the phenomena of study and which gives the reader an experience by which they can make up his/her own assumptions and understandings on top of the ones the researcher presents. Thus, it makes a thorough explanation of the networks, making it a powerful research method (Geertz, 1973; Van Maanen, 1988). Saying that, with the stronger focus toward organizational ethnography and growing awareness among ethnographers, there is a need for stepping away from the naive approach that ethnography has to be a descriptive telling from the inside (Watson, 2011) toward an approach of reflexive ethnography and confessional tales (Van Maanen, 1988). Accordingly, the ethnographic approach becomes a reflexive process where trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 1982) of the study also relates to the researchers' role in creating data and developing findings / conclusions, which will be discussed further in Section 5.8 Research quality. This reflexivity requires alternative styles of writing. Thus, one thing is the creation of data; another thing is writing up the data. The process of writing up the

overwhelming amount of data, which is often produced when taking an ethnographic approach, can be a challenging affair, and within the ethnographic approach several methods are possible (Ybema, Yanow, Wels, & Kamsteeg, 2009). Humprey and Watson in Ybema et al (2009) suggest four different approaches when writing up organizational ethnography: plain, enhanced, semi-fictionalized and fictionalized.

Table 5.3: Approaches for writing up ethnography

Plain Ethnography	Enhanced Ethnography	Semi-fictionalised Ethnography	Fictionalized Ethnography
A traditional social science account of events occurring within the investigation of a single case	An account of events occurring within the investigation of a single case which uses the presentational techniques of the novelist: descriptive scene-setting; use of dialogues; author as a character in the narrative; inclusion of emotional responses by author and subjects; attention to the perspectives and stories of subjects	<p>A restructuring of events occurring within one or more ethnographic investigations into a single narrative (incorporating B form features)</p> <p>This is an invaluable way of using research 'data' that is highly sensitive or confidential and which would not be publishable without very heavy disguising</p>	<p>A drawing on ethnographic and related experiences from the author's life to construct an entertaining and edifying narrative (incorporating B and C form features).</p> <p>Characters and events may be 'created' out of materials gathered over the authors personal and scientific life</p>

Source: (Ybema et al., 2009, p. 43)

The ethnographic narratives developed in the dissertation are developed in the enhanced ethnography approach. The writing up of the observations and interviews of and around the networks are partial and selective and relates to the networks and the research question. What is strived for with this approach is a to make the narratives recognizable for not only participants and facilitator in the networks but also readers, which is considered a criteria for trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

Here it is argued that the narratives and interpretations discussed in the theoretical frame of inter-organizational network theories create opportunities for transferability and translation of knowledge across contexts. Thus, the narratives gives the reader the possibility of getting involved in the plot all along, and it opens up for the reader's reflections in relation to what is going on. I focused toward the challenges participants and facilitator meet on the "roller coaster" trip of networking activities (both their the ups and downs are described and discussed), and how they among themselves came to appreciate participation, and thus, made participation valuable. Consequently, writing enhanced ethnography can open the door to important knowledge about the networks (Ybema et al., 2009). The narratives produced for this study are of what happened in exactly these two networks, but written in a way that makes it possible to reflect upon similar situations. Taken together, these considerations make a compelling argument for how the research generates knowledge that can facilitate new understandings for academia as well as practice. I have approached the research inquiry process so it can bring forth discussion of networking activities, inspire requirements for practice, and scaffold transferability of knowledge produced about network facilitation.

5.7.1 Analysis as an ongoing process of coding

As a paradigm, organizational ethnography is a reflective practice in which the researcher critically considers her position in relation to the organization and the situations studied. This consideration nourishes and guides the process of writing ethnography as a part of the analysis. The sections above describes how the data were written up, but throughout this process a structured selection and de-selection process took place, a process that can be phrased as coding. Miles et al describes how they consider coding as more than just preparation for the analysis to come; "*coding is analysis*" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 72). The coding of the data has all along been based on the puzzlement occurring as situations unfolded as a part of a reflexive endeavor, as described in the above, thus here the coding took place as an continuous practice, taking place when collecting data, writing up notes, preparing for interview and when constantly going back and forward in the empirical data.

The use of fieldnotes plays an important role in ethnographic studies. Van Maanen describes how fieldnotes are continuous streams of commentary about what is happening in the research, involving both observations and analysis (Van Maanen, 1988). Similarly, Hammersley & Atkinson (1983) argue that an important part of the analysis is reading carefully through the data and using it to think with as an uninterrupted research activity. Then the puzzlements, surprises, and interesting parts arise. The puzzlements can sometimes arise from comments made by informants and in other cases by the researcher as conclusions of observed actions.

In this dissertation, the data collection resulted in a rather vast material of different notes. The arrangement of the material was rather straightforward in the sense that I had already very early decided to focus on the activities taking place in the networks, and thus there is a focus toward how the relations among participants and facilitator emerged and developed and made participation in the networks valuable. Thus, observations and interviews were coded according to the research question and how the networks developed, and questions asked in interviews were related to situations in observations. Data have been systematically interpreted and analyzed, following the standard qualitative methods from open coding to more selective coding (Miles et al., 2014). This implies that the topics with which I entered the field, in form of a problem area, established the reflective frame and became the major tool for puzzlements and interpretations in form of similarities and differences. In other words, the narratives of the networks have been interpreted in context with the intention of gaining knowledge of how participation in networks becomes valuable. This early and on-going process gave structure to the ethnographic narratives but is not as visible as references in the writing.

In the analytical process that followed, I looked for overlapping and recurring themes, and similarities and differences in the network. Focusing on the question of how participation became valuable was where the analysis took its form. This exercise reduced the number of semi-unstructured quotes and situations in form of patterns to a more limited set of meaningful themes that still managed to account for variations in the data (Miles et al., 2014).

Although various shortcomings of this approach could be discussed, such as the given context, the variation in the networks and the purposeful selection of interviews, this approach is appropriate for exploring the theme of making participation in networks valuable and capable of illuminating the roller coaster ride participants and facilitator engage in, in network. Therefore, no claims are made about representation nature since this is beyond the epistemological understanding previously elaborated upon.

5.8 Research quality

All along this research process has been a reflexive journey. Throughout the research process, research questions and general inquiries have been formed by the empirical data as well as theoretical input and qualified as a reflexive and interpretive research process (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Mead, 1932). As my perceptions changed, the inquiries and research questions changed accordingly. Doing interpretive and reflexive research is like doing a patchwork. You can keep adding new knowledge, and it seems to be a job never ending. Mead describe this reflexive process Mead as *“turning back of the experience of the individual upon himself”* (Mead, 1934, p. 134). Mead’s understanding of reflexivity also provides a basis for ethnographic studies seeking to explore social interactions. Mead’s concepts enable ethnographers to overcome the objective understanding of researchers not being able to access the emerging meanings appearing in social interactions. When the self continually is under construction, this is what ethnographers experience when participating in social interactions related to the phenomenon of study. Attention to the process of transforming the researcher’s “me” can provide genuine knowledge of the context wherein the ethnographer participates. So the reflexive “turning back” in ethnography is providing access to new understandings as long as they do not lose sight of delivering explanatory abstractions and not just report individual experiences as problematized by Yanow (Yanow, 2009). The process of turning back on oneself is a continuing process when doing research. Reflexivity has been the guiding framework that has enabled me as a researcher to see things differently. Reflexivity qualifies methodological choices and the

research process; thus, guided by reflexivity I recognize my own influence on choices throughout the research process.

5.8.1 Trustworthiness as a process when doing qualitative research

It is difficult to judge the validity and reliability of qualitative research within the traditional framework such as that of quantitative research. Yet it is still important to discuss and review the quality of qualitative research but by criteria that are appropriate to it. Many attempts have been made to develop criteria for validity in qualitative research (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Becker, 2008; Blumer, 1954; Cho, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Kvale, 1995). Cho discusses how a transformative approach is a *“a progressive, emancipatory process leading toward social change that is to be achieved by the research endeavour itself”* (Cho, 2006, pp. 312–322). In same vein Kvale applies the notion of “pragmatic validity” when he discusses how validity is related to the quality of craftsmanship and how interpretation is useful to participants taking part in the research as it has the potential of mobilizing action (Kvale, 1995). Thus, research can do more than describe; it changes action. Similarly Guba and Lincoln argue that research should be methodologically documented so that the readers can follow the line of arguing leading to interpretations and arguments (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). A qualitative study can ensure credible findings through careful attention to its methodology and at all stages of the research process. From the entry into the field through to the writing phase the researcher, explicitly consider how the research question, theory, methodology, technics and the researchers presence in the field are intertwined with an embedded view of trustworthiness. Whereas the more positivistic standards limit interactions between researcher and participants to a truth finding endeavor of causes/effects, what Guba and Lincoln (1982) call the naturalistic qualitative inquiry is an continuous process of research craftsmanship supporting new understandings and change (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

In this dissertation, the aim is to move away from the concept of truth seeking and a claim of correct/accurate/verifiable understanding to a research process where the researcher’s

puzzlements and interpretations are ever present by sharing concerns, challenges, contradictions, and similarities continually. This means that we have to judge quality or “trustworthiness” (Guba and Lincoln, 1982) of research from a different set of criteria than positivistic research. Guba and Lincoln have developed a bridge between the more positivistic and traditional conceptions of research trustworthiness. They argue that positivistic research have four terms for research quality: internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity. In qualitative, naturalistic research, they suggest that these terms for research quality could be replaced by the terms credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 247). The following discusses these terms, and it is the intent to argue that the research quality in this dissertation should be evaluated against these terms instead of the traditional positivistic criteria.

5.8.2 Credibility

The term credibility is the naturalistic (qualitative) equivalent of the term internal validity used in realistic and positivistic research. Research based on naturalistic inquiry can ensure credible findings through careful attention to its methodology at all stages of the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Credibility relates to how the study manages to develop congruent relations between the researcher’s observations and the theoretical conclusions (Miles et al., 2014, pp. 310–315). Thus, credibility ensures that researcher understanding the empirical phenomenon of study and focus the research toward what is intended, and takes into account the perspectives of the participants in the research. Credibility is established through methods and techniques ensuring that relevant findings will be created. It can be argued that credibility also takes into account ethical dimensions of the research and relates to how the researcher engages with people engaged in the study but also how the researcher takes care of the interpretations in a respectful way. Thus, there is a fine balance between the ethical considerations and developing the research.

5.8.3 Transferability

Transferability is a challenging affair in qualitative research taking place in a specific context. Flyvbjerg (2006) and Guba & Lincoln (1982) argue that transferability of a qualitative study relates to how the study is able to develop detailed and nuanced descriptions of the specific context of the study (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Guba & Lincoln, 1982), known as thick description (Geertz, 1973). This thick description establishes a possibility for the reader to interpret how results of the study can be transferred to other contexts. Within the realistic paradigm transferability relates to external validity and how conclusions from a study can be generalized and thus can be transferred to contexts other than the ones they are produced in. Lee and Baskerville argue that the only way for any research, qualitative as well as quantitative, to generalize to a new setting is for the theory to survive an empirical test in that particular setting (Lee & Baskerville, 2003, p. 241).

5.8.4 Dependability

Lincoln and Guba stress the close ties between credibility and dependability, arguing that, in practice, a demonstration of the former goes some distance in ensuring the latter. By dependability it is discussed how a qualitative study shows how findings of the study are created in a way that other researchers have the possibility of following the line of arguing and the process that lead to the findings (Miles et al., 2014). Within the positivistic paradigm this is termed as replicability. Dependability of a qualitative study is reliant on a well-described research process, which includes the thorough description and argumentation of the chosen theory, methods, and research question. Thus, along the way, the researcher takes into account theoretical as well as empirical understandings that influence the findings.

5.8.5 Confirmability

Confirmability speaks to the quality of the data and the analysis and how the process is structured and transparent. Confirmability is a qualitative counterpart to objectivity, and as such, this relates to how the researcher has let theoretical, personal values, or other biased understanding influence on the findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Steps should be taken to ensure that findings are based on empirical and theoretical understandings, rather than preferences of the researcher. According to Guba and Lincoln the confirmability of a study relates to how the researcher is reflexive in the research process and aims to describe bias and assumptions when interpreting the phenomenon of study (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

5.9 Trustworthiness and research quality of the dissertation

This study used observations and interviews and the research quality, and trustworthiness may be evaluated against the naturalistic criteria of Guba and Lincoln (year). The following Table 5.4 shows this study's actions of trustworthiness.

Table 5.4: Research trustworthiness

Method	Definition	This study' actions of trustworthiness
Credibility (Known as internal validity in positivistic terms)	Credibility is established through methods and techniques ensuring that relevant findings will be created	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed a research design fitting the research question and carefully explained the methods. • Developed narratives showing the understanding of the phenomenon of study in dialogue with those represented. • Ethnographic study with longitudinal engagement, based on observations and interviews, between the researcher and the participants in order to gain an satisfactory understanding of the empirical setting and to establish a relationship between the participants • Frequent sessions between the researcher and members of the organization. Through discussion new understandings emerged. The researcher used theses sessions to discuss alternative approaches. The meetings also provide a setting for the researcher to test ideas and interpretations and helped to recognize own biases and preferences
Transferability (Known as external validity in positivistic terms)	Ensure satisfactory empirical data are provided to enable the reader to make a transfer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed a theoretical frame relevant for the phenomenon of study • Developed thick descriptions based on observations and interviews
Dependability (Known as reliability in positivistic terms)	The processes within the study should be explained and unfolded in detail all along the process of the research for readers to follow line of argumentation and the research practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed a thorough description of methodological choices • Developed a research design and arguments for how it has been planned and executed • Provided a reflection upon of data collection and how the researcher was positioned in the field
Confirmability (Known as objectivity in positivistic terms)	Ensures that findings are based on empirical and theoretical understandings rather those preferences of the researcher.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-depth methodological descriptions • Recognize own biases, beliefs, and assumptions • Showed own position in the research

Source: own creation

5.9.1 Summing up

This chapter has discussed methodological choices related to the study. The chapter outlines the steps taken to develop the study and ends by discussing the quality of the research.

Accordingly the chapter sets the scene for the chapters to come for the reader to understand how the remaining parts of the study have been developed.

6 Network 1: CSR network

The following pages are a somewhat chronological description of the emergence of a CSR network in Ringsted Municipality. The first initiatives toward establishing the CSR network was taken at the beginning of 2012, and in the moment of writing this dissertation the CSR network is still ongoing. Writing all actions and discussions down would be an impossible job – and not fruitful for the readers; thus, I have selected noteworthy episodes in order to give a thick description of what is going on, as described in Chapter 5.

6.1 Introducing the CSR network: a short story of how it all began

In Chapter 2 I described how Ringsted Erhvervsforum and Ringsted Municipality in autumn 2011 started a discussion of how they could stimulate and support local business development in Ringsted in a new and more dynamic way. One of the initiatives that rose from this discussion was the agreement to develop a network organized round the topic of corporate social responsibility (CSR). The reason for applying CSR as focus was primarily the increased demand for CSR profiles within the public sector and in larger building projects. To develop the network and to support the network with knowledge, a steering group was established. The steering group involved the present chairman of Ringsted Erhvervsforum (Poul), a managing director from a larger company in Ringsted (Simon), a consultant from a public organization with focus toward CSR (Dorthe), and a facilitator from Ringsted Municipality, Business Development Department. In order to engage participants in the network, the steering group planned a kick-off conference for interested participants. An invitation was sent to members of Ringsted Erhvervsforum (see Figure 6.1), and the conference was also announced in local papers.

Figure 6.1: Invitation to the First CSR kick-off conference



Der er penge i god opførsel! Bliv klogere på, hvordan du kan øge din virksomheds indtjening med social og miljømæssig ansvarlighed.

Din virksomhed/forretning kan få nye opgaver og et større overskud, hvis I arbejder med jeres CSR – altså virksomhedens sociale og miljømæssige ansvarlighed.

Derfor vil vi gerne invitere dig til et spændende seminar, hvor du bliver klogere på CSR og bliver præsenteret for hvordan din virksomhed, i eget tempo og sammen med andre virksomheder, kan komme i gang med eller forbedre jeres CSR-initiativer.

Seminaret er planlagt af en gruppe virksomheder i Ringsted med repræsentanter fra Ringsted Erhvervsforum, Ringsted Kommune og Vinsa (Virksomhedsnetværk for Socialt Ansvar).

Seminaret finder sted **fredag den 13. april** fra kl. 9:00 – 13:00 hos [redacted]
1 i Ringsted. Tilmelding senest den 4. april til [redacted]

Programmet er følgende:

9:00 – 9:10	Velkomst og introduktion til seminaret ved [redacted] formand for Ringsted Erhvervsforum
9:10 – 9:30	Hvorfor bliver CSR vigtigere fremover? [redacted] direktør for [redacted]
9:30 – 9:50	CSR er basis – også i lovgivningen ved [redacted]
9:50 – 10:10	Kaffepause
10:10 – 10:30	Det sociale aspekt ved CSR [redacted] netværkskonsulent hos [redacted]
10:30 – 10:50	Hvorfor arbejder [redacted] med CSR [redacted] direktør for [redacted]
10:50 – 11:10	Kaffepause
11:10 – 11:40	Arbejdsstationer med CSR i praksis
11:40 – 12:00	Paneldebat og videre forløb
12:00 – 13:00	Frokost

Ringsted Erhvervsforum



VIRKSOMHEDSNETVÆRK:
FOR SOCIALT ANSVAR
Fra virksomhed til virksomhed

6.2 First CSR kick-off conference, April 2012

The first CSR kick-off meeting was an open conference that took place in Ringsted in April 2012 and was open to all interested participants. The CSR conference was planned and conducted by steering group members. It was as a three-hour conference with short CSR lectures / introductions and workshops, as illustrated in the invitation in Figure 6.1. Members of the

steering group conducted the lectures. Forty people participated at the First CSR kick-off conference.

I participated at the conference as an employee from Ringsted Municipality without any formal role or assignments. I explained that I was present because of a research project and that my interest wasn't as much CSR but the processes of networking.

What I experienced was a conference that was primarily characterized by presentations and monologues carried out by the steering group. The steering group members are all experienced within CSR and draw on well-established meanings on how CSR relates to their businesses and how and why organizations work with CSR.

During the conference, participants were divided into three working groups with the aim of discussing how CSR had a practical and strategically position in participants' organizations and to share experiences and challenges. The working group sessions turned out to be a shallow telling of CSR in participants' practices, not as much a reflexive dialogue around experiences and challenges. I experienced that participants were listening to steering group members as if they were the ones with the torches, guiding them in the right direction of CSR, instead of a workshop of mutual reflections.

The First CSR kick-off conference ended with a call for participants to join the planned networks with a focus toward CSR.

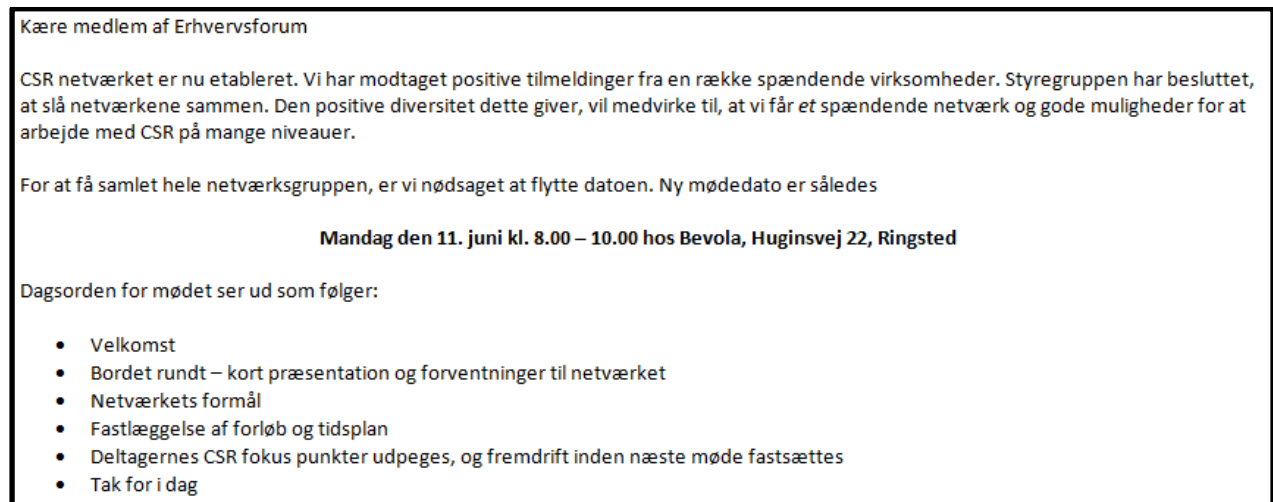
6.3 Gathering participants for the CSR network

For a short period of time my engagement with the CSR network changed drastically. The facilitator from Ringsted Business Development Department resigned from his job, and for a short time there was no one to take over from him. Because I already had participated in the kick-off meeting and was supposed to follow and observe the CSR network, I was invited to become a member of the steering group. This also meant that I for a short period of time

accepted to have a few more practical tasks. These practical tasks were to contact to potential participants and organizing and registration of participant for forthcoming CSR network meeting.

The overall purposes of developing the CSR networks were to provide a platform where participants could work and focus on developing a CSR business profile. The CSR work was to be supported by members from the steering group, and for participant to share reflections upon CSR with one another. The intentions of the steering group were to establish three CSR networks, dividing participants into three different segments: retail, consultant, and industry. Immediately after the First CSR kick-off conference, on behalf of Ringsted Erhvervsforum, I sent an invitation to participants and invited them to join the CSR networks. Unexpectedly, the support from participants wasn't that great and there weren't really enough participants to start three CSR networks. Thus, the steering group agreed to cut down and only establish one shared CSR network for all interested participants. Thus, I was assigned to e-mail all members of Ringsted Erhvervsforum informing them about this change of structure. The e-mail showed in Figure 6.2 shortly describes how the steering group has decided to establish only one CSR network, and in order to do this the first announced date had to be changed. The agenda for the first meeting included the following items on the agenda: Welcoming, Round the table introduction of participants, Purpose of the CSR network, Organizing and scheduling meetings, Focusing the CSR work and assignments before next meeting, Summing up and finalizing the meeting.

Figure 6.2: From three to one CSR network



The new structure, based on one CSR network for all, was to cover approximately 20 participants from various companies. This meant that the network became a very diverse combination of participants, varying from managing directors of larger production companies, to leaders from public organizations to owners of small retail shops as described in Chapter 5.

During the process of sending invitations out and registering participants, I experienced that participants' motivation for signing up for the CSR network was very different. Several potential participants questioning practicalities, segmentation, focus, etc. contacted me.

For instance, one participant didn't agree to the first suggested structure with networks for three different segments because she wanted to engage with people from different fields and in between the lines she saw the CSR network as a way of getting new customers and doing business. The view from a shop owner was opposite; she didn't agree to the new structure because she was conscious about sharing her challenges and experience with CSR in a network including managing directors and participants for companies much larger than hers.

Based on the preliminary conversation with potential participants, I realized that there were many diverse purposes for participation and that some participants more or less agreed or disagreed to the structure. I found myself wondering how this new combination of participants

would affect the commitment and forthcoming collaboration in the CSR network, or if already signed-up participants would bail out.

6.4 Planning and introduction – first meeting in the CSR network, June 2012

With an agenda, as shown in Figure 6.2, the first meeting was upfront, given a character of a planning and introduction meeting. Twenty-five persons signed up for the first meeting and committed to work on a CSR profile for their organizations.

The meeting started with steering group member Simon giving an outline of the day and with a request for participants to introduce their present CSR focus and activities, and how CSR has a role in their daily work practice.

Following, steering group member Poul introduces a CSR profile template to frame and guide the participants' work with CSR, shown below in Figure 6.3. The template was already introduced at the First CSR kick-off conference, but today it is introduced as a mutual frame for the collaboration in the CSR network. Participants are encouraged to describe their existing CSR work through the CSR profile template. Thus, the template becomes an object that is supposed to guide the joint activities in the network.

Figure 6.3: CSR profile template

CSR profil for _____ A/S, Ringsted

Vores overordnede politik


Det gør vi allerede

Det arbejder vi med

Maj 2015

Date: _____ Firma/underskrift: _____

PTP/COWI/04.06.2012 Ringsted Erhvervsforum



The meeting is heavily structured around the practical work of developing a CSR profile. The CSR profile, which the participants have agreed to develop for their individual organizations, is to function as a focal point for the joint work. Thus, the CSR profile template gathers participants and develops a focus toward a common ground. Despite participants shortly presenting their previous work with CSR, the dialogue at the meeting takes its departure from the steering group members' experience with CSR. At the end of the meeting, it is agreed upon that meetings are to be held at participant premises by turn-taking. It was decided to arrange the meetings by turn-taking in order to engage participants and to get them to know one another better by visiting their respective premises.

6.5 A new member of the steering group

The Business Development Department has by now employed a new facilitator, and she also becomes a member of the CSR steering group. For me, this means that I can put the few practical tasks behind me and concentrate upon my role as a researcher doing participative observations. I have agreed to continue as a steering group member, sharing my reflections based on observations, with the other steering group members. In that way my participation, not only in the network but also in the steering group, has the opportunity to support the learning and development of the CSR networking activities.

Registrations for the next meeting are slowly ticking into the facilitator's mailbox, but participants seem to be a bit slow about signing up for participation. The new facilitator seems a little frustrated about the organizing around the CSR network meetings. Even though the steering group members meet a few days before the meeting, they do not as such agree upon how the meeting should proceed, and neither do they agree on an agenda for the day. In the eye of the facilitator the planning seems to be a little loose. The only thing the steering group members agree upon is that all discussions should take place in plenum, keeping participant together in one big group all through the meeting.

I have no longer to deal with the practical issues of the CSR network meetings, but the other steering group members also seems to be a little distant in their engagement with the practical issues. They haven't really discussed which activities each of them is to be in charge of, and it seems like it is expected that the facilitator picks up on most issues.

6.6 Starting to socialize and developing mutual expectations – second meeting in the CSR network, August 2012

Today's meeting starts with a lively and informal dialogue over breakfast. Participants are small-talking, and they engage with one another in a loose and profound way. They are laughing

together and seem to be comfortable in one another's company. From the conversations I overhear, I have a feeling that conversations are both formal and informal, or you could say private or work-related. For instance, participants are sharing with people sitting next to them their CSR stories, progression in their work, and new experiences.

After a nice breakfast and informal talk, steering group member Poul makes a presentation of how CSR, to some extent, is successfully integrated in his company. The atmosphere seems to change during his presentation, and by the look in participants' eyes it seems like they are drifting away. Even though Poul opens up for a dialogue, there are hardly any questions and participants do not pick up on Poul's story. I can even feel the change of atmosphere in my own awareness. Poul's story of how well CSR is integrated in his company was meant as an example of how CSR could work with the overall strategy, but unfortunately the story doesn't seem to inspire or do anything good for the participants.

What seems to be the challenge is that Poul's CSR practice is far away from the participant's practices; thus, it is hard to match and relate to. Poul's telling of how CSR is positioned in his company seems to be too difficult for participants to relate to and apply to their own practices. So even though Poul's presentation of CSR is considered an inspirational input, it does the opposite.

Participants are here for sharing knowledge and learning about CSR, but for now they seem to have gone all quiet. Their way of engaging and addressing one another also changes. They seem to become strangers to one another again and create distance by addressing each other with "*I don't recall your name?*" or "*Where are you from?*" (Log: Søren, Lis and Irene). These particularities didn't seem to matter when they were small-talking at the beginning of the meeting.

The facilitator proposes to divide the CSR network into two workshop groups for the rest of the meeting. Participants are supposed to discuss and present their individual CSR work / profile and to give one another feedback. Before the facilitator has finished her introduction of the workshop tasks, one network participant, Rasmus, cuts her off. Rasmus doesn't agree with the

agenda for the rest of the meeting; he wants all participants to be together to share their work and reflections. He wants to be able to share and gain knowledge from all his new CSR companions. More participants join and agree, and they all strongly object to be divided into two groups. One participant, Lars, tells how he is so curious about the others' work that he doesn't want to miss out on anything. All participants agree; they do not want to be split up. Instead, they agree that knowledge has to be shared equally in plenum if they are to learn from one another and develop new relations.

Following is a presentation of CSR work made by Else. Else represents the smallest business in the CSR network. Before the meeting, Else has been really troubled about how to work with CSR and she has spent a lot of time and effort developing her CSR profile. Else's presentation of her CSR work is very hands-on. This seems to work for the other participants who immediately join in to discuss Else's work on the CSR profile. Participants reflect Else's work toward their own CSR profiles and discuss how the CSR initiatives that Else has taken can work in their companies. Irene picks up on one of the CSR initiatives Else has worked with and translates it to own practice, a practice that is very different. Else's CSR activities seem to work as inspiration for the other participants. Not only does Else's work inspire the others, but also participants acknowledge that even though their businesses might surface very differently, the CSR challenges seem to be the same. Participants acknowledge Else's work with her CSR profile and especially the effort she has put into it. Clearly participants accept her work, which gives them a chance for joining the conversation at different levels, and mutually they agree that "trying" is the most important part when wanting to develop the CSR profile.

First of all, I think what came forth in the discussion is that participants defined the shared purpose for participation in the CSR network. Participants agree that they participate because of the possibility of sharing knowledge and learning about CSR based on a mutual reflection. Secondly, the participants in the CSR network in this meeting acted as a collective against the steering group's planning. This episode was probably the first sign of the CSR network starting to become a collective and joining force.

Previously the participants had only shown very limited responsibility toward the shared focus of the CSR template. They had hardly recognized one another's knowledge about CSR, but it seems to be slowly changing and they are in a process of becoming a collective and developing joint action. Up until now they had not shown much interest in one another's CSR work, but when the network facilitator announced the "dividing" up, a more shared focus occurred. Declining the dividing up suggested by the facilitator led to a new and more shared focus. Afterwards, when participants started discussing their CSR profiles, there seemed to be a different openness toward discussing challenges, and the participants opened up to shared knowledge in different ways.

Later at interviews I asked steering group member Poul and the facilitator how they experienced the participants' rejection of the splitting up. They both had a feeling that it was a turning point for the CSR network because participants actually "picked" each other and agreed on being together as a network. At the interview steering group member Poul said:

"It was a good day. I didn't agree on the dividing up either. They [participants] didn't want to split. They wanted to hear everything; they were eager for knowledge. There was a fantastic energy in the room at the time"

(Interview: Poul)

When finalizing the meeting that day, there is an explicit acceptance of CSR knowledge as being embedded in the network with a possibility of creating value. Several participants joined the choir of acceptance saying, *"I will use my network when working on CSR"* (Log: Else, Irene, Rasmus).

6.7 Developing relations - third meeting in the CSR network, October 2012

The third network meeting starts with an introduction of the company hosting the meeting. CSR participant Lis introduces how her company approximately four years ago started to develop customer relationships by participating in various networks. Lis tells how engagement in various networks is what keeps her business going. Lis explains how her company is depending on collaboration with other local companies, and by engaging in different networks Lis's business area has increased. Further, Lis tells how in particular her engagement in the CSR network has given her new knowledge about businesses in Ringsted. For her company in general, participating in networks has meant that the largest revenue ever was reached in 2012. Lis believes that the positive development *"...is due to working in networks"* (Log: Lis). Hanne agrees with Lis and says, *"I work with relations every day. Developing relationships have impact on my results"* (Log: Hanne).

What I experienced in this meeting is that there is a rather normative acceptance of networking as being a good thing. The network member from the hosting company, Lis, does have some economic results to show, but her learning experience is not at focus. It is more the experience of improving their result and turnover. This also shows the diverse purposes for participating in networking activities. This particular network member might participate primarily for making business on the short run while the participant, Hanne, who stated, *"Relations have an impact on my results"* (Log: Hanne) is focused toward the "relations" as a way of gathering knowledge.

Next on the agenda is participants' presentation of their work on CSR profiles. The steering group encourages participants to present their CSR profile work in plenum. One participant, Irene, who up until now primarily has been in a listening position, grasps the opportunity. When Irene gets going, presenting her CSR activities, it is hard to stop her again. Not only has Irene done a lot of work on her company's CSR profile, she also has a lot of questions and reflections that she shares with the other participants. Irene is telling how her activities related to working with the CSR profile have stimulated a discussion in her company about their presence in the

local community and how her participation in the network has given her a nuanced way to look at business partners and collaboration in general.

Later on I interviewed Irene, and she told me it had taken her some time to get to the point where she felt ready to present her work on the CSR profile. At the beginning Irene had been feeling unsecure in the network due to lack of knowledge about participants and the topic. She said that the facilitator had made a point of supporting interaction processes and getting participants to socialize and share knowledge, which she found very positive. Thus, Irene has a feeling that network participants are getting closer in the sense that they have found a form or a structure for the meetings that seems to work (Interview: Irene).

The lack of knowledge about the other participants is also a matter participant Signe elaborate on when I interviewed her:

“If you don’t show up on a regular basis, people sit thinking, ‘Who are they?’ Then can’t develop a trusting relationship. I think trust is developed when we meet on a regular basis, and then it becomes possible to use one another in different ways”
(Interview: Signe).

Both Irene and Signe are aware that they feel insecure as long as they don’t know one another that well, and this becomes a challenge when wanting to share and discuss knowledge.

Back at the meeting, I am a little puzzled about quite a few participants who seem to have missed out on applying the CSR template for their profiles. Instead, they have chosen to go their own ways with their CSR work and excuse themselves, saying that they hadn’t heard about the template or couldn’t find it on the website. I wonder if this should be seen as an obstruction of the shared focus or just a regular missing out. What I don’t know at this point of time is that the use of the CSR template and applying it to participant’s individual CSR activities is a challenge that will be present in the network all along.

At 10 o’clock the meeting is supposed to stop, but participants seems like they don’t want to split up. Two and two, they engage in discussions about CSR, which can’t seem to end. An

ongoing discussion seems to be how CSR relates to culture and how CSR can be integrated as a kind of DNA within the company. Participants are not as such searching for the one and only solution of how to integrate CSR in their respective companies, but they keep questioning and challenging each other's understandings of how they are working with CSR. In this sense there seem to be an ongoing reflection that keeps producing and providing new knowledge about CSR, which participants relates to own practices.

6.8 Mirroring behaviour – second CSR conference, November 2012

Today is the day for the second CSR conference. The outcome of the past half-year of CSR work is to be shown in public. Even though it is a drizzly autumn day, the conference room is full of good energy and excitement (see photos below in Picture 6.1). The CSR network participants have agreed to show their CSR profiles at an open conference.

Picture 6.1: Pictures from CSR Conference





External speakers have been invited to give their input about newest trends within CSR. The conference has been advertised in local newspapers and by invitations (See Figure 6.4) to businesses and politicians in Ringsted.

Figure 6.4: CSR Conference invitation



PROGRAM

Ringsted Erhvervsforum etablerede i 2011 "Ringsted Udviklingsakademi", der er en platform for fælles udviklingstiltag blandt Erhvervsforums medlemmer.

Det første projekt i Ringsted Udviklingsakademi har fokuseret på, at ruste virksomhederne til at imødekomme de stadigt stigende krav til bæredygtighed og socialt ansvar (CSR). Det har været gjort via initiativet Ringsted CSR Netværk.

Ved en konference den 21. november 2012 fra kl. 9.00 – 12.00 præsenterer de deltagende virksomheder deres CSR profiler, der viser hvorledes de arbejder med social ansvarlighed og bæredygtighed, samt hvilke mål, de har med deres fortsatte CSR-arbejde.

Ud over de lokale indlæg, vil der på konferencen også være indlæg fra Flemming Thingbak, direktør Aalborg City og et indlæg der handler om de nyeste tendenser inden for CSR, ved Cand.tech.soc. PhD, Mercy Wambui Kamara.

For yderligere information og tilmelding se <https://ringsted.nemtilmeld.dk/10/>

Venlig hilsen
CSR Netværkets styregruppe

8.30 – 9.00	Ankomst
9.00 – 9.45	Velkomst ved Erhvervsforums formand Peter Terman Petersen, introduktion til CSR-begrebet, Ringsted CSR Netværket, samt velkomst ved 'minister'.
9.45 – 10.15	Flemming Thingbak, direktør Aalborg City. Fortæller om Aalborgs store satsning på grøn butik-konceptet
10.15 – 10.25	To Ringsted virksomheder præsenterer deres CSR-profiler og deres arbejde med at nå frem til profilen
10.25 – 10.50	Gallerirunde til de forskellige virksomheder der præsenterer deres CSR-profil
10.50 – 11.35	Mercy Wambui Kamara, freelance CSR forsker/konsulent. Fortæller om det nyeste på CSR-fronten
11.35 – 12.00	Dialog, opsamling og afslutning
12.00	Let frokost




Steering group member Poul opens the conference with a speech focusing on the process the CSR network participants have been going through. He describes how the work with the CSR profile has been an ongoing learning process, creating value for participants' businesses. Poul also emphasizes how participants have developed *"a good understanding of one another"* (Interview: Poul).


Most participants have by now developed a CSR profile for their businesses and focus on reachable goals for the near future. The reachable goals are not as such negotiated and

discussed in the network but decided and agreed upon by participants in their daily practices. These goals are very different and differ from changing old-style bulbs to halogen to employing disabled employees. The 12 CSR profiles have been developed in the CSR network, and, as agreed, they are all based on the CSR profile template provided by the steering group. Participants' CSR profiles are all hanging on the walls during the conference, giving the participants at the conference an opportunity to see different ways of taking action of CSR.

To illustrate the outcome, below in Figure 6.5 is shown two CSR profiles, randomly picked. These CSR profiles are very much considered the outcome for the CSR network, and the steering group has had a strong focus of getting the profiles ready for the Second CSR conference. These profiles are what CSR network participants have worked toward at the three previous meetings. At least at the conference today the CSR profiles are seen as the outcome of participants' networking efforts and partly used as a way to legitimize the network. For participants as well as the steering group, the CSR profiles become somehow the tangible evidence of value, created by participation in the CSR network.

Figure 6.5: CSR profiles





CSR profil for, A/S Bevola i 2014, Ringsted

Vores overordnede CSR vision

Bevola ønsker at sikre en bedre verden, gennem den etisk bæredygtige virksomhed, som står for klimaoptimale løsninger, et højt socialt engagement og et generelt globalt samfundsansvar. Bevola Bare bedre løsninger.

Det arbejder vi med

Klimaoptimerer produkter og ydelser

Vi benytter så vidt det er muligt genanvendelige materialer

Vi udfærdiger et officielt klimaregnskab

Vi optimerer på alle energiforbrugende kilder

Vi ansætter elever, lærlinge og praktikanter. Målsætningen er, at fastholde et niveau på 5% af den samlede medarbejderstab. Vi støtter op omkring uddannelsesinstitutioner med diverse projekter, foredrag og virksomhedsbesøg.

Vi samarbejder med CABI, jobcentre, ungehjælpen, produktionsskoler og High Five og en række diverse organisationer. Den vej igennem, er det vores målsætning, at kunne fastholde medarbejdere med nedsat funktionsevne, tidligere kriminelle og andre problemstillinger på et niveau 5 % af den samlede medarbejderstab. Ydermere har vi løbende, mennesker i arbejdsprøvning og aflastning.

Vi arbejder konstant for at vores medarbejderstab er trygge, sunde og effektive, gennem mulighed for uddannelse, træning, rygestop, personlig udvikling, fremtidens værktøjer, arbejdsroking, økonomisk støtte, motions – og kostplanlægning, støtte i krisituationer, deltid, ligeløn og ligestilling. Ydermere arbejder vi konstant og aktivt med nedbringelse af sygefravær.

Vi donerer og sponsorer løbende til godgørende og udviklende aktiviteter.

Vi deltager ikke i korruption, børnearbejde eller nogen form for sort arbejde.

Vi udbreder CSR-begrebet gennem uddannelse, foredrag, artikler og projekter.

Vi skaber arbejdspladser i tredje lande.

Vi overholder alle lovgivningsmæssige krav til virksomheden.

Vi implementerer et globalt "Code of Conduct", på vores levendørdatabase.

Mål 2014

Overført fra 2013 plan, "Det selvstyrende individ", (andet halvår)

Undersøgelse og projektopstilling for solcelleenergi på Slepnersvej, (færdigt til budget 2015).

Energirenovering/optimering af vores kompressorsystem, (færdigt 2014).

Minimum et produktkoncept udviklet i et cirkulært økonomisk perspektiv, (færdigt 2014).

Tiltrædelse af Global Compact, (sept. 2014)


Implementering af ICT (Information and Communication Technology), internt og eksternt, (løbende 2014)


Code of Conduct til leverandører skal implementeres til minimum 10 leverandører, (løbende 2014).

It-optimeringer skal nedbringe papirforbruget og øge effektiviteten med minimum 15 % i forhold til 2013, målt på omsætning pr. medarbejder.

Transportudstilling Elmia skal have CSR som hovedtema.

Dato _____ Firma/Underskrift _____





VORES OVERORDNEDE POLITIK

EGEN VINDING & DATTER er en fondsdrivet virksomhed, der ikke skal levere overskud til andre, men kan bruge overskudet til sociale og samfundsmæssigt gode initiativer, som udvikling i Afrika og støtte af en køjskole i Jylland samt at have lærlinge, handicappede og flexjobbere ansat. Vi er glade for mennesker end for systemvidkøligere og sætter på et godt arbejdsfællesskab.

EGEN VINDING & DATTERS aktiviteter er orienteret mod boliger, bide gennem udløsning, bæredygtigt byggeri og produktion af bæredygtige og gode byggevarer.

DET GØR VI ALLEREDE

Arbejder efter FN's 10 fornødtige globale principper. Det ses bl. a. af engagementet i produktion og videreudvikling af vores miljømæssigt bæredygtige byggematerialer, og vores arbejde med at få dem med i mest muligt byggeri.

Samtidig arbejder vi på at reducere CO2-aftrykket ved at bruge fornyelige ressourcer til opvarmning og indeklimatiske sunde materialer i vores egne bygninger og når vi arbejder ude.

En anden måde at reducere CO2-aftrykket er at anvende brugte køretøjer, sådan som vi gør.

Som nævnt tager vi så mange lærlinge som fornuftigt, og for tiden er det 6. Sådan er vi med til at producere de svende som vi bruger.

Samtidig ansætter vi også mennesker der ikke kan yde fuldt i en stilling: handicappede, flexjobbere og seniorer, og andre der kan have svært ved at komme ind på arbejdsmarkedet, som fx mennesker af anden etnisk herkomst end dansk.

Vi lever også kildesortering af affald, for at bære vejen for genanvendelse og den rette håndtering. I den forbindelse sørger vi også for at undgå brug af ting der bliver til problematiske affald, fx mineraluld, der jo skal lægges i deponi efter brugsfasen.

DET ARBEJDER VI MED

- Fortsat udviklingsarbejde på de miljømæssigt bæredygtige byggematerialer, fx fortsat udvikling af LCA-profilen, og ikke mindst foretaget fokus på markedsføring, for at få en større andel af markedet, til fordel for miljøet.
- Vi vil fortsat arbejde med at reducere energiforbruget.
- Vi anvender ikke pesticider til vedligeholdelse af advarer.
- Vi læser et løb i Afrika, med produktion og byggeri med komprimerede lersten. Det løser flere opgaver lokalt: arbejdet ligger lokalt og inkluderer uddannelse, der skal ikke køre 6 cent fra et industriland, pengene bliver i lokalsamfundet, da de ikke skal køre byggevarer andensteds, og det forbedrer den lokale økonomi.

MÅLOPFYLDELSE AF MÅLENE FOR 2013

- 1) At etablere os i yderligere 1-2 lande i Afrika, med lokal produktion af byggematerialer.
- Ad 1) Vi har udvidet med aktiviteter i Kenya og Tanzania, så målsætningen er opfyldt.
- 2) Forøge salget af vores byggematerialer i Danmark med mindst 25 %.
- Ad 2) Vi har ikke nået de 25 % på alle materialer, men udviklingen er positiv over hele linjen. Målsætningen blev ikke opfyldt, og bliver ændret til en realistisk målsætning.
- 3) Etablere vandrenning i et pilotlæg.
- Ad 3) Anlægget er nu under etablering, og målsætningen er under opfyldelse.
- 4) Større fokus på at udfase problematiske byggematerialer.
- Ad 4) Vores fokus har medført udfasing af flere problematiske byggematerialer, bl. a. gennem kunderidgiving, som er et af vores stærkeste redskaber.

Konklusion

Jeg betragter målopfyldelsen, som tilfredsstillende, og ser frem til arbejdet med 2014.

MÅL 2014

- 1) Konsolidering af aktiviteterne i de 3 afrikanske lande, og forberede indtræden på markedet i endnu et tredjed verdens land.
- 2) Forøge salget af vores byggematerialer i Danmark med 20 %.
- 3) Projektering af et kombineret energianlæg, solceller, solfanger og vindmølle.
- 4) Nedbringe varmerforbruget i vinduesproduktionen.
- 5) Vedholdende fokus på at udfase problematiske byggematerialer.
- 6) Ansættelsespolitikken indbefatter ansættelse af mennesker med svag tilknytning til arbejdsmarkedet, handicappede, flex-jobbere og mennesker i arbejdsprøvning. Vi ønsker at andelen af medarbejderstaben skal ligge mellem 5 og 10 %.
- 7) Få samme måde skal vi have en relevant andel på ca. 10 %, af lærlinge og elever, ansat.
- 8) Vi vil sammen med miljøstyrelsen opstarte et projekt som vil demonstrere og dokumentere at det er muligt at bygge et diffusionsløst hus, uden materialer med problematisk afgiftning og med en CO2 udfasing i anlægsfasen på 80 % mindre end SBI's benchmark enfamiliehus. Projektet starter i 2014 og afsluttes i 2015.
- 9) Vi vil formidle projektet "Det Indvare hus" således at det omtales i selv fagblade som lokale og landsdækkende medier i 2014.
- 10) Lave en markedsføringsplan for minimum 2 af vores produkter.

Dato _____ Firma/Underskrift _____

It seems like the second CSR Conference becomes a crossroad for the CSR network. Participants have in some sense achieved what they set out for – developing a focus of CSR by creating CSR profiles. By showing what they have accomplished in public, they not only gain new reflections upon their work, but they also legitimize their participation in the CSR network.

Up until now I have experienced that the steering group member's conceptions of CSR is framing and focusing the CSR templates, and therefore to some extent, participants CSR profiles are very much a product of the steering group member's conception of CSR. Prior CSR network

meetings have taken departure in the CSR profile template and focused on the work and discussions of participants' CSR activities, and thus final CSR profile.

Looking at the template in that sense, the CSR template can be considered a tool that has standardized and focused CSR activities and committed the CSR work participants to do something in writing. But at the same time the CSR template, to some extent, might have limited participants' reflections, perceptions, and understanding of CSR relevant for their own businesses.

At later interviews several participants told me how they, especially at the beginning of their participation in the CSR network, felt insecure because of the steering group's wide knowledge of CSR, and that the steering group's knowledge was hard to challenge as novices. One participant said:

"It has been the hardcore few who have set the agenda. The 'big brothers' [the steering group members] have had a lot on mind. I think it would be good if more of us put ourselves at stage and give our input" (Interview: Signe)

Another participant in the following with a slightly different phrasing says more or less the same:

"The area [CSR] has been somehow unclear to me, so I haven't been so visible. I have been listening a lot to the ones who have the knowledge" (Interview: Adam)

Flipping back to the second CSR Conference, what I experienced was at stake was an evaluation of participants' focus. At the conference they compared and evaluated their CSR focus and profile, based on interactions with other participants. It was a change to discuss CSR topics in a more public setting with people from outside the CSR network. Irene told me at a later interview:

"You get the chance to see what other people do, and compare your own business activities with others" (Interview: Irene)

So what actually took place at the conference was an opportunity for participants to evaluate their CSR profiles and focus in a confidential setting. They shared considerations, but at the same time they aligned understandings based on mutual reflections. By participating in the CSR network, participants seem to have developed a space where they can prepare themselves for an unknown future within the field of CSR by comparing and evaluating up against one another.

6.9 Value co-creation – fourth meeting in the CSR network, January 2013

It is the first meeting after the second conference. At the beginning of the meeting participants seem to talk less about CSR and more about motivation for participation in the network and how participation creates value. Participants are discussing how they can continue working on their CSR profiles in a way that keeps creating value. Participants share reflections on experienced value-creation. One participant, Jens commented on how participation has developed new relationships and understandings, which creates value for him:

“I have gained a lot from the CSR network which I hadn’t expected. New relations and new understanding for the benefit of my company” (Log: Jens)

Likewise, Else tells how it has developed her understanding of running her business and how she has gathered new knowledge, not only about CSR but also about leadership, business plans, and customers by participating in the CSR network.

Accordingly Hanne is very particular about her participation. She is not just there for killing time, but needs to see how she can apply the gained knowledge in other contexts, and she explains:

“Participation becomes interesting when you experience it creates value in other contexts. It can be knowledge you can share with costumers or other networks. It is business; it is not just for killing time” (Log: Hanne)

Following, Irene explains how listening to participants sharing their stories of how they work with CSR inspires her to new ways of working:

“It is exciting how people attack challenges. You can see how they do it, and relate it to your own practice” (Log: Irene).

During the discussion participants seem to reassure one another that time spent in the CSR network is valuable, and by the discussion they validate their participation. Collectively they agree that participation, not only the CSR network but in networks in general, is a premise for running their businesses when wanting to be able to renew themselves.

What seems explicit in participants' way of defining how participation becomes valuable is that they must be able to relate to the ongoing discussions to their own practices. Even though participation is driven by an interest of CSR, participation doesn't become valuable until they can relate topics and discussion to their own practices.

In a later interview, steering group member Poul explains how participation for him becomes valuable:

“If I need information, I will go searching for it using Google or persons I already know. Participation in the network becomes valuable when other participants share information you haven't searched for but which gives you an answer to something unsolved. Then you get an enlightening and think: ‘That was clever’” (Interview: Poul)

The processes Poul seems to be describing are the ones where the ongoing negotiation and validation of knowledge lead to new understandings, understanding he hadn't been able to develop on his own.

Trying to get closer to the situations where participants experience the processes of value co-creation, I asked participants when they experienced participation in the CSR network that became particularly valuable.

Participant Søren told me that it happens in different situations and often when he expects it the least. Thinking back on the activities within the CSR network, he tells me that participation becomes particularly valuable for him when:

“... we are in small groups, sharing experiences” (Interview: Søren)

Along the same line, participant Signe and Irene respectively tell me when they experience that participation becomes valuable:

“When you start talking freely and open-minded, and when you are more open about what you haven’t done and what is difficult” (Interview: Signe)

“When you go beyond yourself and own understanding because you get a more nuanced view” (Interview: Irene)

What the participants seem to highlight here is that for participation to become valuable, it takes more than a good topic. Participants need to engage and give a little piece of them. It takes more than sharing experiences of the good story; you need to engage in interactions and challenge established understanding. This understanding does challenge some participants, giving pieces of you can be hard and might require certain networking competencies. Adam tells me in an interview how he finds it challenging to engage in the networking activities:

“I need to learn about networking. I am not particularly good at it. I don’t think I offer myself enough” (Interview: Adam)

So not only is value co-creation depending on what the participants experience as value but it is also to do with the participants’ engagement and how they interact.

6.10 Researcher on stage – fifth meeting in the CSR network, March 2013

Today the agenda for the CSR network was somehow different. Not only was the meeting held at idyllic scenery in the middle of Ringsted field, but also I was invited to present preliminary findings in relation to the CSR network. After a delicious breakfast buffet and an introduction to the company hosting this meeting, I was next on the agenda.

I looked forward to the meeting, but at the same time I was challenged about how and which findings to present. In one way I wanted to challenge participants on their processes of value co-creation, but at the same time I didn't want to interrupt their engagement. I was fully aware that the lecture would put me in a position as more than an observer in the network. Thus, it was my chance to give participants as well as steering group members' feedback on mutual activities, and challenge their collaborative endeavor based upon analytical reflections. I decided to begin with a more theoretical discussion on the understanding of networks and collaboration in general in order to frame my empirical findings.

I presented Gray's definition of collaboration in order to get participants to discuss and reflect upon how network participation can become valuable. Gray defines the processes of collaboration:

“Collaboration is a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible” (Gray, 1989, p. 5)

Following, I elaborated on what I had observed and also heard in interviews;

- CSR is the driver for the network, but participation becomes valuable when discussions of CSR are an object that supports discussions, and thus new understandings of other relevant topics.

- Several participants are to some extent, still, unclear about their own roles in the network, and it at times could be hard to contribute with their own knowledge because the steering group members partly had defined how CSR was to be understood.
- I told them how I was puzzled about their lack of activities when it came to contacting one another outside the CSR meetings.
- Finally, I pick up on the facilitation of the network in the future. Since several participants had told me how it was often discussion of “other” topics than CSR that make participation valuable, I questioned how these “other” topics could have more room.

The presented findings gave rise to a discussion, on which premises the CSR network was to continue. For instance the following question was posed:

“What is the goal for the CSR network in the future?” (Log: Anders)

Collectively the presented findings were accepted and validated. Participants also agreed that if wanting to gain more, they have to give more.

After the network meeting I was approached by several participants who told me about their insecurity about engaging in the discussions in plenum because of a feeling of lack of knowledge, not always knowing what was expected from them and which topics were legitimate to bring up for discussions.

Later, at an interview, Signe told me that the lecture had given her a push in regards to her own participation:

“You put words to my thoughts and altogether opened up for the network understanding” (Interview: Signe)

At this time it became clear to me that even some of what I would call “experienced networkers” are also troubled when it comes to socializing and developing new relations. It is

easy just to participate and listen but really engaging and picking the right discussion is a difficult matter – but it seems like that one of the key words for value co-creation is interaction.

After my presentation the facilitator divides participants into small groups to discuss their CSR profiles and share knowledge by posing curious questions. Based on the group work the facilitator asks participants to find common denominators for their CSR profiles, which were to be presented in plenum afterwards.

Steering group member Simon doesn't agree with the facilitator about the group work, and he questions what the commonalities are to be used for. This gives rise to a short discussion among facilitator and steering group member – a discussion that stops when participant Søren in an ironic tone says, *"You are not creating trust"* (Log: Søren). Finally Simon agrees and lets the facilitator get on with her work.

Afterward, discussions in the groups seemed very engaging and loud. Afterward, when the common denominators for the CSR profiles were to be presented, the presentations had some underlying questions related to why are we participating in the CSR network? So, apparently the presentation of preliminary findings had encouraged participants to discuss their engagement in the network and the summing up presented after the group work included following statements:

"Networking is important – especially learning of one another. We have to use each other in our daily business" (Log: Søren)

"We should explore our own horizons in the network" (Log: Adam)

"We do have readiness, will, and trust in the network" (Log: Jens)

Finally the facilitator summarizes the ongoing discussions, and participants agree to her conclusions, which include a focus toward getting to know one another better. The meeting ends with a guided tour at the hosting company's premises. The participants are hanging around long after normal closing hours, interested in the work conducted at the company but also continuing the discussions of CSR and related topics.

What I experienced later was that this network meeting did not only have an impact on participants' reflections upon participation; it also developed a reflection among steering group members. Up until now the agenda for the CSR meetings had been very tight, not leaving much room for networking activities as such. There had been an on-going discussion in the steering group on how the meetings should be organized, but the group had never really discussed how to organize the meetings in order to get more space for networking activities. Previously, the facilitator had tried to persuade the steering group that there needed to be a stronger focus and some more time for participants to engage in a more informal way. At the next steering group meeting, it was agreed that that facilitating a network meeting wasn't just about keeping a tight schedule and working on the CSR profile; it was also about making room for exchanging knowledge about other topics (Log: steering group meeting week 20). The steps the steering group agreed upon in the planning of the CSR meetings had an effect from the next meeting. They agreed to have a break in the middle of the meeting, and there should be a stronger focus toward facilitating process-stimulating social interaction.

6.11 Enrolling new members – sixth meeting in the CSR network, June 2013

As just described, for the meeting today the steering group had decided to make time for networking activities and include a small break during the meeting to make people socialize a bit more. The facilitator introduces the agenda of the meeting, and because potential new

members of the CSR network are present at the meeting today, participants are asked to make a short presentation.

For the first time, an external speaker has been invited to make a presentation. It is a presentation about electricity and how to save electricity. Maybe it wasn't the right topic or maybe it was the wrong person, at least it doesn't seem to lead to any reflexive discussions. Participants seem a little distant maybe even bored, and in the announced break several participants leave.

The remaining participants seem to have particular things that need to be discussed and sorted out. Discussions in the break are as diverse as work ability testing, writing up the CSR profile, and marketing of CSR. I try to observe and listen how participants interact in an informal way in the break to solve challenges. But before I know it, I'm cornered by Rasmus and Lis who, after my presentation at the last meeting, want to know how far I have proceeded with the Ph.D. project, and in more general terms tell me about their reflections upon networking activities. Suddenly it seems harder for me to navigate as a "free researcher" in the network because I changed my presence at the last meeting and participants seem more aware of me. It leaves me wondering how this will affect future empirical activities.

Two new participants have joined the CSR network and in order to try to get them on the same CSR level as the other participants, they are shown special attention. Special attention in the sense that they are paired with two persons from the steering group to discuss how the new participants can develop their CSR profiles according to the template. I join this little group in order to observe how new members are enrolled in the network. The two new participants seem a little overwhelmed when the steering group members start telling how a CSR profile is to be developed according to the CSR template. I might previously have had the feeling that the input of the steering group was strong, but in this situation their direction seems to be the only one existing. The two new members hardly get a chance to say how they relate to and understand CSR because the steering group members are so eager to fit them into the CSR template. One of the new participants seems to be drifting away, and he hardly questions or

discusses what is being said. Sometimes the steering group members are so committed and have so much on their minds in relation to CSR that they forget to take the position of the others.

Looking back on this episode, engaging new participants in the network seems to be somehow difficult. The two new potential participants have hardly been present since. They both seemed to appreciate CSR, but they never really got absorbed in the network.

6.12 Legitimizing participation – seventh meeting in the CSR network, August 2013

Seventeen participants in a summery mood are small-talking over the breakfast buffet. The facilitator has a hard job making them sit down and keeping them quiet. The facilitator introduces the topic of meeting; (long-term) sickness absence, to be introduced by steering group member Dorthe. Dorthe kindly asks participants to engage and pose questions and reflections about the topic during her presentation. Participants are listening carefully to the very factual presentation based on figures and numbers concerning the costs of sickness absence. This first part of the presentation does not open for any discussion, but when Dorthe moves on to the next part about how to handle sickness absence, most participants engage lively in the discussion. Participants bring into play their own experiences about how they handle sickness absence. They discuss understanding of sickness absence and what it means when an employee is sick, for the employee as well for the workplace. Participants continue discussing how to handle sick absence and how to address an employee with a long-term sickness absence.

Per, who normally has a lot on mind when it comes to taking care of employees, hasn't joined the discussion at all. I'm puzzled about this and wonder if employee sickness absence isn't an issue at his company. I decide to question him about it and ask:

“Is this also how you handle employee sickness absence?” (Log: Mette)

It turns out that Per doesn't agree with the general understanding, discussed by participants, of how to handle sickness absence. When invited to join the conversation, Per tells how he considers sickness absence and how he handles it in a very tolerant way. This seems to give some other reflections to participants, and they are posing questions to him with references to episodes experienced at their own workplaces.

What I'm puzzled about afterward is why Per didn't join the conversation earlier. He had a very clear opinion on the topic of sickness absence, but still he never joined or challenged the understanding, until he was directly asked to join conversation. Somehow understandings in the network seem to become well defined very fast, and thus, if one participant doesn't join the conversation straight away, it can be hard to nuance the discussions. When participants do not agree to the mainstream understandings, it can be different to challenge and negotiate well-established meanings. This non-negotiated and accepted understanding of what is going in the network appears when participants get too close and attached to a topic, and might simplify the process of negotiating, developing and evaluating meaning.

Following, according to the agenda, there is supposed to be a status on participants' ongoing work with their CSR profiles. But participants seem unprepared. They are not really prepared to give a status on their CSR work in the frame of the CSR profile. So instead it becomes a very slack status, where participants try to give a status without being prepared. The status doesn't seem to create room for reflections upon the CSR work. Instead participants, again, share personal reflections on how participation in the CSR network has become valuable for them and how they have used the new relationships in many ways.

Jens comment on how his participation in the network has developed new relations that have been useful in his work of creating jobs for young people, and he explains he has contacted particular persons from the network because, due to participation in the CSR network, he has gotten to know their approaches to certain issues:

"I have called you Lars, and you Thomas, because we are in a network and therefore I know you have the right attitude toward employing apprentices and young people. I have been highly inspired by the work in the CSR network" (Log: Jens)

Steering group member Poul tells about his personal development after he joined the CSR network. From primarily having had focus toward CSR in his work life, suddenly his focus toward sustainability has broadened, and when looking into his fridge, he now questions himself;

"How can I eat sausages produced from pigs from China?" (Log: Poul)

Irene joins in, and says:

"Our work with CSR has given us a more nuanced view upon running a business. We have developed a shift from focusing only at our core output as education to a focus where we consider other possibilities and collaborations, which broaden our core output. We take a step further" (Log: Irene)

Somehow it seems like participants, in an unconscious way, are obstructing the use of the CSR template. They might still be working on their understandings of CSR, but not in the frame of the provided CSR template. What they keep doing, though, is legitimizing their participation by telling one another how participation becomes valuable.

6.13 Developing new understandings – eighth meeting in the CSR network, September, 2013

Today is a day of celebration. A windfall has come to the CSR network. A steering group member's company has received the CSR People Prize handed out at the CSR Awards 2013. Not only is steering group member Simon happy, but also participants are overwhelmed and exited on his behalf. It is not only an acceptance of the work done by the company receiving the prize

but it is also a legitimization of the work that participants in the CSR network are doing. Before moving on to the topic of the day (waste separation), a speech is made by steering group member Poul, applauding the work of Simon's company.

Again an external presenter has been invited. This time to give an introduction and answers to the question: How waste separation can be handled and what is garbage? The presentation raises a discussion about how working environment and bottom line are interrelated. One participant elaborates on how he experiences that the only thing that matters is business, and that is what makes CSR a challenging affair:

"It's all about business. It is difficult to measure how a happy/sad employee generates profit, and that's the challenges for all CSR initiatives" (Log: Rasmus)

Adam picks up on this, and even though he is in the process of implementing a CSR profile, he considers measuring a challenge. He argues:

"We can do a check up on our garbage, we have 6-7 apprentice equivalents to 10-15% of our workforce, and we have hired an office apprentice with a foreign background. And I am about to become mentor in Youth Turn Project. But the largest ongoing challenge is still, how do we measure and document our ongoing CSR development" (Log: Adam)

This is commented upon by Per:

"I think you should just continue doing what is right for you. Measuring is a task for the larger companies. You should rather use your efforts doing what makes a difference to you. Instead of constantly checking up and measuring suppliers, you should pick collaboration with the ones you trust. Trust will appear in the regular daily work, and that is what works" (Log: Per)

Participants seem to dwell on this different view of how to consider the challenges of measuring and documentation of CSR. For Rasmus, Per's statement, changes his understanding:

"You are right. It's the focus toward something different. Developing a different way of thinking what is important" (Log: Rasmus)

It also seems to affect Adam's understanding:

"I think the attention toward CSR requires a different dynamic than measuring bottom line" (Log: Adam)

This is the first time I have experienced a break with the understanding of CSR that has been put forth by the steering group members. The CSR template provided by the steering group to a great extent emphasizes measuring and documentation. At this meeting participants are starting to develop their own mutual understandings of CSR and how it should be practiced. Participant are no longer as dependent on the comments of the steering group member – or maybe the steering group members have provided enough knowledge for the participants to start developing new understanding that makes sense for participants' own practices.

6.14 Summing up and unfolding empirical challenges – what was learned

The issue and focus of CSR was new for most participants. Apart from the steering group, knowledge of CSR was very limited in the network. The emerging CSR network has provided an ongoing and present possibility to observe how collaboration develops over time and how participation changes in order to fit participants' own practices. What has become apparent is an ongoing negotiation of meaning where participants' subjective understandings of CSR and its accompanying work have been challenged and changed collectively and again transformed to understandings that fit into participants' practices. Participants were from the beginning

motivated to engage in collaboration and to help one another to develop professionally and to improve their understanding of CSR. The CSR template provided a structure and an easy-to-pick-up script that they could follow – at least in the beginning.

Over time participants came to awareness that the role and understanding of the steering group could be challenged because the steering group was to be considered a leader role, which should facilitate reflection and knowledge sharing. The participants gained new insights from their collaborative experiences, which gave them knowledge to challenge not just one another but also the steering group. This new knowledge changed their ways of collaborating to a more reflective and challenging affair.

The collaboration in the CSR network pointed toward certain points of attention, which I sum up and discuss in the following:

- Developing new relations by social interactions
- Translating knowledge / learning to own practice
- Organizing collaboration around an object – template
- Leadership - steering group's influence on knowledge co-creation

6.15 Developing new relations by social interactions

Most participants have shown an initial willingness to establish crisscross relations. None of the participants were forced to participate, and they had the opportunity to withdraw from participation at any time. Nevertheless, in the beginning involvement was limited and close relationships were none existing; thus, I observed that conversations were almost automatic and non-reflexive. Slowly participants took progressive steps to developing relationships and participants started having conversations that challenged existing understandings of CSR. As participants started to fit their actions together and negotiated and defined mutual expectations, they started to engage differently. By interpretations and reflections of each

other's actions, some relations became more established and led to other activities than the ones in the CSR network.

6.16 Making participation valuable

How and when does participation in network become valuable? The discussion in this section focuses toward how participants in their ongoing reflexive interactions construct new meanings that become valuable in their own practices. It shows how the "I" is curious in the network and how the process between "I" and "me", as described by Mead (Mead, 1934), is important for the processes of value co-creation.

Participants have shown commitment to make their collaborations meaningful to serve their individual needs and to grow in their understandings of CSR. Over time participants have acquired new knowledge and skills relating to their CSR work as well as other parts of running their businesses. The insights participants gain from participation in the CSR network is reflected in the experienced value co-creation and surely in their way of thinking of and creating their individual businesses.

Most of the participants participate in the CSR network from a position where they can challenge and set a new direction for the businesses they are employed in or own. Thus, participation in the CSR network makes imprints in their individual practices (see section 8.2.3 for a discussion of value co-created in the networks). Often discussions show that participants use the discussion in the network to do a reality check on their own business activities. So the ongoing reflections seem to stimulate their own understanding of how and what they are doing in their daily working life. Participation in the network becomes a frame where participant can look into their own business activities and reflect others' understandings whether their own activities are coherent with the practices and understandings of the other participants. So not only are they developing their understandings of CSR but they are also changing their own organizing practices.

6.17 Organizing collaboration around an object – The CSR template

When engaging with the CSR network, most participants did not have much practical experience when it came to describing their CSR activities, but to some extent they adopted the CSR template to structure their work. The CSR model framed participants' discussions and interactions, and from there their collaborations rose and developed. The CSR template provided the participants with an object that gave them a structure to start to working from.

The participants' positive focus toward each other's CSR profiles stimulated the social interaction, and they saw each other's diversity as a potential to build new understandings. For instance, Else, the participant from a small shop was at the beginning very nervous about her participation in the CSR network. She considered her knowledge as very limited in regards to CSR and how to create a profile. But we heard how the other participants acknowledged her work, and they even used her as the good example when talking about challenges related to CSR. Thus, the participants used each other's knowledge to construct new understanding – even though they appeared very different.

Participants sometimes seemed to avoid the work around the provided CSR template and instead starting to search for their own ways of working. This is where we saw the first sign of participants in the network starting to react in a reflexive way, as in the sense that participants moved from a structured process developed by the steering group to a process that they in some sense structured for themselves, in order to create value. In doing so they validated mutually their own understandings of CSR, and they pushed for changes. They objected to engage with the normative understanding of CSR presented by the steering group. Participants started to create their own understanding of CSR, maybe less academic then the one introduced by the steering group, but a model that somehow seemed to make more sense to their individual practices. Thus, by these actions participants started to create a role for the steering group that seemed to be distinct from the initial role. Toward the end of the study, participants showed commitment, and they moved from the strong structure where they were depended

upon the steering group to a structure that they somehow were structuring for themselves and their needs.

6.18 Leadership - steering groups influence on value co-creation

Even though discussions in the CSR network primarily are focused toward the CSR profile template, many related topics have been discussed. Already from the beginning the CSR template has been the object that has focused the work and gathered the participants. At meetings participants have presented their progress in their CSR work by presenting status based on the CSR profile template. These presentations have taken the discussions far and have related to subjects as varied as leadership, how to involve/engage employees, flex jobs, garbage sorting, optimizing of productions, solar cells, language and cultural challenges, etc. Some of these topics are directly related to CSR; others are more peripheral. But at the same time it seems like the knowledge of the steering group and the way of formulating CSR into a template have been somehow blocking the participants' own possibility of developing new knowledge. Most participants entered into the network as relative novices when talking about CSR. Some of the participants had limited prior experience with CSR, but participation in the network was considered an opportunity – especially because the steering group was competent within the field.

While the authority and knowledge of the steering group has been helpful by suggesting structure and advancing the CSR understanding in the form of a CSR template, it seems that the dependence upon the steering group may hinder some development of meanings and new relationships, and especially some of the value co-creating processes that tend to be enacted in unstructured and free manners. Steering group member knowledge in form of the CSR template often defined the overall discussion in the CSR network. The steering group's knowledge seemed to become general knowledge. Thereby, their understanding of CSR seems to be determining for the general understanding and focus of CSR in the collaborative network.

Relying on the authoritative knowledge of the steering group might reduce the development of new meaning and engagement of network participants.

The members of the steering group, even though to some extent considered network managers who impose to support and facilitate the CSR work, seem to interrupt the facilitating processes in the network by applying a tight focus based on their CSR experiences and considerations in the form of the CSR template. Relying primarily upon the CSR template reduces the development of new knowledge and relationships since focus seems to be centralized around pre-established understandings and considerations. What is pointed towards here is that meanings and knowledge of network managers can easily become unchallenged because of their central position.

7 Network 2: Network for managing directors

The following chapter consists of narratives describing some of the key moments in the Network for managing directors in which participants negotiate and change meaning over time, trying to make participation valuable. The interactions among participants and facilitator show their search for making participation valuable and how their relations and interactions change back and forth. Thus, the chapter includes narratives from observations, nuanced with details from the interviews, from the Network for managing directors.

7.1 A short story of how it all began

The network started October 2012, and as I write, it is still in progress. I observed the network for a year, which adds up to eight meetings. The emergence of this particular network for managing directors from larger companies in Ringsted is closely related to the new direction for local business development in Ringsted Municipality as described in Chapter 2. When I first entered the field, I conducted interviews with 20 managing directors from larger companies in Ringsted. Through these interviews it came forth that many of the managing directors were weakly related to Ringsted Municipality, had little knowledge of offers and activities in Ringsted, and, last but not least, had little knowledge and contact to other companies in the area. Based on knowledge gathered from the interviews, the Business Development Department decided to launch a network for the managing directors who had shown some kind of interest in participating in a local network or at least shown an interest in some kind of closer contact with Ringsted Municipality. Thus, the purpose of the network was twofold: First, the municipality had an interest in getting to know the managing directors for the larger companies better, and secondly, the managing directors seemed to have an interest in getting together in order to discuss topics related to their location in Ringsted. Further to this, through the interviews I identified mutual challenges and opportunities that the managing directors had shown an interest in elaborating on with equals. Topics were as widespread as:

- Attracting and retaining employees
- Leadership supporting LEAN
- Contact to universities
- Challenges regarding transport and logistics
- Developing the industrial areas in Ringsted
- Improve and increase collaboration among local businesses
- Develop contact to Ringsted Municipality
- Challenges and opportunities related to the managerial role

The network should be facilitated and supported by an employee from the Business Development Department and considered a neutral platform for the managing directors to meet and discuss topics of interest in a confidential setting.

7.2 Gathering participants

As you already know by now, Ringsted Business Development Department had employed a new facilitator, and it also became her job to contact and gather the managing directors for the network. I provided her with information and reflections from the interviews and pinpointed the managing directors who had shown an interest in participating in a local network. This selection process seemed in my view important because it was the basis for emergence and existence of the network. We ended up with eleven managing directors who were to be invited to participate in the network. Participants were contacted in person by the facilitator and invited to join the network. These meetings gave the facilitator a chance to explain and elaborate on the value of the network and at the same establish some kind of a relation with the managing directors and with her own ears hear their interest for participation.

All contacted managing directors agreed to participate, so when the network started, it was with participation of managing directors from eleven very different companies. By the time for the network start, one of the managing directors had left his position, and the company was in

the process of hiring a new managing director. This meant the invitation was accepted by the former managing director – and for the new managing director to confirm participation when employed.

As described in Chapter 4, quotes from interviews and observations are anonymized, but participants are all named as they appear in the following narratives.

7.3 First meeting, December 2012 – Getting started and negotiating expectations

When the day for the first meeting in the network arose, I felt a little bit tense. I had a great saying when participants for the network were picked, so I hoped that the network could give them what they were looking for. What I didn't know at the time was that the issue of "what they were looking for", or the purpose of the network, should be an issue often discussed. Unfortunately, the first meeting wasn't with participation from all participants; three managing directors had to attend to other things.

Right from the beginning, the network had some kind of political interest. First of all, it was the first of its kind in Ringsted Municipality, and secondly most of the managing directors had not previously participated in local activities, and therefore not very well known to the municipality. To show the political interest and goodwill, the town mayor and the manager of the Business Department participated at the first meeting. The town mayor and the manager of the Business Department, both focusing toward the mutual interest of getting to know one another, opened the meeting with speeches respectively. The town mayor especially pointed toward how the network was an import initiative in developing collaborations, not just among the companies, but also among the companies and the Municipality.

Since I to some extent had a say in developing the network and at the time probably was the one who best knew the managing directors, I had been asked to shortly introduce the Ph.D.

project and also the selection criteria for being invited to join the network. I told participants how I through interviews had heard about the managing directors' lack of contact and knowledge of other companies in the municipality – and how this knowledge in many ways had pushed the development of the network. Further to that, I explained that I would join the network as a participative observer and my interest in the network was related to how and when participation in networks becomes valuable. Participants accepted my presence, and no questions as such were asked.

Following, the network facilitator took over and introduced the agenda of the day. She emphasized how the purpose, structure, and topics of the network were to be developed by the participants. Several times she emphasized that the network was “theirs”, in the sense that the participants was to decide how the network was to unfold. She told how her presence primarily was to ensure some kind of progress in their discussions and to support all kind of practicalities around the meetings.

The meeting started with a workshop where the facilitator divided the participants into two groups and they were asked to discuss contents, purpose, and structure of the network. Despite being the first meeting the participants engaged lively with one another – discussing and listening.

At this time my observations was primarily toward the overall engagement of the network participants since they were divided into small groups. All along the group work, there was a good energy and ongoing discussion in the room. Some of this good energy and engagement was especially from one of the participants, Ole, who seemed particularly engaged in discussing the focus of the network. Ole was articulating not only vocally but using his full body and arms, having flushing red cheeks. Ole was relatively new managing director in his company, and before the meeting, he had no contact with the municipality or other companies in Ringsted.

After the group discussions, the managing directors discussed the purpose, contents, and structure, in plenum. Based on these discussions they agreed to the following:

Purpose

- Develop relations
- Knowledge sharing
- Sharing of resources / functions

Content

- Increase knowledge to one another by having the network meetings at participating companies
- Identify mutual challenge and collaborate on potentials and solutions
- Emphasize competencies
- Generate new ideas
- Focused discussions on specific topics

Structure:

- Meetings were to be held at the companies and include an introduction to the company highlighting particular challenges
- Meetings should not be too heavily structured
- Monthly meetings

Toward the end of the meeting the facilitator asked the participants to elaborate upon what they had experienced at this first meeting. Participants agreed that the network has the potential to develop new relations and knowledge that can be fruitful. As one participant said:

“I can see potential in getting to know new people locally” (Log: Ole)

The impression I had was that participants were eager to interact and that they believed the network can give them “something” that might become valuable. For now they seem to be willing to participate and explore what this “something” could be. Participants agreed that creating and developing the network purpose, content, and structure is an ongoing process. Furthermore, they agreed to discuss whether more people should be invited to join the network. They agreed upon a structure, where the meetings in turn are held at participant’s

premises, in order to develop knowledge about the companies, each other's competencies and challenges.

One of the participants, Rene, had for some time been looking a bit uneasy, and finally he shares his concern about the structure. René explains how he has a bad gut feeling about meetings becoming empty if not structured around a certain topic. Participant Lucas responds to this by saying:

"I believe the network can feed itself with topics for a long period of time" (Log: Lucas).

Somehow the negative "gut feeling" presented by René was neglected and didn't get any further attention. Participants seemed to have a feeling of having had enough for the day, and one participant packs his things together. The meeting came to an end a little abrupt, and the facilitator wraps up the meeting very quickly, with a *"thank you for participating and you will hear from me"* (Log: facilitator).

I am left with a funny feeling wondering what caused that the meeting to end so abruptly, that the "gut feeling" concern of one participant was neglected.

7.4 Second meeting, December 2012 – searching for a common ground

Since participants have decided to do a grand tour visiting one another, some meetings are split in two, visiting two companies. This is also what is planned for today where the meeting takes place at two companies, placed within walking distance.

This second meeting takes place on a snowy day. Due to weather conditions participants are in general a little late, showing up drip wise. There are more participants present today than at the first meeting. Participants gather around a little coffee table by the entrance. Some participants

get together two and two small-talking. At the beginning, I have a feeling of unease or discomfort in the room; even though a few get together and talk, participants primarily seem to isolate themselves. Somehow it seems like we are starting all over again because a lot of the participants wasn't present at the first meeting, and thereby have little knowledge about one another. When all participants, apart from one who is stuck in the snow, have arrived, the network facilitator picks up on the focus participants have agreed on at the first meeting. This focus also establishes the agenda for the day: a presentation of the company focusing on present and future challenges.

Standing by the coffee tables at the entrance, Managing Director René shortly introduces the company, highlighting managerial and strategically challenges. A walk around the production facilities follows this. Rikke is especially engaged and poses questions related to the challenges presented in the beginning. The participants are very interested in the production equipment and show a great interest in how the production is managed. There seems to be a great interest in the walk around the production facilities and participants listen carefully and engaged. Questions are posed but are typically closed questions, which can be answered with yes or no. Dialogues or discussions as such aren't present. I have the impression that there is no reflection as such toward what is seen and heard, more an automatized and polite reaction.

After the guided tour in the production facilities, participants walk to another participant's company, situated just across the road. A couple of participants gather up, but most walk individually without interacting with the others.

At the second, company Managing Director Thomas makes a positive and glossy, but also very mainstream, presentation, which doesn't leave room for much discussion. During the tour round the production facilities four of the participants seem to join forces. Along with the managing director of the company, they meet in a discussion of production challenges, and the discussion is ongoing when walking around the production facilities. Other participants are a bit distant, not being invited to join the discussions.

After the tour around the production site all participants gather in the meeting room. The facilitator sets the tone for discussion, and reflections of what they have seen and heard at the two companies. No one actually turns down the facilitator's suggested topics for discussion, but instead discussing and reflecting upon mutual challenges they start discussing the purpose of the network. For instance, René ask the question:

"What can we do together?" (Log: René)

Suddenly, one participant, Lukas, starts talking about his own experiences of running a business. Maybe it is his way of putting himself on stage that the participants do not agree upon, or maybe they are just not interested in the topic he picks, but when he talks, the atmosphere in the room seems to shift and participants are drifting away. The discussion is closing down, maybe because he talks about something else than that they agree upon – even though this agreement is still somehow unclear.

When the facilitator wraps up the meeting, a more general discussion about leadership occurs. This topic seems to pick up participants' attention. René tells how he tries to work with the understanding of being an entrepreneur in order to motivate his employees. This gives rise to reflections in relation to motivation and leadership as a more general debate.

My reflections upon the meeting are that participants are having difficulties in finding a common ground for discussions, and it is hard for the facilitator to guide and hold on to a certain topic. Even though they do pick up on some topics, they never get close to challenging each other's understandings. Participants do deliver knowledge to the network, but they don't reflect upon it mutually.

In later interviews participants also tell me how they are having a feeling of unease in conversations. For instance, Oscar tells me that he never really experiences conversations being unrestrained. He says:

"We are very polite and neat, and listen. We discuss, but never frankly" (Interview: Oscar)

Ole told me in the same line how he has experienced that discussions tend to come to an end very fast, and discussions often has a focus towards the glossy story of the companies (Interview: Ole).

7.5 Third meeting, January 2013 – short of participants

Today a lot of the participants are occupied elsewhere. This means that the network today is reduced to five participants before the meeting starts. Unfortunately, one of the signed-up participants forgot the meeting, so he never shows up and they are down to four participants. The four participants who showed up are a bit dissatisfied, and I have a feeling that maybe the meeting should have been cancelled. Like at the previous meeting, the participants are visiting two companies for a short presentation, followed by a discussion and reflection upon the presentations.

At the first company a short trip around the facilities is followed by a concentrated introduction with a focus upon challenges. This presentation is very much aligned with the form the participants previously has decided and agreed upon. After the presentation a few clarifying questions are posed by participants before they get into their cars and drive to the next company.

At this company a very detailed presentation is made along with a long tour through production facilities. Focus in the presentation is primarily a telling of success achieved by the managing director and the positive development of the company. The presentation has a touch of show off, and the managing director skips the focus of challenges instead of a focus of success. The managing director has an answer to everything, even before the questions are posed. Especially one participant seems to be floating away, and I can sense his impatience by his rocking foot under the table.

Instead of a discussion and reflection upon mutual challenge, the participants, again, pick a discussion of the purpose of the network. The participant, who has showed his impatience through the presentation, poses the question:

“How do we all benefit from participation?” (Log: Oscar)

This leads to a discussion where participants discuss the purpose they agreed upon at the first meeting: a network where challenges can be brought up and discussed. Participant Jesper uses the opportunity to give a message in particular to the managing director who just presented his company:

“It shouldn’t be a show off with good stories – we need to do something more”

(Log: Jesper)

Immediately, another participant agrees:

“We shall not go as much into what we do. We should focus on what we are especially good at and which challenges are present” (Log: Ole)

Oscar, Jesper and Ole’s statements are all pointed toward the managing director who made the last presentation and who is hosting the meeting. By talking about purpose and how to participate and socialize in the network, participants are in a process of developing a practice for joint actions in the network. They use the purpose to develop a practice for their joint actions and without doing it explicitly they establish some norms of correctness for participating in the network.

The participants never question or reflect further upon the last presentation, nor the previous one, instead they go searching for purpose and joint actions. Finally the participants agree, again, toward a focus of the network, where they can challenge and help each other with present and future challenges.

This episode from the network shows how participation in the network requires social competencies and an understanding of established social orders. These social orders are participants trying to establish by the enactment of joint actions.

Episodes like the one just described, are at interviews challenged by participants, who tell me how they are not interested in the glossy story, but the challenges behind (Interview: Oscar and Interview: Ole).

Ole tells me that he finds that the business presentations have been interesting but at particular places they have been too shallow to support later discussions. Further to that he states;

“Standard presentations are fine, but it is the discussions around something more challenging which makes it interesting. Network members should be requested to set the tone differently and present their challenges” (Interview: Ole)

Along the same line, respectively Rikke and Maria told me how they would like participants to open more up for challenges they are facing and not just introduce their company:

“If you are frank about your challenges then people are forced to engage and give you input. Instead of just making plain presentation” (Interview: Rikke)

“Some meetings are better than others, no doubt about that. Some of the meetings are just a presentation, where important matters not are included, such as your challenges. The meetings where challenges are discussed during the walk round the premises, and picked up later on, are great” (Interview: Maria)

7.6 Fourth meeting – observations by facilitator

Unfortunately, this meeting took place at my annual skiing holiday. Thus, the following section is the reflections upon the meeting based on a dialogue with the facilitator. Just to frame this

reflection I should mention, as described in the methodology chapter, that reflections upon the networking meetings has been an ongoing activity between the facilitator and me. We have had a close collaboration between meetings where we have discussed the network. Thus, the facilitator has a good sense of what I am looking for.

All but one of the participants was present at this meeting. The setting for this meeting was rather different from what had previously been experienced. First of all, participants had to get changed into sterile clothing: one-piece suit, hairnet, helmet, and clogs. This put the participants out of their comfort zones they seemed a bit tense about the whole situation. During the tour around the production plant, participants were very engaged and sporadically small-talking when walking from unit to unit.

Back in the meeting room, a lot of questions were posed about the production facilities. Hosting Managing Director Charles made an effort of involving and drawing lines to some of the matters participants had discussed, at the first meeting as possible topics for collaboration: employee rotation and Job Centre collaboration.

At the end of the meeting Managing Director Peter calls for more critical and challenging questions. He said he would appreciate, when participants were to visit his company, questions challenging his managerial and strategically actions. This seemed to have a motivating effect on the other participants, and they agreed to do this.

The setting of today's meeting might have been very different, but participants are starting to establish routines for how they engage and participate at the meetings. What I do find interesting is the call for more critical and challenging questions, which might support the mutual reflection processes.

7.7 Fifth meeting – sharing experiences

Participation is, again, short. Only five participants have shown up. This seems to trouble the other participant; thus, the meeting starts with a discussion of why participants are missing from the network meetings. The facilitator confirms that apart from one, participants are absent with apologies, and she doesn't consider it as lack of interest. Participants acknowledge that often they are not always in control of their calendars because of international meetings, board meetings, etc. So even though this bothers the participants present, they somehow agree with Managing Director Ole:

"It can be hard to control the calendar" (Log: Ole)

Participants agree that they will still prioritize participation.

Somehow I have the feeling that the challenge about participants' not prioritizing the network meetings is a bigger issue than the discussion here shows. First of all, I observe a feeling of being let down among the participants. Even though participants agree to the "calendar excuse", it becomes clear that not all participants are in the network with the same enthusiasm for participation. Secondly, when participants are in and out of the network, it is difficult to develop a relationship based on trust where challenges can be mutually shared.

This view appeared to reflect that held by most participants who were present that day. For example when asked in a later interview about how they experienced the absence of participants, I was told:

"I find it challenging that participation has been variable. Some have only been present a couple of times or three. I think it makes it difficult to develop a good cohesiveness. The ones who haven't participated have not heard the others' presentations, and I find that very frustrating. It means that we don't really get to know one another" (Interview: Maria)

Managing Director Ole explains more or less the same:

“The lack of participation is a little disturbing. But as in many other networks there are loyal participants and then the other who either don’t prioritize the meeting or are too busy. But it is the ones who participate on a regular basis that I have developed a good relation to and the one you speak a bit more frank with”

(Interview: Ole)

Maria’s and Ole’s statement are concrete examples of participants who find the lack of participation challenging. All in all, most participants point toward the challenge of participation and how it affects the relations and thus discussions. Unfortunately the lack of participation will become an ongoing challenge in the network, giving the facilitator a hard time when trying to get participants to engage.

Swapping back to the meeting, Managing Director Ole gives a short and precise presentation, stating the three main challenges of the company, and afterward he guides participants relatively quickly through the production facilities. Back in plenum, participants relate to the challenges the managing director presented, and it stimulates a discussion about key performance indicators, their impact on practice, and how they can be used to motivate employees. Participant Rikke relates the presented challenge about motivation of employees to her own practice. She tells how she has similar challenges about change and employee motivation.

What I experience here is a new openness toward sharing individual challenges, and they try to use the network in a reflective manner. For participants it is a change to share challenges and experience that they are not alone with their challenges. High and low have challenges that are similar. The discussed challenges often relate to participants’ own practices as leaders.

During the meeting participants tell how they are starting to contact and use one another’s competencies in between network meetings. Based on experiences within the network,

participants have used one another's competencies to broaden their own knowledge in relations to particular topics.

- A participant has arranged for his whole staff to visit one of the other companies to share knowledge about optimizing production.
- A participant with a specific interest in LEAN has with his quality manager visited one of the companies from the network that has gone further in its LEAN work.

These activities, which are in addition to the network meetings, imply that participants are developing some shared points of attention that have the potential to become valuable for their individual practices.

Later at an interview, participant Ole told me how he through interactions in the network had become aware that two of the other companies present were in front of his firm in regards to LEAN. Ole hadn't used the network meeting to go into further discussions about LEAN but had instead contacted and visited one of the companies. This had given him inspiration for their long-term work with LEAN. Ole explains that this is often what he experiences with the network; it might not be the interactions taking place in the meetings but more the relationships that become valuable (Interview: Ole).

Toward the end of the meeting the facilitator initiates the discussion of how participation becomes valuable. A participant tells how he at the beginning was doubtful about which value the network could create but over time he has experiences that:

"At each company I have been inspired. Relations have been developed, and we are identifying mutual topics of interest. In that sense it [the network] creates value. Leadership challenges can be solved in the network but not until trust is present because you expose yourself when you share" (Log: Ole)

A similar statement is heard from Oscar:

“At all our meetings I have been introduced to companies I didn’t even know existed. What I hear is mutual challenges which relates to leadership, products, and attraction of employees” (Log: Oscar)

It is interesting that even though participants do not always engage in reflexive discussions, they pick up knowledge they find necessary and interesting for their own practice. Thus, they use the network activities to develop relations that can be used outside the network setting.

7.8 Sixth meeting – searching for more knowledge

This meeting includes visiting only one company. By now meetings are becoming routinized or you could even say participants are enacting a shared practice in the sense that meetings progress in more or less the same way. Meetings start with a tour around the premises and thereafter a short presentation of the company – or at times the other way around. This is also what happens today. During the tour around the premises interactions among the participants are hardly present. Managing Director Jesper tells the story of the company when walking around the production area, but it doesn’t seem to stimulate conversation. Most participants are walking by themselves, hardly communicating.

Today a new participant has joined the group. During the presentation the new member is checking his cellular phone regularly and hardly connecting with the network. He isn’t officially presented until the managing director from the visited company ends his presentation. The official presentation of him creates a change; he joins the conversations. The official presentation seems to include him in the network and give him a position to talk from.

The topic that emerges from today’s presentation relates to product development and products that can be developed in collaboration with universities. Briefly participants discuss how they can develop relations to various universities and how this can be valuable. Nevertheless, the discussion never seems to get going. Participants are not very engaged and unpleasant silence arises, like participants have nothing to communicate about.

For every meeting the combinations of participants are changing, due to shifting participation and new participants, and it has an impact of how discussions are drifting. Participants never really get used to one another, and insecurity appears.

Later at the interview Maria told me that because of the low turnout, she finds that it is hard to develop cohesiveness in the network and she says:

It doesn't matter so much if you miss out on one meeting. But if you participate at one meeting, and then miss out on the next five, then you have to start all over. Especially because we still haven't gone in depth with anything. I find that challenging" (Interview: Maria)

Before the meeting the facilitator informed me that she wants participants to discuss the structure and content of the meetings since they more or less have visited all companies. Therefore, she poses the question:

"What should take place at the network meetings forwardly?" (Log: facilitator)

The question is asked for participants to decide if structure should be changed, but instead the question stimulates, once again, the discussion of purpose. I get the impression that through the discussion of purpose, the participants are legitimizing their participation in the network. Somehow they still seem to be unsure of how participation in the network becomes valuable so collectively they search for meaning. Managing Director Oscar suggests that short input from people outside the network could be interesting, as a way to put more knowledge into the network. This suggestion is followed by Niels:

"If there is no agenda, it becomes fluffy. We need short presentations so it becomes interesting" (Log: Niels)

Apparently, participants are aware that among them they have various competencies that are interesting when shared, but they need their discussions to be structured by a topic if interactions are to become valuable.

In the matter of how thematic and discussions are to be structured by the facilitator, participants are split.

Maria tells how she found it great when the facilitator picked up on the leadership thematic and put it on the agenda for the following meeting (Interview: Maria).

Oscar points toward how he thinks that thematization demands more from the facilitator and that he doesn't think it is possible to orchestrate certain discussions (Interview: Oscar). Peter argues similarly:

"In our group, we haven't taken important issues out in the open. We haven't discussed. I think it depends on the facilitator if this is to happen" (Interview: Peter)

7.9 Seventh meeting – routinizing and researcher on stage

The lack of participation seems to continue. Again, only five participants are present. The company we are visiting this morning differs from most of the others. The company is in the investment trade so no production plant to visit, but instead a visit to an old manor where the company is located. The atmosphere seems very casual and relaxed, and participants socialize during the tour around the manor. Later, gathered round the old mahogany table with a view to the park, participants listen carefully to the managing director's presentation of the company. There is even room for small practical jokes that fill the room with a certain lightness that haven't been present before. The small jokes seem to be met with joy from the other participants, and it opens up conversations and discussions.

In her first slide, Managing Director Maria presents the company's major challenges. The routines agreed upon is followed, at it seems to bring comfort to the participants. Somehow they are starting to know the drill and maybe it makes it easier for participants to interact because they recognize what is expected of them.

Managing Director René in particular interacts with Maria during her presentation, and he relates the presentation to his own practice. It becomes a discussion of the challenges having to be an entrepreneur as well as a salesman. By reflecting his own story in Maria's telling, René gets the opportunity to see his own challenge in a new light. By hearing a story similar to his own, he reflects differently upon the challenges in his own company. The participants hear René's challenges in a new perspective, and it becomes suddenly possible for René to ask for help in relation to a specific challenges. The network members pick up the request for help, and they discuss how a particular challenge can be solved. Mutually participants reflect upon René's challenge. As a solution to René's challenge Maria offers to develop contact with a person in her network who can help solve René's challenges.

Maria tells me about this episode in an interview. She tells me how she has put René in touch with someone from her personal network, and how this is one of the potentials for the network, and thus, one of the things they can do for one another:

"This is what it can be used for. To create references. I have been able to help him, and maybe one day he can help me" (Interview: Maria)

The specific situation does show some of the potential in the network. When participants engage actively and share and reflect upon challenges, a solution to challenges can appear. What puzzles me though is why it doesn't seem to happen more often. Why do participants not seem to engage in a way with has the potential of creating novelty? Often participants seems to be cozy in their comfort zones, as the network more is a break with equals instead of a possibility of enacting new understandings.

Afterward, the network facilitator informs participants that a network member has decided to quit the network because of lack of time. This information gives reason to discuss whether there are enough members in the network. This leads to a discussion of the positivity of new businesses' appearing in Ringsted and how positive it is when things are being built. This inspires participant Oscar to quote Danish Poet Benny Andersen⁶, *"One has never regretted a bridge"* (Oscar). Somehow this philosophic quote indicates a change in their perception and reflections. I get the feeling that a different way of interacting might be surfacing.

With the participants in this reflecting mode, I am happy to "go on stage". I have been asked to make a short lecture on trust, network, and leadership. Before the meeting I have had many considerations on how to do this. I considered it as an opportunity to engage with the participants in a different way and try to make them reflect upon their own practices as leaders.

I chose to open the presentation with following quote of Nooteboom:

"Trust could be seen as an input, a process and an outcome of collaboration. If it is not already in place, trust has to be built up. It is as much the result of collaboration as a condition for it" (Nooteboom, 1996, p. 989).

I presented how networks in general could be considered a premise for organizational learning, and I discussed how trust in network and leadership can be understood.

⁶ Danish Poet Benny Andersen: "Man har aldrig fortrudt en bro"

After the short lecture, I opened the discussion with the following, straightforward questions:

- How does participation in networks influence your daily business?
- How are network activities and knowledge integrated in your daily working life?
- What does participation in networks mean for your company, and how do you encourage employees to participate in networks?

In particular, participant Ole seems motivated by the lecture and questions, and he tells his own story and experiences about participating in networks. He explains how he to some extent considers participation in networks an exercise. He considers himself as rather introverted and thus, at times he finds it hard to participate in network activities. He tells how it becomes easier over time when he gets to know people, but basically it feels challenging having to share knowledge with people you hardly know.

By this telling, the other participants get an understanding of his personality and why he at times might be less participative. I observed how his telling motivated other participants to reflect upon how participation in networks first become valuable, when relations are formed in a way that allows for knowledge to be shared in a reflexive manner, and thus, transformed into knowledge that can be used in their daily work practices.

What I find interesting today is to observe the more personal discussions taking place. Participants share personal knowledge and reflections in a more nuanced way, which seems to support their engagement. They seem to have a willingness to engage and participate in a more reflexive manner. I start to have the feeling that participants are speaking more frankly and that they encourage one another to do so.

7.10 Eighth meeting – back to scratch

There is a strange atmosphere this morning when participants are slowly dropping in at the network meeting. Small talk is more or less non-existent, and the participants just stand and

stare out into the blue. Maybe they are overwhelmed by the room we are in, which is filled with colorful paper wrappings in all different shades and colors. Even though the participants by now have shared quite a few experiences, they seem to be troubled when it comes to small-talking.

Today the program for the meeting is a little different. The facilitator and I have discussed how meetings can become more dynamic when interactions are supported with a topic. In the efforts of framing discussions differently, an external speaker has been invited to give a lecture about productivity.

The host of the day, Managing Director Peter, starts his presentation by asking the participants to challenge him on strategy and understandings. Peter is the one who previously in meeting 4 asked for question critically challenging his managerial and strategically actions. Unfortunately, the request is hardly picked up. The questions participants ask, such as; *“Who are your customers?”* and *“How do you handle customer relations?”* The questions asked don’t seem to challenge Peter, being straightforward and not requiring deeper reflection.

At the tour around the production area the participants seem to gather in small groups. One group seems to socialize on an informal level. The other group is interested in the production plant and challenges the managing director on how they can develop and optimize packing facilities. Going back to the meeting room, the same people continue discussing how it is a managerial task to involve employees in development processes, and how hard it is (Log: Rikke).

Back at the meeting room, the discussion about leadership and how to generate new ideas continues. Participants start to share reflections on how to stimulate innovation in their daily practice by incitement structure. Unfortunately, the facilitator stops the discussion when it is just about to get started because the external speaker has to start his presentation.

The external presentation is about productivity in Denmark. The topic seems highly relevant for the participants, at least on the paper. Unfortunately they hardly seem to pick up on it. One participant tells about own challenges concerning productivity, but the challenges are never questioned by the other participants. Then suddenly, 15 minutes before closure time, two

participants have to leave, and the meeting ends very abrupt. Thus, the meeting ends as it started, short of conversation and rather uneasy.

7.11 Ninth meeting – searching for a path for the future

While waiting for people to arrive, there is a casual conversation about traffic in Ringsted. As usual, the conversation at arrival is tense and forced. Participants try to push the deafening silence away by a forced conversation about traffic. Finally, all participants are gathered and Managing Director Niels starts his company presentation. Niels invites participants to interrupt and join conversation whenever they have questions.

In his presentation he tries to challenge participants with following statement about safety at work:

“You can talk about it [safety] so much that it boosts insecure behavior!” (Log: Niels)

But participants don’t pick up the discussion about work safety, so it ends in nothing. During his presentation and discussion, Niels continuously reads messages on his telephone. Maybe this is what makes most participants to go all numb, and only pose very practical and not challenging questions, in line with the following:

“From where do you get your employees?” (Log: Maria)

“How do you sell your projects?” (Log: Ole)

At previous meetings participants have circled around mutual challenges from their daily leadership practices. To pick up on the discussion about leadership, the facilitator has prepared a small workshop. Participants are divided into two groups and given 20 minutes to discuss leadership challenges. The facilitator frames the workshop by the following question:

“What are the challenges when wanting to change the mindset among employees in the managerial group?” (Log: facilitator)

I participate in one of the groups, just listening and observing their reflections. Participants get going, reflecting upon their own practices. They share stories of best practice. Participant Oscar tells about how his company has developed from being a local actor to a national actor, how the board of managers implemented a new strategy and what challenges this caused. Another participant tells how she has had challenges with a mid-level manager and how she solved this by dialogue.

Interactions are characterized by stories of best practice. Participants are sharing knowledge of how and what they do in certain situation. They question how things developed and mutually they reflect upon their stories of best practice. During the workshop conversation is running smoothly and seems to have a relaxing and comfortable touch.

After the workshop, participants get together in the meeting room to share with one another what they have discussed. At this point conversation seems to take an interesting approach. Instead of telling what they discussed in the workshop, it becomes a reflection upon how they mutually have shared reflections. Rikke frames what have taken place in the workshop with the statement:

"We have developed our understanding of how to understand" (Log: Rikke)

They laugh together in a comforting way, and this develops the dialogue further:

"It sounds wise, and it is very close to what took place. How does something become meaningful is the question?" (Log: Oscar)

"I think the individual development of competences is crucial" (Log: Rikke)

"So you consider individual development of competences as important – why? I agree if it is a matter of developing your senses. It is the reflection upon what you are doing as you go along" (Log: Niels)

Maria returns to this discussion when I interview her at a later time. She tells me that she experienced that this discussion took them a little further; they moved a bit closer to one

another and challenged each other's understandings. Maria considers the network a mirror, where she can reflect upon own challenges among equals (Interview: Maria)

Finally it leads them, again, toward a discussion on how participation in the network is valuable:

"I think what I get out of participation, is that we are in agreement in relation to various issues. But how do we move on?" (Log: Maria)

"We use the network to get to know each other and challenge each other. I think we have challenged each other" (Log: Oscar)

"I think we achieve what we want when we take the time to stop and reflect. It is a break in the daily business" (Log: Niels)

The facilitator asks participants to discuss future form and topics of the network. Participants answer with the following statements.

"We shouldn't be too ambitious. I want to get to know you. Give input in a crisscross manner, but I am not looking for therapy. If I need therapy, I will search for it somewhere else" (Log: Oscar)

"Taking the time from daily tasks gives time to reflection" (Log: Rikke)

"I think we have some reflections here – and then we take it further with someone else" (Log: Niels)

As the above discussion unfolds, I'm sitting wondering where these reflections take participants. Somehow they seem to appreciate one another's company and what they frame as "time for reflection", but at the same time I have heard them search for more so many time that it puzzles me if this is what they settle for. But today I have felt that the conversation was more open, acknowledging and reflective and in a way it seems like participants are having some kind of breakthrough in their network.

7.12 Summing up empirical challenges – what went on?

In this section, I frame the discussion by five empirical points of attention that have occurred during the life of the network. The points of attention are:

- Processes of value co-creation
- Emergence of a network
- Negotiating and changing expectations – searching for a common ground
- Developing trust when negotiating and changing expectations
- Sharing expectations – developing new understandings?

In general you can argue that the managing directors tried to work from a mutual purpose. Right from the start the managing directors spent a lot of time trying to establish a mutual purpose for sharing experiences and knowledge in a reflective matter. Later they sought to develop more specific shared activities. The unpredictable purpose seemed to create more obstacles to collaboration than opportunities. Over time and with more insight to one another's practices, the managing directors started to take some steps toward in clarifying what they actually could achieve together. The network participants brought together diverse perspectives representing very different areas of businesses. The facilitator stressed the potential value of participants' diverse background as a way of seeing different perspectives. The network moved from agreeing to share their individual challenges at meetings to presenting their business in a more glossy way. Because of work pressure, many members missed quite a few meetings, and this seemed to develop some kind of distance between participants. Somehow they seemed to lack a shared purpose to work around, and meetings often seemed dispersed.

7.13 Processes of value co-creation

What I often observed during the managing directors network meetings was an attempt of participants' to sticking their heads into one another's businesses. Immediately, when I saw the photo of the sculpture visualized in Picture 7.1⁷, it became a picture of the networking activities I have observed in this particular network.

First of all, it symbolizes the process the participants have been engaged in by visiting one another's companies. This could also be described as "sticking their heads into each other businesses" by a quick glance around facilities. Standing outside trying to get a glance of the inside.

Picture 7.1: Corporate Head



At the same time the photo also symbolizes the activities that have taken place. These activities have often not taken them anywhere, and participants have only gained the quick glance and not been able to get close enough to challenge and negotiate new meanings. Thus, participants have ended up with their heads stuck in concrete, not being able to break through to make participation particular valuable.

The managing directors often touch upon the question in their ongoing discussion of negotiating expectations, of how to make participation valuable. All along they have been struggling to find ways and means for the network to create value. Though, I did observe that in the processes of

⁷ Corporate Head Sculpture created by Terry Allen. The building is located downtown Los Angeles. Photo taken by my brother Lars in 2013

finding common ground based on a shared purpose, participants had moments of debating, evaluating, and negotiation that gave them new understandings on topics that couldn't have been imagined or put on the agenda, but appeared as a part of their mutual reflection. Such moments occur occasionally in the narratives unfolded above. Sometimes more explicitly than others, but what I do note is that these moments are the ones that give rise to discussions and disagreements that have the potential to lead to new understandings.

7.14 Emergence of a network

How participants were recruited for the network seems to have affected participants' engagement, and thus, the ongoing understanding and negotiation of expectations. Although participants to some extent were recruited for the network based on their own suggestions picked up in the first interviews, this "recruitment" might be a challenge for participant commitment. As it comes forth in the above narratives, there is a lack of mutual understandings about participants' expectations. Participants' expectations and commitment differs and thus, the negotiation of expectations becomes an ongoing thing.

Thus, the municipality provided a structure that could easily be followed initiated the way the network, but at the same time it created obstacles to the network. Despite the call for a network from some of the managers, mutual expectations still have to be negotiated in order to make participation valuable. Caught up in the structure that the participants agreed upon at the first meeting, the managing directors are challenged trying to sort out expectations, and thus, how participation becomes valuable.

7.15 Negotiating and changing expectations – searching for a common ground

More or less every meeting seems like the “first time”, and participants keep searching for topics and organizing practices that might make sense. The managing directors are struggling trying to find ways and means for their collaborative activities to become valuable. The art of posing reflective questions appears to be very challenging, even though they work hard to make network activities meaningful. Expectations for the network appear to be ill-defined and participants spend a lot of time searching for common ground. Thus, expectations cannot be adapted and reflected in their way of collaborating.

Participants do seem to attain some new knowledge needed for making participation in the network valuable. I suppose you could say that the insights they gained about one another’s practices are reflected in the changes that came forth in their relationships and their search for common ground. Commitment in the network proved to be hard work, but toward the end of this study, participants started to find a way to interact and collaborate that fitted their individual needs.

7.16 Developing trust when negotiating expectations

The study of the network showed that participation in network settings is hard work, requiring time and trust if relations are to be developed. More or less all meetings included an explicit focus toward negotiating expectation, not only to the purpose of the particular meeting but also among network participants.

By these observations I also gain insight to how the development of trust takes time, and it is developed through the negotiation of expectations, which in this case relates to the purpose of the network but also participants’ engagement. However, the narratives show that trust has to be worked out through participants’ mutual reflections on their shared actions, which also

relates to building up routines for their network meetings. By negotiating expectations, participants seem to build up trust, which establishes possibilities for building relationships where challenges can be shared. It is noteworthy that the trusting relationships they have achieved are developed by a sustained effort and a search for common ground. So building trusting relationships can be considered a process emerging over time.

7.17 Sharing experiences – developing new understandings?

I observed that participants engaged in presentations and discussions, but it became presentations and discussions in which hardly any reflection took place. Questions posed by participants often seemed closed and more as a friendly gesture to the participant hosting the meeting. The feedback they gave one another on presentations was often affirmative and not challenging, as participants had agreed to when trying to define the purpose of the network. Participants often confirmed one another's actions as interesting, but they hardly ever challenged the reflections and methodology behind actions. So even though they had the chance of digging deeper into one another's practices, discussions often became shallow.

Ongoing, I observed that when participants engaged in discussions about their own practices, it did offer opportunities for developing new understanding. I experienced a development and change in participants' collaborative actions over time, but at the same time they also seemed to get caught up in the routines, mutually developed in the beginning. These routines were agreed upon with the purpose of getting to know one another. But at the same time the routines became very tight when it came to developing relationship and engage in reflexive interactions.

8 Network roller coast journey oscillating between imaginative and proper conceptualization of value

Participating in networks is defined in the network literature as a challenging affair (Carranza, 2007; Ebers, 1997; Eide & Fuglsang, 2013; Gausdal & Nilsen, 2011; Lemaire, 2012), and the Chapters 6 and 7 not only confirmed this understanding but also showed how and why it is so challenging. Thus, the narratives provide an in-depth account of the emotional “roller coaster” journey of interactions taking place in the two networks and offer an opportunity to investigate how and when participation in business networks becomes valuable. Mead argues that the “expressions” of emotion are gestures. As gestures, emotions have sign value because they indicate interrupted, aborted, or completed lines of action (Mead, 1934, pp. 15–18). Emotions’ sign value increased to the extent that they showed how network participants were prepared to act. Similarly, Weick argues that emotions are a part of the important social processes through which sense is enacted and that shared meanings can emerge from these emotional situations (Weick, 1995, pp. 45–49). The preceding discussion suggests that the construction of shared meaning plays an important role when participants through the emotional interactions try to make participation in the networks valuable. In the following, I elaborate and unfold the emotional roller coaster trip by discussing the situations of emotional gestures, which involve the development of a shared meaning. More precisely, the narratives illuminate how differently participants in networks engage and interact and thus provide examples and preliminary conclusions on the challenges faced by network participants and the facilitator when trying to make participation in the networks valuable. Further, the narratives show how participants vary in their proximity to the local context and how this also influences their expected and experienced value of participation. Despite the networks’ obvious differences, the empirical findings also highlight some important commonalities that are worth pointing out in the search of gaining more knowledge about how value is co-created in networks. A special interest is paid toward the activities concerning the ongoing interactions between network facilitator and participants in the network as a joint sphere.

8.1 Structure of the chapter

First, this chapter uses the concept of “imaginative value” (Beckert, 2011) to explain the oscillating behaviors, also considered an emotional roller coaster ride, observed in the two networks. Imaginative value can be defined as symbolic value that actors ascribe to an object. I argue that practices in the networks developed based on participants’ interactions framed by expectations and experiences of network participation. These interactions led participants to create imaginative values, but the network participants also continuously struggled to escape the impression of imaginative value through reflexive strategies trying to make the understanding of value more tangible. Second, the chapter discusses the similarities and the differences in the emotional roller coaster journey, which the network participants in the two networks engaged in and enacted when signing up for participation in the networks.

8.2 Imaginative value based on expectations and experiences

Inter-organizational networking has often been defined in terms of achieving goals, such as certain outcomes relating to productivity or profitability (Cunningham & Ramlogan, 2012; Gazley, 2010). More recent concepts of value in networks also take intangible outcomes into account or even concentrate on the evaluation of processes (Bizzi & Langley, 2012; L. Fuglsang & Eide, 2013; Gausdal & Nilsen, 2011; Halinen et al., 2012). However, value may also be thought of as imaginative value (Beckert, 2011). The role of imaginative value is much less studied in the literature about networking. Imaginative value, as described by Jens Beckert, is when actors ascribe symbolic value to an object. This is seen as a process that is socially constituted (Beckert, 2011) through group practices. Beckert argues:

“Imaginative value of goods, though individually experienced, is a social phenomenon” (Beckert, 2011).

Beckert gives us the example of groups of artists, galleries, and art buyers that ascribe imaginative value to a piece of art through mutual excitement and affirmation of value. Beckert's concept of imaginative value draws, among others, on Durkheim:

"In his analysis of symbolic representation, Durkheim identifies a specific human capacity at the core of religious beliefs. I will argue that this capacity also lies at the heart of attributing symbolic value to goods in the economy: namely, the faculty to attribute to objects qualities that exist only in the imagination and have no objective material correlate in the object itself" (Beckert, 2011)

In similar ways, the network participants and facilitators collectively engage in group practices, where they tend to ascribe symbolic value to the networking activities. But they are also observed escaping the impression of creating such imaginative values through varied reflexive strategies. By ascribing symbolic value to a theme, participants and facilitators create excitement around participation and interpret events positively, but they also strongly fear to be carried away by this group practice. The downside of imaginative value is that it is fragile and requires continuous affirmation because of its lack of being tangible and practically experienced:

"Imaginative valuations are fragile constructs of the mind that need constant reaffirmation in communicative practices if they are to be maintained" (Beckert, 2011)

What the network participants instead strived to do was to conceptualize value in a more proper way. This sensemaking activity corresponds more to the strategies explained by Howard Becker in his seminal paper on becoming a marijuana user. Becker investigated how people learned to appreciate marijuana by the help of experienced smokers who interactively explained to newcomers how marijuana should be smoked, what the effect was, and how it could be appreciated. Becker concludes:

“Persons who do not achieve the proper kind of conceptualization are unable to engage in the given behavior and turn off in the direction of some other relationship to the object or activity” (Becker, 1953, p. 242)

In the two networks we should not speak of newcomers and experienced users, but rather how reflexive interactions among participants led them toward proper conceptualizations of networking activities. “Proper conceptualizations” can be defined as participants’ experienced value of networking efforts, including more tangible value of the networking activities. These proper conceptualizations will be summarized and discussed in section 8.2.3.

In the following two sections, I shall analyze and discuss how the concept of oscillating between imaginative value and proper conceptualizations can be applied to explain and elaborate our understanding of network participation. Through strategies of reflexive interaction participants tried to make an imaginative value tangible and anchor the value in expectations and experiences in order to achieve and experience a proper conceptualization of valuable participation.

8.2.1 Expectations

Expectations are critical for ascribing value to an object. What seems an important activity of the facilitator is to help adjust expectations continuously. As Mead argues, the past is known through the present (Mead, 1932). However, the present is also influenced by the future, as our expectations of what might happen in the future affect what we draw on from the past and bring into the present. In this way, the past and future come alive through expectations in the present.

In the CSR network expectations for participation were pre-defined from the steering group. The steering group expected that participants would work from and around the CSR template and with inspiration therein develop their own CSR profile. This meant that participants were expected to participate in the network based on these pre-defined expectations. In this way,

participants' imaginative value was primarily built around two members of the steering group who previously had developed and successfully used a CSR strategy. These two steering group members' doings and sayings created the expectations and thus influenced participants' imaginative value since CSR was an intangible concept for most participants.

In the narratives of the CSR network, I described how the CSR template from day one worked as a driver for expectations about CSR. The CSR template worked as an object for participants to mutually unfold CSR, to which they could relate their expectations for participating in the network. Further, actors engaged in ongoing, in-depth interaction with one another in a process of mutual adjustment of expectations around CSR. From day one there was a frank exchange of views around the template. In the begin of the networking efforts, the CSR template created stability for the network participants, and they were relatively sure about what was expected from them and how they could meet the expectations. Over time this changed. A shift from following the pre-defined expectations from the steering group to a more negotiating and reflexive engagement appeared when participants started to define their own expectations and challenge the expectations of the steering group. This implied a different form of commitment from participants, which they never really as such negotiated, but it emerged as dissatisfaction with the pre-established expectations. More reflexive interactions among the participants started to take form in order create a more proper and meaningful conceptualization of CSR. The facilitator provided time for participants to discuss how participation in the elaboration of a CSR profile was to become valuable for participants. But even though participants wanted some kind of change in the networking activities, it was hard for them to negotiate and define new expectations mutually. Over time, participants became more equal with the steering group members and facilitator, and their activities took a more collective turning. This meant that participants got involved and took responsibility for planning themes and activities for network meetings, engaging in taking turns concerning the hosting of meetings, and paying attentions to one another's progress with and expectations to CSR.

In Network 2, the networking efforts among managing directors developed a bit differently. Participants had very different expectations to the networking activities; for example, whether

the network should be a reflexive space for challenging their own practices or whether it should be a policy laboratory for the municipality. This gave basis for ongoing discussion of expectations, where participants' imaginative value of networking stemming from their previous experiences were renegotiated collectively, and this discussion of expectations led to an agreement that the network could be useful in different ways for different participants.

Before the network started, I had interviewed several of the managing directors, and they had suggested very proper and tangible reasons for developing a network for the managing directors in Ringsted. They had suggested the following topics for discussion:

- Attracting and retaining employees
- Discuss how can leadership can support the implementation of LEAN
- Contact to universities
- Challenges regarding transport and logistics
- Developing the industrial areas in Ringsted
- Improve and increase collaboration among local businesses
- Develop contact to Ringsted Municipality
- Challenges and opportunities related to the managerial role

At the first meeting the facilitator supported a small workshop where participants elaborated on their expectations of participation in the network, and how participation could become valuable. There were very differing views and expectations toward the purpose of the network, and even though the facilitator tried to make expectations very explicit, participants ended up with somehow intangible expectations. Even though the managing directors discussed their expectations of participation in the network, they never really developed a mutual ground. The small workshop had the purpose of finding a focus for the networks, but instead of making the expectations explicit, it had the opposite effect of making the expectations very intangible and "airy" (imaginative), and this impression of creating only imaginative value disturbed the network relations all the way through.

The managing directors struggled to avoid too much imaginative value. Participants' imagined values ascribed to the network were motivating their engagement in the network and thereby their commitment and further development of shared expectation. Yet the managing directors repeatedly discussed what they could possibly gather around in order to make participation valuable in a more concrete and material way. These attempts to make the value of the network more concrete never actually stabilized the relations among the managing directors. At each meeting this negotiation continued and in some ways obstructed a proper value being materialized. One of the managing directors explained in an interview:

"We don't necessarily expect the same value. I might have one purpose, and for others it might be different. It might be all right, but we need to discuss it. It is frustrating if we pull in different directions" (Interview: Oscar).

Somehow the ongoing discussions of expectations are a way to deal with uncertainty about how to challenge imaginative value. Recall the following interactions:

"We shouldn't be too ambitious. I want to get to know you. Give input in a crisscross manner, but I am not looking for therapy. If I need therapy, I will search for it somewhere else" (Log: Oscar).

"Taking the time from daily tasks gives time to reflect" (Log: Rikke).

"I think we have some reflections here – and then we take it further with someone else" (Log: Niels).

As it appears in the above quotes, some of the managing directors wanted to use the network as a reflexive room about issues relevant for individual practices and where they jointly could model understandings and others thought that this was not the right place for such reflections.

In the workshop at the first meeting, the managing directors had agreed to include and focus toward challenges in their presentations of their respective companies, though they seldom did this. Rather, the managing directors reported on their everyday working life in fairly general

terms that did not as such open up to unknown terrains. I observed that most participants settled for the easy choice when it came to presenting their businesses. The managing directors used a lot of time presenting their companies in rather glossy ways, instead of presenting and discussing challenges. This matter was never as such verbally challenged among participants in the network, but in interviews it was explicit as something that had been annoying to the participants:

“In our network, we haven’t really gotten the interesting things forward. We haven’t discussed” (Interview: Peter).

“We are still very polite and listening. We discuss but not in a very direct way” (Interview: Oscar).

“It has been hard to get into to depth with discussions” (Interview: Ole).

“We haven’t come up with something new and revolutionary” (Interview: Maria).

The above discussed themes, relating to participants’ commitment and engagement, was rarely collectively discussed, at least not in the way I heard it in the “corners” and in interviews. In the meetings it was discussed how hard it was to control one’s calendar, but participants never nailed it down to what they expected from one another, or how they could meet these expectations mutually. I did overhear small talk where participants reflected upon expectations to one another’s commitment, and I observed that many participants weren’t satisfied with what was going on, and thus the value of participation and in face-to-face interviews I was also presented with great dissatisfaction, which was never explicit in the collective settings.

Over time, the challenge of developing and meeting expectations became increasingly difficult to deal with and was an unpleasant matter not only for participants but also for the facilitator. For instance, the facilitator was never really certain about who was going to participate in the meetings. Even though meetings had been scheduled in advance, cancellations were ticking in last minute and sometimes participants just didn’t show up. This lack or not agreeing about the expectations did worry the facilitator all along since it questioned the value of the network. The

facilitator did try to discuss the matter, but among them, participants and facilitator never really ended up with mutual defined expectations, and this became an ongoing, negative issue all the time.

I observed in both networks how participants organized themselves around their expectations. I argue that despite having a mutually formed purpose based on expectations for the networking efforts, participants co-create their activities and meanings throughout participation, and reflexively co-create understandings to achieve a more proper conceptualization of the value of networking. But it is a balance on a knife's edge; thus, when expectations are too firmly negotiated, disagreement or rebelling are likely to appear, but when expectations are too loose, participants struggle to make them more concrete. Imaginative value might work as a temporal stabilization of the networking interactions, yet the participants also need to materialize the value into something concrete in order to remain interested. In particular, trust is necessary, for participants to keep discussing and waiting for proper value to emerge. Sufficient trust in one another and thus related to an understanding of that expectations turns into something proper is needed.

8.2.2 Experiences

Experiences are here understood as in the German word *Erlebnis* rather than *Erfahrung*, which is more about past experience and learning (Lars Fuglsang, 2015, p. 213). Thus, what is to be discussed here is experience of value (or lack of value) in the network. Experienced value can be tightly related to expectations (as fulfillment of expectations) but may also be different from expectations (like in a surprise). Mead argues, *"We are aware of ourselves, and of what the situation is, but exactly how we will act never gets into experience until after the action takes place"* (Mead, 1934, p. 177+178). Further, I use the concept of experience to denote certain, special events that play a role for participants' actions. Mead gives us the example of walking. Even though you take the expected steps, it puts you in a slightly different position from what you expected. Mead argues, *"The resulting action is always a little different from what is*

expected” (Mead, 1934, p. 177). Mead describes the “I” and the “me” as responding to social situations as the experience of the individual. We are aware of ourselves and of what the situation is, but exactly how we will act never gets into experience until after the action has taken place (Mead, 1934).

Take the situation of a steering group member who experienced a “change of gear” in the CSR network. Poul described how he became “enlightened” because of participants’ negotiation and challenge of knowledge. He became “enlightened” in a way he hadn’t expected. This “enlightening” came forth when participants engaged in interactions where there wasn’t a set goal, but where participants took the time to explore different aspects of CSR as their mutual topic. Poul experienced that when he engaged in the reflexive interactions. He gained new understandings of his practices, understandings he, at that point of time, wasn’t even aware he was in need of.

It is in such situations that I observed how participants in the CSR Network explored challenges related to CSR in a way that addressed problems and challenges participants’ hadn’t seen or become aware of before, and thus they experienced that value of participation through reflexive interaction that couldn’t be planned. By consciously exploring CSR, participants at times gave life to new understandings, which extend their knowledge not only about CSR but also about related topics. Participants also talked about how they experienced value of participation in their individual practices. For instance Jens said,

“I have gained a lot from the CSR network which I hadn’t expected. The new relations and new understanding has been for the benefit of my company” (Log: Jens)

Jens elaborated on how new knowledge gained from participation affected him in his daily practice, e.g., by giving him the possibility of acting in new ways, and this is when participation is experienced as valuable.

Especially in the CSR network, participants are much occupied with telling how they experience the value of participation in their daily business lives. Else also tells how her participation in the CSR network shows in her daily work life, for instance, by qualifying her wishes and demands toward suppliers, and thus she has gathered new knowledge, not only about CSR but also about leadership, business plans, and customers. It is observed that value might be co-created in the network, but often value of participation is experienced in participants' practices as changes of habits and understandings.

For the managing directors, value is guided by previous, individual experiences of participation in networks, and they use these past experiences to collectively discuss and negotiate imaginative value for the present network in a way that makes it possible to experience proper conceptualization of value. The managing directors' previous experiences of value in networks establish a guideline for actions needed in the present network in order to experience a more proper and less abstract conceptualization of value. When interviewing the managing directors, a general reflection is that most participants are willing to give the network some time because, based on previous experiences, they know that making network participation valuable takes time. But somehow applying their previous experiences as a guideline for how participation becomes valuable is challenging for their mutual networking activities, and the managing directors are not capable of finding a way together. Rikke told how she had participated in another network where participants were upfront and honest about their challenges and this formed the basis for some good discussion, which she experienced as valuable. When Rikke uses her past experience of participation in a network as a guideline for making participation in the present network valuable, she doesn't necessarily engage in the discussion of making participation valuable in a different way.

In both networks, the facilitator insisted that participants kept discussing how they experienced value of participating in the network. The facilitator told me that she was convinced that specifying topics of interest and defining clear lines of actions would not be sufficient when engaging in networking efforts; she wanted participants to keep discussion and negotiating the value of participation (Log: facilitator). But what happened when discussing experienced value

of participation, participants kept reflecting on experiences from participation in other networks, through which they had developed a mix of personal and business value. The facilitator tried to help participants in both networks to recognize the value of participation by facilitating and supporting interactions, which focused on the experiences of value in the present network. However, it is difficult for participants to pinpoint a proper conceptualization of value for participation in the present network.

In both networks, participants use narratives to communicate, in particular value from participation in previous networks in order to confine value of networking efforts to one another and to themselves. These narratives of past experiences are supplying participants with a plot that makes sense and that can be as credible to the participants as the value they have actually experienced within the present network. Participants in both networks sustained uncertainty about value of participation, and this made participants draw upon experiences on how participation in other networks had become valuable. These experiences established a basis for imaginative value, which is working as a guideline for participants' commitment.

The processes of mirroring and reflecting difference could be phrased as reflexivity-in-action in the network, which brought together and showed new understandings that over time were experienced by participants as making participation valuable. Arguably, stories of past and present experiences of value may translate imaginative value into more proper actions. On the other hand, what participants experience as "actually happening" depends on interpretations framed by participants' expectations. I argue that reflexive interactions over time result in reconstruction and change of habits, which participants will experience as value.

8.2.3 Summing up value co-created

Network activities seem to be formed and enacted through the use of network expectations based on participants' previous and past experiences of network participation. Participants consider value in terms of what is relevant or sufficient to somehow fit and develop their daily practice. In the previous section it was discussed how network participants over time, and with

the support from the facilitator, tried to routinize and standardize situations by establishing accepted and mutually ways of interacting and collaborating when trying to make participation valuable. Developing mutual expectations constituted somehow the answers to the questions of how participants experience the value of networking. Expectations and experiences represent and relate to accepted and generalized ways of participating in networks and support and make the ongoing activities and interactions easier and more efficient. They seem to facilitate and support activities, but they also, to some extent, limit new ways of doing thing because expectations and experiences constitute and limits participants' actions. Wanting to change the expectations and experiences requires effort, even though they are practical tools because it is the way that participants move on and get things done, and thus makes participation valuable.

Participants did experience proper conceptualization of value, such as improved leadership abilities, social competencies in relation to participation in networks, access to new knowledge, or expanding the business. These tangible values are already discussed in the narratives of the networks in Chapter 6 and 7. In the following Table 8.1, I summarize value co-created. What becomes obvious is that value is not only intangible but also two-fold. Two-fold in the way that value at times is personally related to the participant and at other times value is related to the business practice.

Table 8.1: Value of participation in the networks

	Personal value for participants	Business value
CSR network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed social competencies related to network participation • Developed ability to communicate business strategy • Developed communicative competencies • New local relations • Improved leadership capabilities • Access to new knowledge 	<p>The work with the CSR profile led to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New ways of handling garbage policies • Saved money on electricity • Sharpened business focus in general • New partnerships developed • Collaboration with suppliers changed due to CSR focus • New business perspectives
Network for managing directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed relations to local partners • Developed social competencies in relation to network participation • Information about local businesses • New perspectives on leadership challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed relations with the municipality • Access to local LEAN knowledge / competencies

Source: log and interviews

From the above, it can be argued that value of participation can take various forms, e.g. as useful skill, a key piece of information, or a new perspective experienced. The personal value of participation in the network can also be experienced in form of inspiration, trust, and a different way of viewing one's self. Participants in the CSR network argued that working with the CSR profile changed their mindset, private as well as business.

When following Mead's arguments of meaning as being developed socially, the understanding of knowledge, as a collective achievement in networks is a central point and an important consideration when engaging in network activities. Among them, participants in the networks,

provides access to certain resources; e.g., specific knowledge and relations, and thus, participants in networks has the opportunity of building shared understandings and developing a shared language that facilitates and supports interaction and learning.

8.3 Cross-case discussion of similarities and differences

The networks have a number of similarities and differences. The way participants interact and approach challenges in the networks' influences the value co-creation in the networks. Both networks have the same facilitator, but the level of engagement of participants differs due to the context and pre-conditions of the networks, e.g., the size, number of participants but also how participants are engagement within the local setting and how they engage outside the network with the facilitator. With the network for managing directors, the limited interaction with the facilitator gives some explanation why participants are less engaged that in the CSR network. It became apparent from the first part of the analysis that some of the dynamics and structures of the two networks deserve a more thorough research to further deepen our understanding of how the networks evolve. So far, little attention has been paid to the different ways the networks developed. Thus, despite having the same network facilitator, the network practices developed very differently. The analysis in this section demonstrates that, as participants differ in the networks, the interactions also differ making the processes of value co-creation very different, but these differences still gives an understanding of how networks develops.

Cross-case comparison can support the understanding of the networks when characteristics are categorized when they share certain patterns. Characteristics can be ordered or sorted along several dimensions. For example, Denzin (1984) suggests collecting multiple cases of the phenomenon of study and then bracketing them for essential elements and components across cases. The essential elements are then rebuilt into an ordered whole (e.g., construction of the value co-creating processes) and put back into the social context. The cross-case examination is

used to establish conceptual insights, and the two networks are used to gather insights by comparing them with each other.

Thus, in the following I try to reach a deeper understanding of the cases, by comparing and discussing differences and similarities, and then re-constructing the understandings into a whole.

Table 8.2: Similarities and differences of the two networks

	CSR Network	Network for Managing Directors
Focus of activities	Topic driven – aiming at developing a CSR profile for participants businesses	Activity driven – searching for ways to collaborate and getting to know each other
Network initiator	Ringsted Erhvervsforum	The Municipality
Participants	Various levels of employees from various sizes of organizations	Managing Directors from larger companies in Ringsted
Participants relation to the local setting	Participants have a strong local sense of belonging - most participants lives within the municipality	Mainly detached from the local context - most participants lives outside the area
Coordination of the network	Municipality facilitator in collaboration with a steering group	Municipality facilitator
Meetings interval and location	Changing	Approx. monthly taking place at participants premises
Activities	Activities are built around the development of a CSR profile for each participant and pretty standardized. Activities are informal and driven by a passion for the topic	Activities are changing and organized around expectations of participants and the host company. Participants hosting the particular meeting have the possibility of focusing the network meeting
Building relationships	In and around the network setting Participants take actions and meet / interact outside organized network settings Relations are formal and informal	Primarily in the network settings Relationships are rather impersonal and formal, and interactions are based on and related to agenda presented by the facilitator
Network structure	The network is relatively open, and new members can (easily) join the network	The network is relatively closed and participation determined by participants position in their companies
Trust	Trust is developed over time and is based on participants engaged in developing the CSR profile. Trust is based on social interactions and between the participants	Trust is based on organizational and professional knowledge and is relatively impersonal.
Facilitators' interactions with participants	Facilitator is closely engaged with topic and participants' practices in and outside meetings. Facilitator is considered an "expert" within the CSR area	Facilitator is distanced to participants' practices and topics of interest. Facilitator's knowledge of topics is limited
Challenges	The businesses' participants are very diverse in size and focus towards CSR. Businesses' (and participants') resources to develop CSR are very diverse.	The local context has very different impact on participants' businesses – and participants are differently related to the local context. Facilitator's knowledge of participants and their businesses is limited
How value occurs	Linked to CSR activities in and around the network and primarily based on commitment	Value is changing and situational and dependent on specific network activities in the network and primarily based on stories of success

The two topics framing the discussions in the following are 1) Socializing stories organizing the networking activities, and 2) Stabilizing structures. These two elements capture the different dynamics of the networks.

8.4 Socializing stories organizing the networking activities

In the following it is addressed and discussed how participants in the networks are concerned with producing socializing stories. Thus, it is discussed how the participants in the networks define and modify meaning of participation through a social process organized around socializing stories.

In the network for managing directors it was observed how the socializing stories that participants organized discussions around were based on prior experiences outside the network setting, which they invited the others to join and thus discuss and reformulate. The interpretation of these prior stories stayed open. Which experiences were to be picked by the others and discussed into something meaningful were difficult to say beforehand. As an example, we saw how the managing directors in their short presentations at the network meetings often tried to focus upon a management challenge, based on stories of success, as a socializing story for the others to discuss. But most times, it was observed that participant didn't engage in discussions and stayed passive, which led to the presented stories not being discussed and turned into something meaningful for the others. This search for socializing stories that could gather the participants in the network for managing directors became a great challenge for making participation valuable and resulted in conflicting understandings and definitions of value. In the network for managing directors knowledge and value of participation were more related to intangible issues because of the character of socializing stories and thus the knowledge sharing and value of participation was less obvious. The managing directors needed to be patient and spend more time together before they found socializing stories, which they could gather, their attention and interactions around. All along, there seemed to be a need for

introducing a socializing story that could gather participants' actions and interactions, making the understanding of value less dependent on the particular and changing setting.

In the CSR network the CSR profile served as a socializing story, gathering participants and their interactions around CSR in general, but at the same time CSR discussions were very closely related to their individual businesses. Participants were quickly able to develop a network practice based on prior knowledge and assumptions about participation and participants, also due to their close links to the local setting. Value of participation in the network was co-created and strengthened through participants' development of the CSR profile. Thus, as described previously, CSR network participants engaged in discussions, which made them reflect and interpret their previous understandings of CSR. Due to CSR as a socializing story, CSR participants had an easy way of finding common ground for discussions on other topics. These discussions were often formed, supported, and developed by the facilitator who not only had a thorough understanding of CSR but also was closely related to participants. The relations were developed by interactions and meetings the facilitator had with participants, often outside the network meetings.

The facilitator supported interactions in the CSR network because of her understanding of participants' individual practices and understandings. In the network for managing directors she was limited in her actions because of a lack of knowledge of participants, and thus less developed relations. Where the focus in the CSR network from the start was built around CSR as an socializing story that became experienced as a passion for the participants, the network for the managing directors was less focused and the participants less "socialized."

8.5 Stabilizing structures

For participants in both networks the ongoing activities were often turbulent, and the whole process is considered an emotional roller coaster journey. An important part of the activities in the network was trying to stabilize the network and find a passable road for participants and

facilitator. Stabilizing is not thought of as not wanting to change but is considered a way to make sense of a structure, and thus a platform for participants to proceed from. Process of stabilizing the network involves getting to know one another and finding a passable road toward collaborating activities.

The obvious way, and the known way, to stabilize the road toward collaborative activities are through processes enacted in the meetings; e.g., the facilitator supporting interactions in various ways. In both networks it was observed how the facilitator invited participants to interact by presenting topics she thought might have their interest. In the CSR network this was somehow relative easy; thus, members participated to develop their knowledge of CSR and the link to other relevant topics seemed to be easy to find. In the network for managing directors it came forth as harder, as already discussed in the above. The facilitator tried to focus discussions to various and different topics, but interactions never really went smoothly.

When taking into account the similarities and differences summarized in Table 8.2, an interesting perspective to structure and focus the networking activities are for the facilitator to engage with participants outside the network setting. In the CSR network the facilitator was closely linked to participant practices and met participants outside the network setting, both in local business activities settings but also by one-to-one meetings at participants' organizations. For instance, the facilitator visited participants when they had trouble with developing their CSR profiles, and in this way, it was possible for the facilitator to get an insight and thus an understanding of the individual participant's practices. This proved relevant for focusing meetings through shared themes and also supporting and guiding discussions in a way that seemed relevant for participants. This was different in the network for managing directors. Here the facilitator had less knowledge of participants' prior to the network start, but also the interactions with participants outside the network meetings were limited.

The network facilitator has a strong focus toward engaging with the participants on their premises. The facilitator's engagement or lack thereof, especially outside the network meetings, with the participants in the networks seems to have a great influence in what the networks

achieved. Of the two networks studied, the participants in the CSR network were the ones most attached to the local setting, Ringsted Municipality; thus, the facilitator seemed to have more contact and chance of building relations with these participants. Further to this, the CSR network participants had a more developed relation to the municipality and had participated in prior, municipal business development activities. For this reason the network seemed more open to the facilitator's input and external influences. The CSR network built around the specific topic was coordinated in very centralized style by the facilitator and the steering group. Network participants in the CSR network are very diverse and almost exclusively connected by a shared passion/interest for CSR. The focus of CSR is established around the steering group's understandings, and this understanding is presented and discussed not only in the network meetings but also when participants meet in other settings. The CSR network was the first network of its kind in Ringsted Municipality. The network facilitator had a dedicated background to CSR and became an important asset not only in her role as a facilitator but in the overall focus towards CSR and the "fight" of putting CSR on the agenda in general.

8.6 Cross-case learning

The following summarize learning from the cross-case analysis.

- Participants in both networks are searching for ways to make participation valuable.
- The facilitator has a major role in supporting participants in their search for value; thus, value is co-created among participants and facilitator.
- Ensuring that themes and topics discussed in the network have relevance for participant practices is a challenge – and one that can be solved best by the facilitator's engaging closely with participants outside network activities.
- Reasons for participating in network vary, but it is easier to make participation valuable when there is a topic guiding interactions.
- Facilitator's knowledge of topics of interest has an impact on the co-creation of value.

- For participants there is a need to acknowledge that they are part of a process of value co-creation and that participants have different views on value.
- When the facilitator engages with participants outside network meetings and gets to know and understand participants' practices, it becomes possible to relate to and support emerging socializing stories.

9 Elaborating the understanding of networks and facilitating processes

Based on the study of the two networks, the following suggests a re-thinking of networks and the facilitating processes of networking activities, taking into account more of what the facilitator and the participants actually do. There are a lot of challenges in the understandings of networks and how participation in networks becomes valuable as it appears in academic writings, as well as in conversations among practitioners.

In this study, it has come forth that networking activities should be considered processes of value co-creation. Furthermore, regarding the doings of the facilitator, not only within the network meeting but also outside the network meetings, we have come to acknowledge that when the facilitator's knowledge of participant increases, it is easier to support the network activities and thus the value co-created in the networks. Activities where the facilitator and participants meet outside the network meetings are taken into consideration as important activities for supporting the mutual value co-creation. Accordingly, these processes taking place outside the network meetings are conceptualized as an important though less researched part of networking activities.

9.1 Chapter structure

First, the understanding of networks is elaborated by the suggested framing of Networks as value co-creators. Second, based on previous theoretical contributions, phases of networks are discussed and extended. Third, the supporting activities and thus the role of the facilitator is extended and rephrased as a socializing facilitator. Further, it is discussed how the facilitator has a role in making the networking roller coaster journey less curvy and loopy and at times has succeeded in smoothing out the emotional roller coaster journey.

9.2 Networks as social interactions

Most of the network literature emphasizes how networks increasingly are used as developing concepts for organizations (Abrams et al., 2003; J. S. Brown et al., 2002; Christensen & Lundvall, 2004; Daft & Anand, 2007; Huxham & Vangen, 2005; Juel, 2014; Mellewigt et al., 2006; van Ees & Bachmann, 2006). Organizations join or form networks for a variety of reasons, such as wanting to exploit knowledge and develop specialized competencies, foster innovation, access resources etc. (Abrams et al., 2003; J. S. Brown et al., 2002; Christensen & Lundvall, 2004; Daft & Anand, 2007; Huxham & Vangen, 2005; Juel, 2014; Mellewigt et al., 2006; van Ees & Bachmann, 2006). But regardless of the specific reasons, networks and their participants, in general, are seeking to achieve something they could not have achieved on their own (Gray, 1989). Huxham and Vangen (2005) use the term “collaborative advantage” when referring to collaborative alliances and inter-organizational partnerships that are useful when handling complex social challenges. For the use of networks, Huxham and Vangen (2005) argue: *“Almost anything is, in principle, possible through collaboration because you are not limited by your own resources and expertise”* (Huxham & Vangen, 2005, p. 3). Thus, networks create structures for participants and facilitator to come together, to engage and to act. The value of networks is often derived in the underlying argument for developing the network. Inter-organizational networks can be viewed as a platform for addressing complex challenges, such as CSR and/or leadership challenges, by taking the advantage of a broader set of resources (Mandell & Keast, 2011).

In general, it is argued that networks are found in multiple forms and vary along a number of factors, such as number of participants, participants’ work levels, how and by whom it is organized, where and when meeting takes place but also why participants choose to participate. Bergenholtz and Waldstrøm argue that very diverse settings have been framed with the network concepts, e.g., joint ventures, alliances, franchising, patent licensing, strategic networks, interlocks, loosely coupled systems, and strictly dyadic relations (Bergenholtz & Waldstrøm, 2011). Provan, Fish, and Sydow (2007) note: *“...Although inter-organizational networks are by now a commonly understood phenomenon of organizational life, it is not always*

clear exactly what organizational scholars [or people in practice] are talking about when they use the term. Even the term network is not always used. Many who study business, community, and other organizational networks prefer to talk about partnerships, strategic alliances, inter-organizational relationships, coalitions, cooperative arrangements, or collaborative agreements" (Provan et al., 2007, p. 480). The examples above, and the discussion in this dissertation's Chapter 1, are just a small sample of the varying definitions in the literature. Though, what we do get from the literature is that *"despite differences, nearly all definitions have a few common elements including social interaction (of individuals acting on behalf of their organizations), relationships, connectedness, collaboration, collective action, trust, and cooperation"* (Provan et al., 2007, p. 480).

These varying factors complicate our understanding of networks in general and also our understanding of the particular networks of study. It is an ongoing challenge within the field of inter-organizational networks research to agree upon how networks can be referred to and studied. Throughout this dissertation, the term network is used when referring to interdependent organizations' value creating interactions across organizational boundaries. Thus, I follow Provan & Kenis and Dhanaraj & Parkhe and understand networks as the frame for *"autonomous organizations that work together to achieve not only their own goals but also a collective goal"* (Kenis et al., 2007, p.2 31), and they are loosely coupled organizations' responsive to each other but retain their separateness and identity (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006).

The phrase Networks as value co-creation has been applied to describe and establish focus toward how participants in the networks intersubjectively ascribe value to participation in the network, and it has been discussed how meaning emerges and changes as participants engage in social interactions. This working definition derived from the research of various authors trying to describe inter-organizational network of differing kinds, and at the same time a gap in the literature where focus has been less toward *"how inter-organizational networking relationships are built, develop, and dissolve"* (Ebers, 1997, p. 7) and *"the intermediate processes, the steps and activities that translate motives into particular network structures and about the*

contingencies that facilitate and constrain these processes” (Ebers, 1997, p. 7). In line with Ebers, Blumer argues:

“A network or an institution does not function automatically because of some inner dynamics or system requirements; it functions because people at different points do something, and what they do is a result of how they define the situation in which they are called to act” (Blumer, 1969, p. 19)

It has been discussed how two streams of literature frame our understanding of how network participation becomes valuable. The stream in the literature, which suggests to understand Networks as channels, seems to have a quantitative focus on the number and type of relations in networks (Newell et al., 2009). This approach focuses less on the quality of interactions and more on networks as a sort of a quantifiable knowledge capital (Newell et al., 2009, p. 165). By contrast, Network as communities takes into account the qualitative aspects of relations and is concerned with social relations created on the basis of ongoing interactions and interdependence in the network (Newell et al., 2009). Yet this network approach is less concerned with participants’ activities outside the network and their meaning for the network and the agency of the single actor (Newell et al., 2009, p. 166).

These two streams of literature already developed our understandings, to some extent, of how networks *“are structured, how they operate, and even how they develop”* (Provan et al. 2007, p.480). What became obvious from my research is that even though participants in the networks are autonomous, their qualitative relationships are based on mutuality and interdependence. Through their interaction participants do not merely learn from one another but they also together create a collective with its own unique value. Thus, in this dissertation business networks are defined as value co-creating settings with the potential of engaging participants in unique interactions and opening unique new perspectives for participants, thereof the phrasing Networks as value co-creator.

In Chapter 8, I summarized value experienced by the participants in the two networks of study. While the potential value described in the literature is varied (see Chapter 1 and 3 for further

elaboration), it showed that in the CSR network, value that was experienced was closely linked and aligned to the particular purpose. Whereas, the value experienced in the network for managing directors was more drop-by-drop and participants had challenges making participation valuable. The following Table 9.1 sketches how Networks as channels, Networks as communities and Networks as value co-creators develop different forms of value.

Table 9.1: Value created in different network perspectives

Network type	Purpose	Value
Networks as channels	Develop connections and channels	Gain knowledge and information
Network as communities	Context for learning	Share (tacit) knowledge
Networks as value co-creators	Co-creation of value	Frame for meaningful interactions where meaning and value is negotiated

Source: Own creation

9.3 Phases of networking activities

Some studies try to explain how networks develops through different phases, and it is often discussed how networks are either emergent or consciously formed. In these studies it is recognized that networks seem to evolve during certain stages and have recognizable life cycles with a beginning, a middle, and an end (Ahuja et al., 2011; Eide & Fuglsang, 2013; L. Fuglsang & Eide, 2013; Gausdal, 2013; Human & Provan, 2000; Kenis et al., 2007; Koka, Madhavan, & Prescott, 2006; Koza & Lewin, 1999; Menzel & Fornahl, 2009; Provan & Lemaire, 2012). Network formation, development, shared understandings, trust, power, designing, desired outcomes, growth, maturity, sustainability, guidance, resilience, transformation, and death are key points

the literature often discusses when trying to highlight life cycles in form of stages or phases of network evolution (Ahuja et al., 2011; Eide & Fuglsang, 2013; L. Fuglsang & Eide, 2013; Gausdal, 2013; Human & Provan, 2000; Kenis et al., 2007; Koka et al., 2006; Koza & Lewin, 1999; Menzel & Fornahl, 2009; Provan & Lemaire, 2012)

The details of how network evolve dynamically over time are an issue that is not settled within the network stream of literature, leading to a call for more research on this topic (Huxham & Vangen, 2005, Ahuja et al. 2012, Isett et. al, 2011, Provan et al, 2007, Provan et al 2011 and Eide & Fuglsang). This study engages with this discussion based on the longitudinal data from the study of the CSR network and the network for managing directors.

Langley argues that what is often useful is for the researcher to rely on forms of temporal bracketing to identify and compare units of analysis when working with longitudinal data (A. Langley, 1999). In order to theorize from process data you need to develop theoretical explanation. Langley states that when working with process data, the central challenges is:

"Moving from a shapeless data spaghetti towards some kind of theoretical understanding that does not betray the richness, dynamism, and complexity of the data but that is understandable and potentially useful to others"
(Langley, 1999, p. 694)

One way to do so is to define temporal brackets at appropriate levels of detail to capture significant actions of reproduction in the network processes forming and supporting the development of networks. When framing the empirical data with temporal brackets, unfolding over time, phases can be constructed as events and activities having identifiable characteristics. This enables the researcher to examine the empirical data and analyze how phases develop and have impact on how a given phenomenon develops over time. Thus, the complexity of process data is a reflection of the complexity of the organizational phenomenon (Langley, 1999). To further the understanding of network development, a number of researchers have created different versions of this developmental framework attempting to formulate dynamic

understandings of how business networks emerge. Some of these perspectives are summarized in the following.

- Provan and Lemaire (2012) argue that the evolutionary path that a particular network takes depends both on key external events that occur as the network evolves and on the influence, incentives, and pressures of the organizations that are involved in the network. Context, then, is a key factor in understanding evolution. Provan and Lemaire point toward five process phases of importance when developing effective networks: involvement at multiple levels, network design, appropriate governance, building and maintaining legitimacy, and stability Involvement (Provan & Lemaire, 2012).
- Huxham (2003) argues that instead of developing stages or phases, they prefer to create overlapping pictures forming a *“theoretical conceptualization of the nature of collaborative working”* (Huxham, 2003, p. 404). Huxham (2003) argue that the five pictures; common aims, power, trust, ambiguity, and complexity can form an understanding of the complexity of networking (Huxham, 2003)
- Koza and Lewin (1999) focus on the coevolution of network alliances and explore the antecedents and stimuli for the formation of the network, the network morphology, the motivation of the network members, and the ways in which the network coevolves with its environment and with the adaptation practices of its members. Koza and Lewin develops a model of the coevolutionary process, illustrating the loose coupling between member firms and the network and the ongoing exchanges that take place (Koza & Lewin, 1999).
- Koka et al. (2006) develops a framework for understanding network change. They focus on environmental effects of network change and argue that the frame gives a guideline for a better understanding of how to build an effective network. Koka et al propose four patterns of network change: network expansion, network churning, network strengthening, and network shrinking (Koka et al., 2006)

- Menzel and Fornahl (2009) argue, based on their cluster researcher, that network life cycle includes the stages of emergence, growth, sustainment, and decline. They argue that the fundamental dynamics behind the development process are the transfer and exploitation of knowledge within the network (Menzel & Fornahl, 2009).
- Eide and Fuglsang (2012) have identified three network phases in their recent work, based on a case study of two rural tourism networks: 1) focusing attention; 2) mobilizing actors; and 3) creating designed infrastructures and activities. They argue that these three phases can be seen as designed structures, which facilitates learning and new practices. The three networking phases do not necessary appear in order, and Eide and Fuglsang also show in their work that the two networks they study evolved in slightly different ways (Eide & Fuglsang, 2013).

In the following I have applied the temporal bracketing strategy (A. Langley, 1999) to analyze and discuss how the particular networks of study developed and changed over time. The temporal bracketing strategy aims to divide the flow of events into sequences of shorter periods. The phases are not to be considered phases that follow in a sequential and given order, rather they are phases of activities that represent a certain continuity and thus transferability to other situations (as discussed by Guba & Lincoln, 1982) within each phase.

First, the networks phases are discussed in the frame of three scaffolding structures suggested by Eide and Fuglsang (2013): “*focus attention towards experiences, mobilize actors and create activities and infrastructure*” (Eide & Fuglsang, 2013). Eide and Fuglsang’s framework provides a possibility to explore and elaborate the phases the studied networks went through. Second, a fourth phase is suggested named *collaborating crisis*, extending Eide and Fuglsang’s (2013) work. Finally, characteristics of the phases are summed up in Table 9.2.

9.4 Focusing attention

Eide and Fuglsang (2013) argue that in the phase of focusing attention “*participants together find out what they want to develop and how*” (Eide & Fuglsang, 2013). It is a phase where participants might need external inputs to find a shared platform. Eide and Fuglsang argue how focusing attention is dependent on previous experiences (Eide & Fuglsang, p 294+300). Similarly Provan et al (2011) argue how there is a need for building legitimacy:

...The keys to being able to build sufficient legitimacy...to ensure its early success as a network were to draw on the diversity of roles in the network, build support for the network through a bottom-up strategy, and develop and implement a mission that was supportive of, and not in competition with ... members (Provan et al., 2011, pp.324-25)

In the CSR network, there was hardly any doubt of what to pay attention toward. The main focus of the CSR network was to develop a CSR profile for participants. Thus, right from the start, attention was focused toward a CSR template, developed by the steering group. The CSR template worked as a guideline for participants’ engagement, and through this participants developed an understanding of value of participation.

Based on the form and content of the CSR template, participants developed imaginative expectations of participation. What was observed was that the focus was not stable. When the pre-defined expectations were met, participants started to re-negotiate expectations, attention changed. This re-negotiation established new focuses for participants as they went along, and even though the main focus was still toward CSR, other topics became relevant.

Accordingly, during this re-negotiation of focus, CSR participants and steering group not only re-negotiated the focus but also the process of making participation valuable. Thus, when participants expressed a need of re-structuring the network meetings to focus the attention, it was observed how the facilitator tried to meet these needs for change. This dynamic way of changing working processes to make activities fit the attention was experienced positively by

participants, and this dynamic approach seems to be a key point when wanting to make participation in networks valuable.

In the network for the managing directors, focusing attention was a major challenge. At the first network meeting, the facilitator initiated a small workshop trying to focus attention of the network activities. The major outcome of this workshop was that the managing directors decided to hold the network meetings alternately at one another's company and through these visits try to focus attention. It has already been discussed how this was a challenging affair. Focusing attention was hard, and the road they laid out didn't match their expectations, and they had troubles experiencing value. Participants expressed disappointment in their fellow participants' engagement in form of participation, commitment, and following the discussed purpose.

Focusing attention is an important prerequisite, not only for a good takeoff for network participants but also for the network in general to stay tuned. Through focusing attention, participants come to imagine how participation in the network is valuable to them. It might sound as if focusing attention is an activity primarily taking place at the beginning of the networking activities, but it should be considered an ongoing process, taking place over and over again. Here it is argued that focusing attention helps improve participants' relation to the network and is based on reflexive interactions that require an ongoing reassurance among facilitator and network participant, where the facilitator initiates participants' understanding of imaginative value. Focusing attention should be considered a dynamic process, which simultaneously is taking place, so attention is constantly challenged and re-negotiated for participation to become valuable. This ongoing re-negotiation of attention gives participants a possibility to engage from different perspectives as long as they have some kind of anchor to focus attention.

It is argued that in the phase of focusing attention it is of importance that participants are extremely participative and active. The negotiation of attention must be based on a solid ground to work as guideline for networking activities. Inevitably, a situation where some

participants do not agree or have not participated in the negotiation of attention is challenging, not only for their own commitment but also for how participation can become valuable.

9.5 Mobilizing actors

Mobilizing actors is a matter of identifying relevant actors that can participate and thus continue and develop relevant discussions (Eide & Fuglsang, 2013). Eide and Fuglsang describe how the owner of a consulting firm was the initiator of a network in Lolland Falster, and how this mobilization of actors helped participants develop their practices (Eide & Fuglsang, 2013, p. 300). Further, their empirical data describe how mobilizing actors, in their case of a business network, was an ongoing process changing the network (Eide & Fuglsang, 2013, pp. 295–297). My empirical data seem to support this since mobilizing came forth as a discussion being raised continually in both networks.

The development of the CSR network and mobilization of participants was at the beginning based on two main reasons: 1) The change of mutually developing new and relevant understandings of CSR, and 2) Based on the steering group members' goodwill in the local setting. These two main reasons were present all along. Over time, it was observed how mobilizing actors was a major issue at the CSR conferences. At the conference participants showed their CSR profiles in public, and at the same time they tried to mobilize new but also present participants. Before each conference, participants and facilitator were focusing toward the development of CSR profiles, and the CSR profiles exhibited at the conferences was a driver for mobilizing actors. The CSR profile was a very specific value from participation that became important for mobilizing new participants, but also for existing participants to experiences a tangible output of participation that kept them going. The writing of the CSR profile was a challenge for most participants, which mobilized participants and they met outside network meetings in order to get some work done on their profiles. Practically, the mobilization of actors was supported by press coverage about the CSR conferences and articles, which focused on particular network members and their CSR activities. Further, the CSR network had visits from

the town mayor and the CSR award-winning steering group member was driver in mobilizing members.

Mobilizing participants for the network for managing directors was all along a challenge. Not only was participation in the network meetings fluctuating, but also all along existing participants discussed how to mobilize more participants for the network. This challenge of mobilizing participants was never really solved, as it was hard for participants to move on and focus attention to subjects of interest. At the same time, this lack of interest of participation made it difficult for participants to experience any value of participation.

Though participants did try to mobilize actors, and at a local business development meeting, one of the managing directors made a speech about the value of the network. Here it was obvious how the participant, by telling his story of participation, not only reflected upon his own value of participation but also provided a story not only for the participants in the network but also for potential participants to reflect upon.

I argue that mobilizing actors is closely related to building legitimacy of the network. When value of participation is intangible, mobilization of existing as well as new participants for networks is challenging. Mobilizing is about building engagement for new as well as existing participants. Developing engagement and commitment influences the experience value of participation and thus the change of mobilizing participants. It is important to highlight that what I emphasize here is that mobilizing actors should include new as well as old members.

9.6 Creating activities and designing infrastructures

In this phase of the network, not only the working structures are visible but also the more explicit value of participation. As for the working structures, Eide and Fuglsang argue: *“Cooperation has to be practiced and emerged over time; it could not be designed top-down”* (Eide & Fuglsang, 2013, p. 297). They explain how a Small Tourism network, in this phase, was turned into something more formal, which supported the workspace. What takes place in this

phase is a formalization of activities, and repeated actions can be observed. The phase of creating activities and designed infrastructures induces “*mutual trust and mutual knowledge amongst the members*” due to the regular and tighter relations (Eide & Fuglsang, 2013, p. 297). Due to this formalization, the phase of creating activities and designed infrastructures seems to include a more tangible element, such as development of common brochure and shared website, development of business hobbies, study trips, development of usable toolkits (Eide & Fuglsang, 2013). I argue that this phase seems important for making participants experience value of participation, and the more visible and recognizable structures make it easier for participants to collaborate and thus make participation valuable.

In the CSR network, participants and steering group members found a structure for organizing the meetings, and they developed the CSR conferences a continual activity. The CSR template became for the CSR network what Eide and Fuglsang describe as the “*glue that tightened the relations and gave positive results for the firms*” (Eide & Fuglsang, 2013, p. 297) in their Norwegian case. For participants, value of participation was conceptualized in their individual CSR profiles and when they were exhibited at the CSR conferences, it gave participants explicit opportunity to experience the value of participation in the network. Thus, the CSR template was used as the driver for conceptualizing proper value of participation.

The managing directors developed a structure where they on a regular basis had their meetings at one another’s premises. When the managing directors visited one another, they tried to use the experiences to conceptualize experiences by reflecting upon the presentations related to the context the meetings provided.

In both networks, participants spent a lot of time telling stories of how participation in the network became or had the potential of becoming valuable. Their mutual reflection upon the more tangible outputs of network participation and thus how participation in the network influenced their way of thinking and working seem important for the phase of creating activities and infrastructure.

In the sections above, Eide and Fuglsang's (2013) scaffolding structures frame the discussions of the networks of study, and this has contributed to a more thorough and nuanced understanding of the phases. The following section extends Eide and Fuglsang's (2013) scaffolding structures with a phase identified and recognized in the networks of study. The phase is framed collaborating crises.

9.7 Collaboration crises

In the inter-organizational network literature it is discussed how collaboration crises most likely are to occur due to participant's diverging perspectives, priorities, and understanding of the common goal and the fact that trusting relations take time to build (Huxham & Vangen, 2005; Kenis et al., 2007; Lemaire, 2012; M. P. Mandell & Keast, 2011). These collaboration crises drive or constrain the network development and must be taken into consideration in the phases of developing a network. Eide and Fuglsang (2013) are less explicit in their work when it comes to discussing crises and challenges that participants experience when participating in the network activities. What is important to state here is that collaboration crises should not necessarily be considered as only a bad thing. Some network literature suggests that a crisis can be the trigger to develop the network structure (Gray, 1989). Provan & Lemaire discuss how internal as well as external legitimacy of the network can provide network crises and how these crisis relates to the value of network participation and can often be linked to network failure (Provan & Lemaire, 2012). Provan and Kenis (2007) emphasize that to overcome and meet collaboration challenges and crises, a focus needs to be put on network effectiveness, and thus addressing the question of why participants came together and how participation becomes valuable (Kenis et al., 2007). Further, it is argued that ongoing relationship development is an important aspect of creating internal legitimacy and in that way overcoming network crises (Kenis et al., 2007). Human and Provan suggest that a key factor that relates to collaborating crisis is the development of internal as well as external legitimacy (Human & Provan, 2000). Internal legitimacy relates to how participants experiences the network's value, and external legitimacy

is how other external stakeholders view the value of the network (Human & Provan, 2000). It has been argued that too much focus on external legitimacy can be linked to network failure (Provan & Lemaire, 2012). Further, Provan et al. argue that ongoing relationship development is an important aspect of developing internal legitimacy, especially when participants in the networks have no or limited prior relationships (Provan et al., 2007). Internal legitimacy is important even when the networks mature, and before it is established, it can be hard for participants to experience value of the network (Provan & Lemaire, 2012)

In the CSR network collaboration, crises occurred when the steering group tried too hard to be driver of the network and not negotiate expectations and thus focus with participants. What was observed though was that collaborating activities increased or developed when participants agreed to overrule facilitator and steering group members and have it their way. Collaborating crises especially appeared when participant weren't able to recognize how their work and especially working processes should proceed and make sense. Then participants turned passivity, and collaboration stalled.

The managing directors' network was more or less a long journey of collaboration crises, observed as a roller coaster ride. First of all, they were challenged by lack of participation, which created a lack of drive for the participating managing directors. Further, the managing directors had troubles meeting their own expectations of highlighting challenges when presenting their companies. This developed collaboration crises where participants questioned their value of participation. Supposedly the major challenge was, that activities proceed, as nothing was wrong.

Overall, I found that collaboration crises are not necessarily bound to breaking up the network. But collaboration crises are bound to arise in networks, and they do so when activities become too static, when value of participation is intangible, and when activities do not reflect participants' expectations. But what seem to be of importance is that the crises are actively and collective dealt with to be overcome.

Collaboration crises can have many faces and occur in many ways.

- The crises can be strictly related to the facilitator's engagement with the network. For instance, when the facilitator lays out a line that in her opinion is the right track. The right track for networking activities is never static.
- It can be related to participants' commitment, e.g., lack of participation, unwillingness to engage, no commitment to defined expectations, etc., but all resulting in frustration among participants and facilitator and a missing value of participation.
- Lack of experienced value, which relates to the above challenges

Thus, collaboration crises will often appear when participants have challenges seeing how their imaginative value can turn into something proper and network participation (Human & Provan, 2000; Kenis et al., 2007). But collaboration crises can also appear less explicit as when participants choose not to participate in discussion even though they do have a lot on their minds. Per, the CSR participant chose not to engage in the discussion about sick-absence. This was solved with a question that invited him into the discussion, and he joined as the discussion unfolded. But if a lack of willingness to engage in discussion is present within the network, then collaboration crises are bound to appear since discussions will appear less reflexive and nuanced and not able to create value to participants.

Collaboration crises can mostly be overcome if the network is established on solid ground. If crises keep appearing and they are due to lack of participation and missing commitment and if participants in general have to search too much for value to emerge, it could be time to close down the network or totally re-organize. If participants have gained the value they can from the network, the network has done its job.

What can be suggested is that when wanting to develop internal legitimacy (Human & Provan, 2000; Kenis et al., 2007) and thus overcome collaborating crises, participants must mutually examine their value of participation and make it explicit how and when participation becomes valuable. Telling and developing narratives of participation can do this.

9.8 Four complex, dynamic and intertwined networking phases

The networking phases discussed above shows how the reflexive interactions are dynamic processes of co-creations, oscillating between imaginative and proper conceptualization of value. The processes are tightly intertwined, and it is often blurry to divide one phase from the other. Or at least challenging to say exactly when participants and facilitator move from one phase to another. Thus, the phases and the order they are listed in are not to be considered a linear process or even a chronological order. The phases interact with one another, but they do not necessarily progress in linear sequential steps and the cyclical processes intertwined with the context. Although the processes are ongoing and some of the phases even overlap, the pinpointing of the phases supports our understanding of making participation in the networks valuable. I agree with Eide & Fuglsang (2013) that the theorizing should not be understood as phases in the sense that participants and facilitator went through them in a predictable linear and sequential way, and the phases do not, as such, cover exact periods of time. They are phases in the sense that they involved certain characteristics that made the networking efforts stand out.

The following Table 9.2 summarizes the four networking phases and emphasises some characteristics and actions that unfold in the different phases.

Table 9.2: Characteristics and actions within the four network phases

Network phase	Network phase characteristics
Focusing attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Pre-define working frame. ➤ (Re-) Negotiate expectations and goal. ➤ Discuss value of participation. ➤ Change structure to fit goal and focus.
Mobilizing actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identifying relevant participants. ➤ Building engagement and commitment for new as well as existing participants.
Creating designed infrastructures and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Working structures are visible. ➤ Activities and actions are structured based on participants' expected value of participation. ➤ Value of participation can be defined and is more tangible.
Collaborating crises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Networking activities are static. ➤ Lack of participation and commitment. ➤ Unwillingness to engage. ➤ Missing value of participation.

Source: own creation

With the four phases discussed, I move on to extend and elaborate the understanding of the facilitator's role. From the above-discussed phases it became explicit that the facilitator role should be extended from how we formerly know the facilitator role, to support the value co-creation in the networks. In order to make distinctions from our previous understandings of the facilitator role, it is here rephrased as a **socializing facilitator**. The sections to follow elaborate and argue how the role of the socializing facilitator is different from the former role we know and why this rephrasing is appropriate.

9.9 The role of the socializing facilitator

The theoretical contributions of not only network theory but also the theories of leadership of networks are complex (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001; Agterberg et al., 2010; Boardman, 2011; J. S. Brown et al., 2002; Bøllingtoft et al., 2012; Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006; Ebers, 1997; Human & Provan, 2000; Kenis et al., 2009; Macaulay et al., 2012; Mandell & Keast, 2009; Möller & Halinen, 1999; Mønsted, 2011; Nilsen & Gausdal, 2012; Nooteboom, 1999; Ospina & Saz-Carranza, 2010; Ring & van de Ven, 1994; Sotarauta, 2010). The accomplishment here is not a systematic review and discussion of all the literature. But rather it is an accomplishment trying to elaborate questions from studies highlighting and acknowledging that managing networks is, still, a challenging affair and descriptions of activities and responsibilities of the facilitator remain vague (Ebers, 1997; Eide & Fuglsang, 2013; Gausdal & Nilsen, 2011; Gausdal, 2013; Human & Provan, 2000; Kenis et al., 2009; Ring & van de Ven, 1994), a discussion which was already introduced and touched upon in Chapter 1.

In the following it is argued that the facilitator can support the processes of value co-creation within the network, especially when succeeding in developing relations with participants outside the network activities. Based on these arguments, the understanding of the facilitator role is elaborated and refined in the following, and it is argued that the facilitator should be rephrased as socializing facilitator. Thus, in the following, I engage in a discussion with current theoretical understanding of the facilitator as an orchestrator, based on theoretical arguments of respectively Dhanaraj & Parkhe (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006) and Gausdal & Nielsen (Gausdal & Nilsen, 2011).

Dhanaraj and Parkhe (2006) present a set of purposeful, deliberate, and interrelated processes that when done by the facilitator are suggested to enable coordination of the network and thus support value creation: 1) Managing knowledge mobility, 2) Managing network stability and 3) Managing innovation appropriability. Dhanaraj & Parkhe define the facilitator role of networks as orchestration. According to them, network orchestration can be defined as *“the set of deliberate purposeful actions undertaken by the hub firm as it seeks to create value (expand the*

pie) and extract from the network” (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006). Dhanaraj & Parkhe argue how hub firms possess prominence and power in networks and perform a leadership or orchestrator role integrating resources and capabilities of network participants (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006). According to Gausdal & Nielsen, managing processes are important for how the network develops (Gausdal & Nilsen, 2011) and thus value creation. In general it can be argued that orchestration is the support and integration of participants’ experienced value. Recently Gausdal & Nielsen (Gausdal & Nilsen, 2011) added an extra process to Dhanaraj & Parkhe’s previous framework: managing network health. These four key processes are all related to making participation in networks valuable and are elaborated in the following.

Managing network knowledge mobility is the process that supports knowledge resources accessible to network members, and it is an activity that includes sharing, obtaining, and organizing knowledge among network participants. Dhanaraj and Parkhe define knowledge mobility *“as the ease with which knowledge is shared, acquired and deployed within the network”* (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006, p. 660). Value of participation can be realized if and when the knowledge of the independent participants of the network are brought together and combined. This can take place through network identification and socialization.

In the networks of this study, knowledge mobility among network participants was also a focus of the facilitator. Interactions among the managing directors in the Network for managing directors took primarily place in the organized network meetings. The facilitator did organize a mailing list for participants to reach out to one another. A few of the members and the facilitator did meet one another at other settings, but meetings were primarily within the monthly network setting.

Managing network innovation appropriability is the ability to capture commercial value from innovation. This also refers to mutuality among network participants, which is considered important for the network to succeed. Innovation appropriability is making sure that innovations are recognized and become profitable for participants; thus, in that way it is closely linked to making network participation valuable. The facilitator has a role in enhancing and

exploiting possibilities of knowledge and innovation. The facilitator has a key role in supporting appropriability by emphasizing and guiding participants in their perceptions of value gained from innovation.

The facilitator in the two networks of study was observed supporting network appropriability by discussing how participation in the network could benefit from the network activities and pointed out how getting to know one another in the local setting could provide a setting for appropriability, though it was hard for participants to point out the economic value of network participation.

Managing network stability embraces how network relations can be fragile and how these relations can be strengthened. Dhanaraj and Parkhe argue that stability in networks is needed since *“a network that is unraveling is not conducive to value creation or value extraction”* (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006, p. 663). Networks are often characterized by interplay between static and dynamic elements. It is argued that long-term relationships are required, and lasting relations between participants have to be supported to ensure stability. At the same time diversity is needed in order to develop new understandings. Dhanaraj and Parkhe argue that network stability can be fostered through the shared goal and vision of the network, which increases ties between actors, and by emphasizing the expected value (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006).

Gausdal and Nielsen has developed a fourth process named *Managing network health* (Gausdal & Nilsen, 2011).

Managing network health is defined by Gausdal & Nielsen (2011) *“as the process of evaluating the network’s contribution to members, and the construction of a strategy for the recovery of failing networks”* (Gausdal & Nilsen, 2011). According to Gausdal and Nielsen, the focus of this proposed orchestrating process is to recover the network from failing by initiating actions that can put the network back on track.

Especially in the network for managing directors, actions of managing network health were observed. The facilitator over and over again tried to engage the managing directors in discussions of how to continue the network and make it valuable, but it was difficult due to the facilitator's lack of knowledge of their businesses. The authors argue that the four processes are not to be considered as separate activities but ongoing and interrelated (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006; Gausdal & Nilsen, 2011).

9.10 Managing networks during timeout

Based on this framework for facilitating networks, it is here argued that a fifth process needs to be added. It is a process that indeed supports the above mentioned four, but one which seems to have the potential to focus the networks' activities and support the processes of making participation valuable, based on activities taking place outside the network meetings. The four key processes developed by Dhanaraj & Pharke (2006) and Gausdal & Nielsen (2011) do not stress clearly the role the facilitator has outside networks meetings.

It is not the activities of administration that are of interest when wanting to discuss the activities of the facilitator outside the network meeting. These activities are already taken care of in the previous developed framework by, but it is the way the facilitator meets and engage with participants outside network meetings, which seems to have an, up until now, less prioritized but an important position when discussing how network participation creates value.

Trying to make it more clear what I want to emphasize here, I draw on the analogy of timeout in a handball match. The activities the fifth process should focus toward can be compared to what goes on in the timeout in a handball match. In the timeout the handball coach has the opportunity of talking to individual team members, providing the players with a broader perspective of the match and the competitors. This gives the players the option of playing differently, taking certain responsibilities, and in general giving the players a new perspective on how the match is developing. The coach is placed in a different position than the players,

making him capable of seeing the match in a different light than the players. Thus, the coach can bring new understandings to the game in the timeout, understandings the players might not be capable of seeing because they are in the heat of the battle. Since the coach knows the players from training sessions, he is aware of competencies the players can activate in specific situations; therefore, the coach plays an important role in a handball match when wanting to develop and change the game.

To follow this analogy, the fifth process is phrased **Managing network timeout**. The activities of this process are related to the facilitator's activities among and with participant *outside* the organized network meetings.

9.11 Managing network timeout

What has been comprehended from this study is that it is almost impossible for the facilitator to support the network activities, based on particular knowledge about participants' practices, without engaging extensively with participants outside the network meetings. As discussed in the following, it is possible for the facilitator to develop a firmer role when focusing on particular topics based on a proper knowledge of participants' challenges in their daily businesses. So, there is a need to establish and maintain more precise insight of participants' practices; in that way support value co-creation seems to have a potential for networks. The main contribution of this section is to argue how the activities outside the network meeting that the socialized network facilitator can engage in seem important for making participation in the network valuable.

Keast argue that throughout the network activities the facilitator can help and support participants in experiencing the value of participation based on the relationships developing in the network: *"...Perceptions of each other begin to change. Members begin to recognize and appreciate each other as resources. In effect, the pool of expertise is expanded based on these new ways of relating to each other"* (Keast, Mandell, Brown, & Woolcock, 2004, p. 369). From

Alvesson and Sveningsson's research of leadership in a large, international company, it is suggested to re-think leadership (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). They argue that leadership should include more mundane aspects of managerial work and leadership, such as *"administration, solving practical and technical problems, giving and asking for information, chatting, gossiping, listening and creating good working atmosphere"* (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003, p. 1436).

Especially in the CSR network, it was observed how the facilitator visited and engaged closely with the participants of the network. The facilitator visited many of the participants or stayed in touch by phone between the meetings. Here the facilitator had the opportunity to discuss how the CSR profile was progressing and also discuss issues related to participants' practices. The function of the facilitator here became much more than what the handball coach engages in: providing a larger picture of CSR as well as the network in general and listening to participants' challenges on a more frequent basis. This engagement with participants affected the way the facilitator could interact with participants and focus activities in the network. Alvesson & Sveningsson argues that:

"One important meaning of managers' listening is that it conveys a feeling of inclusion, participation and social significance [...] Listening to people makes them engaged and interested; it provides a sense that they are contributing and thus included" (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003, p. 1449)

The empirical data showed, that the participants with whom the facilitator had the closest relationship with, e.g. visited outside networks meetings or had other shared interests within the local setting, was also the ones who experienced that participation became valuable.

This was also what Alvesson & Svenningsson experienced in their research on leadership, where leaders suggested that when *"they listen and talk informally the acts are rendered a special value, both for the managers themselves and for their subordinates. It is not just anyone listening or doing the informal talk, but rather managers who display interest, respect, etc. Managers performing these acts seemingly make them extraordinary and perhaps even*

grandiose, in spite of the acts themselves being highly mundane and of an everyday character”
(Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003, p. 1452)

The activities that the Managing network timeout implies differ from activities previously suggested by previous research within the stream of network leadership (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001; Agterberg et al., 2010; Boardman, 2011; Brown et al., 2002; Bøllingtoft et al., 2012; Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006; Ebers, 1997; Human & Provan, 2000; Kenis et al., 2009; Macaulay et al., 2012; Mandell & Keast, 2009; Möller & Halinen, 1999; Mønsted, 2011; Nilsen & Gausdal, 2012; Nooteboom, 1999; Ospina & Saz-Carranza, 2010; Ring & van de Ven, 1994; Sotarauta, 2010). It takes the understanding of the network facilitator; thus, it could be argued that the role becomes more complex and even time-consuming. Nevertheless, the engagement between participants and facilitator outside the network meetings seems to provide valuable insight when wanting to make participation in networks valuable.

Discussing the broader relevance and developing the argument of the above, it is argued that in order to achieve valuable participation in networks there is a requirement for a closer engagement between facilitator and participants. From this dissertation, it is learned that the facilitator not only plays a role in supporting activities, supporting the negotiation of meanings and facilitating trusting relationships, but the facilitator plays a key role in counteracting too much imaginative value by anchoring value in experiences and expectations. To do this, the facilitator must engage in the value co-creating processes, and this requires that the facilitator develop a close relation to participants in the network. The facilitator must take part in participants' ups and downs in and outside the network when trying to make participation in the networks valuable. Thus, the relationship among participants and facilitators is a relationship that requires some kind of intimacy that can develop when the facilitator actively engages with participants outside network meetings. In view of this, it is argued that the role is rephrased socializing facilitator.

In other words, turning participants' imaginative value into proper conceptualization is a process where the participants and the socializing facilitator collectively enact co-creating

activities to make participation valuable. In this new understanding, the socializing facilitator is more closely related to participants than what has formerly been known. Furthermore, the socializing facilitator does not only support the process but engages on equal terms and influences network participants in various ways by participating in the process of value co-creation.

10 Concluding remarks and perspectives

This dissertation has addressed how participation in networks becomes valuable in the frame of Networks as value co-creators. It differs from the traditional way networks have been defined. Inter-organizational networks have previously been defined in various ways. For example, Newell et al. have emphasized two streams of literature with different conceptions of networks: 1) *Networks as channels* and 2) *Networks as communities* (Newell et al., 2009). They highlight how networks can 1) channel information and 2) be communities for mutual learning. Based on these understandings, the dissertation started by addressing the popularity of networks as concept and practice. Further, while the literature has described how networks are important frameworks for channeling information and practice-based learning, less attention has been paid to how networks are intertwined with value co-creation. Networks not only provide frameworks for information and learning, they also help participants to frame and understand what is valuable in a societal context. The aim of this research was to explore and add richness to our understanding of how participation in networks in this way becomes valuable by framing value. The dissertation has provided firsthand insight on networking dynamics by developing thick descriptions of networking efforts taking place among participants and a facilitator in two business networks in Ringsted Municipality in Denmark for approximately 1½ year. Through ethnographic narratives, we came to see how the facilitator and participants carefully tried to transform their imagined value of participating in the networks into more proper and realistic conceptualizations of value. Furthermore, the study has extended our understanding of the networks in two ways. First, by elaborating and discussing the networks' development phases within the frame of existing research, it became possible to extend previous research with the phase of *collaborating crisis*. Second, by extending the facilitator's role with the processes of *Managing network timeout* under the notion of a "socializing" facilitator, who interacts with participants in a network over time and come to know them well.

The overall research question in the dissertation was:

How do processes of network facilitation support value co-creation in local business networks?

The brief answer to this question is that networks must develop a collaborative forum that helps participants to mutually understand and conceptualize what is valuable, i.e., beneficial for them. Value and the value of networking is not a given thing that can be uncovered ex ante, but it is derived reflexively and retrospectively from social interaction, collaboration, and networking.

In what follows I shall summarize the main findings in regards to the research question.

10.1 Structure of the chapter

The chapter is structured in the following way. Firstly, it shows how networks can be understood as collaborative frameworks for value co-creation, and it discusses how co-creation opens up for new positions and understandings of inter-organizational networks. Next, it presents how collaborating crisis is a phase within network development and why the facilitator should be understood as a socializing facilitator. Thirdly, it discusses how trust and boundary objects are phenomena with importance for processes of value co-creation in inter-organizational networks. Fourth, it elaborates the implications of applying the framework of symbolic interactionism to the study of the two business networks; thus, the focus of the dissertation toward reflexive interactions as a main construct. Finally, some limitations, future perspectives for research, and practical implications of the study are discussed.

10.2 Collaboration as value co-creation in networks

Joining an inter-organizational network may offer several advantages for participants, but the processes of creating value are not smooth. Indeed, networking efforts are challenging, and facilitating the networking efforts is a complex undertaking. The dissertation has extended

existing theories and conceptualizations of inter-organizational networking by applying the understanding of value co-creation from service marketing research. In Chapter 3 the dissertation introduced Grönross and Voima's (Grönroos & Voima, 2013) theorizing about how value can be co-created in joint spheres between customer and provider. Grönross and Voima emphasize that within a joint sphere, i.e., through direct physical interaction, customer and provider can move closer to each other, thus increasing mutual understanding. Through this relationship, the provider can contribute to the user's conception of value. In this dissertation value co-creation is explored in a network, as the networking activities are jointly enacted in a sphere among network participants and the facilitator. The value in this case concerns both the benefits of the network itself and the benefits framed and created through the network, such as the increased understanding of how to use CSR in one of the networks. In service marketing research, the provider can thus impact the customer's perception of the value (Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Vargo & Lusch, 2007). According to Grönroos & Voima (2013), service providers also pay attention to value creation in the firm's sphere in the form of value-in-exchange, where the focus is to create economic value for the firms. In contrast, value co-creation activities must take place through interactions in a joint sphere (i.e., where firms' and customers' spheres are overlapping). Grönroos & Voima suggest that interaction is needed for creating the customers value-in-use, and they argue that if no interaction takes place, then the value created is merely value-in-exchange or value-in-use (Grönroos & Voima, 2013). They argue that it is in the direct physical interaction, the joint sphere, that co-creation of value is made possible. In this dissertation, Grönross and Voima's construct of the joint sphere has been applied to processes taking places in inter-organizational networks among participants and facilitator. There are some ambiguities in Grönross and Voima's conceptualization of how to apply this research in a more practical situation. For instance, beyond the description of the joint spheres, no managerial actions have been pointed out in relation to supporting the joint sphere. There is also a lack of elucidation on how the value co-creation can be derived and how the provider can access and engage in the customer's value sphere.

Nevertheless, Grönross and Voima's research has informed us in regards to how we can think of the interactions taking place among participants and facilitator as a value co-creation process in which the perception of value is formed. This process could also be called joint problem-solving, which is what is experienced in the activities taking place among participants. Gray describes this as a process where parties constructively can explore different solutions that are beyond their own expectations (Gray, 1989, p. 5). Such processes of joint problem-solving were positive outcomes of the networks. An example is when steering group member Poul explained how he had become enlightened in a way he had couldn't have imagined.

When applying the understandings of value co-creation, it opens up for new positions and understandings on how to manage inter-organizational networks. Value co-creation in direct interaction establishes a new horizon for understanding inter-organizational networks as frameworks for formation and framing of value rather than frameworks for passive learning or exchange of information. Considering networks as a framework of value co-creation leads us to discuss different ways of supporting such activities in the networks.

10.3 Collaborating crisis in networks

Collaborating crisis has been developed as a phase within the network development. Previous literature discusses how collaboration crisis most likely is to occur in networks (Huxham & Vangen, 2005; Kenis et al., 2007; Lemaire, 2012; M. P. Mandell & Keast, 2011). What has been discussed is that even though they might be bound to occur, they might be the trigger for the network to develop. Collaborating crisis is related to what Provan and Lemaire (2012) frames as internal and external legitimacy of the network (Provan & Lemaire, 2012). Various researchers provide us with different frameworks to increase our understanding of how network develops (Eide & Fuglsang, 2013; Huxham, 2003; Koka et al., 2006; Koza & Lewin, 1999; Menzel & Fornahl, 2009; Provan & Lemaire, 2012)

The two networks of study have been discussed in the structural framework of Eide and Fuglsang (2013). This has provided an elaboration of Eide and Fuglsang's (2013) three phases: 1) Mobilizing actors, 2) Creating designed infrastructures and activities, and 3) Focusing attention and a development of a fourth phases: ***Collaborating crisis***.

Here it is argued, that collaboration crises mostly can be overcome if the network is established on solid ground and it is suggested that to overcome collaborating crisis, participants must mutually examine their value of participation and make it explicit how and when participation become valuable.

10.4 From facilitator to socializing facilitator

It has been suggested that in order to make network participation valuable, activities of a socializing facilitator is needed. Value is regarded as being formed in and through society, as argued by Mead in the following quote:

"The individual is constantly reacting to an organization community in expressing himself and the attitudes involved are gained from the group, but the individual has the opportunity of giving them an expression" (Mead, 1934, p. 197)

Here society and, thus, the generalized other are considered network participants as well as facilitator. Often the facilitator role has been described as one that in some ways is uncoupled from the network participants in what could be framed as a service function, which several researchers describe as challenging (Ebers, 1997; Human & Provan, 2000; Kenis et al., 2009; Mønsted, 2011; Ring & van de Ven, 1994). Just as participants in the networks have their daily practices, or own sphere, away from the network, the socializing facilitator will also have a facilitator sphere where other actions are taken. Here the facilitator will take care of activities such as facilitating, supporting, and coordinating relations (Mandell & Keast, 2009), paying attention to knowledge about industries, companies, and products that are important to establishing links across businesses (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006), and binding and establishing

relations with an effort toward coordinating, maintaining, introducing, and facilitating relations among parties (Fuglsang and Scheuer in (Macaulay et al., 2012).

Mead provides us with a conceptualization of the engineer, which very well describes the role of the socializing facilitator, from what has been observed at the network meetings. The process the engineer engages in can be translated to role of the socializing facilitator, described as a process that requires shared social understandings appropriate to the particular situation and people present:

“The engineer has the attitudes of all the other individuals in the group, and it is because he has that participation that he is able to direct. When the engineer comes out of the machine shop with the bare blue print, the machine does not yet exist; but he must know what the people are to do, how long it should take them, how to measure the processes involved, and how to eliminate waste. That sort of taking the attitudes of everyone else as fully and completely as possible, entering upon one’s own action from the standpoint of such a complete taking of the role of the others, we may perhaps refer to as the ‘attitude of the engineer’” (Mead, 1934, p. 277)

In this explanation Mead suggests that teamwork is a social process that depends on the ability of taking the attitude of the others. Related to inter-organizational networks, Mead here would suggest that networking depends on shared social understandings, which can be guided by the socialized facilitator. Further, Mead describes how the engineer in the process he is facilitating needs the ability to take the attitude of everybody else. Equivalently, the facilitator must meet the demands from everybody else in the network in order to facilitate the processes. The facilitator must take the role of an engineer, guiding participants toward a result not yet fully known.

Similarly, Becker’s study of becoming a marijuana user argues that the social environment interacts with the individual and found that each user went through a process of learning to become a user, a process of how to enjoy marijuana. From this Becker argued that users (participants) go through a social process of learning (networking activities) to enjoy marijuana.

Becker found that most users went through the same process of learning how to enjoy and appreciate marijuana. Becker's study explains how the users had to learn 1) smoking the drug properly, 2) experience effects and relate them to the drug use, 3) define the situation as a pleasurable event. Becker argued that people would not continue smoking marijuana unless they were able to experience it pleasurable.

From the above, it can be derived that Mead and Becker argue that individuals become objects to themselves through the attitude and behavior of others within a social context. Correspondingly, they describe how it is in social relations that selves develop; thus, new meanings and understandings appear. Mead and Becker are preoccupied with how actors, by input of society, can see themselves in the light of the other and based on this can relate their ongoing development of meaning so it fits the given context.

Seeing the facilitator in the light of the descriptions by Mead (Mead, 1934, 1964) and Becker (Becker, 1953), the role also includes learning how to engage and appreciate network participation. This research contributes to the understanding of the facilitator role by describing how the socializing facilitator, through intense knowledge of participants, can guide them in the networking efforts by teaching them 1) to commit and appreciate networking activities, 2) experience value from participation, 3) consider networking efforts as enjoyable. Based on this, processes of ***Managing network timeout*** have been developed.

10.5 Trust in networking activities

In the trust literature, it has been shown that trust is important for engaging in collaborating activities (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Krogh, Ichijo, & Nonaka, 2000; D. Z. Levin, Cross, Abrams, & Lesser, 2002; R. C. Mayer, Davis, Schoorman, & Schorrmann, 1995). Ferrin et al. argue that cooperation and trustworthiness are intertwined and can be observed when people interact (Ferrin et al., 2008), and trust seems to have a positive effect on collaboration (Doz, 1996; Ellonen et al., 2008; Zaheer et al., 1998).

The dissertation has taken a processual approach to the phenomenon of trusting, as suggested by Möllering (Möllering, 2012). The dissertation has investigated how trust develops over time. The research contributes to the trust literature by showing how trust is built up and developed over time, when participants and facilitator in networks engage in meaningful and beneficial interactions and negotiate and develop expectations for mutual networking efforts.

Following Möllering (Möllering, 2006, p. 139), trust, i.e., positive expectations of another's behavior, is here defined as a contextual phenomenon. Trust is seen as an inherent characteristic in social relations, depending upon past and present (inter)actions within a group of actors, which together form positive expectations for future actions. Thus, trust, meaning, and value are closely intertwined concepts. Trust is not considered a conscious act or feeling, but it is developed through experiences. Thus, a key premise for trust is that people choose their actions in consideration of the likely choices and expectations of others.

First of all, the study showed that participants in the networks did have some kind of pre-established trust for the facilitator of the network due to her employment in Ringsted Municipality and general credibility. Thus, the participants came together believing in the network initiative and in the value of participating in the networks. Yet this trust, which was based in pre-established knowledge through third party (the municipality) about the facilitator, proved to be insufficient when wanting to engage in relationships where people are bound to move closer together. Recent work by Ferrin et al. (Ferrin et al., 2006) shows that trust may be transferred via third parties by communication and observation. Generally they showed the importance of third parties in trust development and how third parties affect trust perceptions. I propose that trusting the facilitator via third party (the municipality) leaves imprint on the development of trust in networks and has the potential of shaping the interactions, but that the trust facilitated by third party has a generalized character that needs to be qualified. Trust in one another and the value of participation emerged over time.

A second implication is that the development of trust, here among network participants, takes time and is developed when participants in the business networks engage in the networking

activities and start to mutually negotiate their expectations to one another. As Rousseau et al. suggests, participants develop relational trust based on their repeated interactions (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 399). Yet trust also seemed swift (Meyerson, Weick, & Kramer, 1996) and had to be rebuilt at each meeting and was related to the particular topic of the day. Especially in the case of the managing directors, the trusting relations were challenged and trust had to be rebuilt at each meeting. Often it was observed that even though one network meeting ended up in a positive manner with fruitful interactions, at the next meeting participants were back to scratch trying to find a way to communicate and interact. What we witnessed was a network with upturns and downturns in which positive and negative expectations to the network came and went. However, for participants in both networks it seemed like their repeated interactions did increase trust and this created a more solid basis for what they could do jointly. Time was a critical factor when developing trusting relations.

A third implication is that trust building in networks can be informed by focused interactions that enforce a process of exchange (Mead, 1934, pp. 289–298). Mead discusses how economic processes of exchange bring people closer together:

"The economic process is one which brings groups inevitably closer together through the process of communication which involves participation. It has been the most universal socializing factor in our whole modern society, more universally recognizable than religion" (Mead, 1934, p. 295)

In the same way, it can be argued that the agreed network construction of the two networks and the activities within the network to some extent enforced interaction and forced participants to come closer together. In both networks it was experienced that the network forced participants to become more interested in each other's point of view, and, moderated by the facilitator, they interacted in ways that contributed to trust building. Especially in the CSR network we saw how the facilitator successfully used her knowledge of participants' practices to pose relevant questions, which led to interesting discussions in the group. What happened when participants engaged in collaboration enforced by the network, paralleling what Mead

described as the economic process, was that participants eventually became more interested in one another in order to produce value, which Mead describes in the following way:

"If we are to cooperate successfully with others, we must in some manner get their ongoing acts into ourselves to make the common act come off" (Mead, 1964, p. 279)

What Mead recognizes here is related to our notion of trusting. Thus, it is in the context of specific social interaction and collaboration in which actors are bound to collaborate that trust will evolve because actors have to provide information about themselves and trust the others in order for collaboration to take place. Further, when participants in the networks gave one another a glimpse of their life and business troubles, they qualified the trusting relationship. The notion of the generalized other implies that the reaction of an actor is guided by her reflection on the attitude of the group that she depends on (Mead, 1934). In this perspective, trusting is not related to the individual's choices but is a basic phenomenon in meaning and value-creating social relations.

10.6 Objects as mediators for reflexive interactions

Current literature has argued that boundary objects can work by assisting the sharing of knowledge (Carlile, 2002), promoting negotiation among various actors and creation of local knowledge (J. Brown & Duguid, 2001), establishing a shared point of attention (Star & Griesemer, 1989), and assisting the shaping of joint actions (Kellogg et al., 2006). The literature on boundary objects suggests that boundary objects may mediate the negotiation of meaning by enabling participants to clarify and explain understandings across boundaries. The work of Star & Griesemer, Carlile, Miettinen (Carlile, 2002; Miettinen, 2002; Star & Griesemer, 1989) already suggests that an object can carry out a significant role in networks. This research contributes to the literature on boundary object by specifying the critical, yet complex, role boundary objects play in inter-organizational networks when participants try to establish mutual

understandings and develop new knowledge across organizational borders. The case demonstrated how including an object of attention in networks can support and focus the ongoing interactions, and thus the processes of making participation valuable. Further, the analysis has demonstrated how participants in the two networks at times derived important knowledge from one another when an object was identified. These findings have not only important implications for our understanding of how boundary objects can work as a mediating entity for networking activities but also how the facilitator can support the networking efforts. The case also suggests that a critical dynamic when facilitating a network can be to identify an object serving as a value co-creating entity, focusing participants' and facilitators' networking efforts. The findings presented in this research contribute to current literature on boundary objects with the following knowledge: 1) The case showed how boundary objects can draw attention and gather participants around specific topics, thus helping participants and facilitator to focus their attention as long as the boundary object has a situational and changeable character; 2) when boundary objects are applied to networking activities, activities become more focused and it is easier for participants and facilitator to gather around shared problem-solving; 3) finally, the case suggests that boundary objects have the potential of making the value explicit and thus justify participation in the networks. These three contributions are elaborated in the following:

- 1) In the CSR network, it was observed that the CSR template developed by the steering group worked as a boundary object that gathered participants and focused their interactions. This showed how a boundary object could help focus the attention toward a particular kind of knowledge. For some time the CSR template worked positively as a way to intensively engage with a certain topic. It focused participants' attention firmly toward the CSR in form of the CSR template. It was observed that the CSR template worked well in the beginning of the networking activities by facilitating perspectives and new understandings for participants. Though, over time, the CSR template did make it challenging for participants to develop their own understandings and reflections toward CSR. In the ongoing discussions about CSR, it came forth that some participants had difficulties relating themselves and their

companies toward the CSR template. Over time, the CSR template as an object limited participants' willingness to engage in interactions that could lead to value co-creation. CSR became a too defined object that limited participants' possibilities of developing their own understandings. Thus, some interactions seemed to collapse, not allowing the social learning processes to flourish. So even though a boundary object enables participants to engage in reflexive interactions and mutually develop new knowledge relatively quickly, the study points out that an object should have a situational character and be changeable over time so it can be used to frame processes of value co-creation in a way that most participants can relate to.

- 2) As for negation of the shared purpose, I found that some kind of boundary object is always at play, even when not visible at first. In the network for Managing Directors, where the purpose was somehow unclear, the value of the network itself became the boundary object. The discussion of the purpose of the network functioned as a boundary object. What seemed to be simple discussions about shared purpose turned into meaningful conversations, which suggests that boundary objects are useful and allow for developing shared understandings among participants in networks. I found that conversations and discussions were somewhat limited until participants engaged in discussions and validation of their imaginative value of network participation.
- 3) Organizing networking activity round an object establishes an opportunity for co-creation of value by mirroring one another's understandings, and it reduces the uncertainty about making participation valuable. The analysis of the processes that participants in the networks went through revealed, for instance, that working around a shared topic in a somehow structured manner organizes a collaboration process, which gives the participants a shared direction and understanding that makes participation valuable. It was also observed how a specific structure around an object can become an obstruction for the development of value because understandings become too tightly anchored round a

determining object. Participants can get so caught up in actions established around a certain object that they lose sight of how it makes participation valuable.

10.7 Reflexive interactions as oscillations between imaginative and proper conceptualization of value

This section briefly explains how symbolic interactionism, by its focus on reflexive interactions, has guided this study. I suggest that symbolic interactionism and the concept of reflexive interaction can be used to explain how value is framed and created in the two networks. More specifically, network relations are important for conceptualizing value because they provide a context for mutual discussion and reflection upon what is valuable.

Mead argues that the self is socially constructed in a community by engaging in social actions and that humans construct their understanding of experiences socially; thus, participants conceptualize things and develop meaning of them by sharing their experiences through ongoing reflexive interactions (Mead, 1934). Reflexive here means that actors reflect upon the different positions people have in a societal context and how, as a consequence, it is possible to participate and contribute in this context. Value, as it has been used in the dissertation, can be defined as a conception of beneficial, useful, and proper behavior within a societal context. The concept of the generalized other, as applied by Mead, is a metaphor for the overall relationships and behaviors that are deemed possible and beneficial within a societal setting. A business network of the kind I have studied in the dissertation can then be seen as providing a space for such reflections where actors can try out and discuss what behavior is valuable in a given business context. What makes networking valuable is when it is able to reveal and conceptualize such societal value for the participants. In this way, business networking is not just about obtaining information and learning, but also about understanding which information and what learning are valuable in a business context.

Symbolic interactionism has thus provided the dissertation with a theory of how meaning and value emerge, namely as derived from a social context like a network. It opens up for questions and answers that are not obvious at first sight. Thus, it offers a way to engage with and understand, in this case, the practice of inter-organizational networking. Consequently, symbolic interactionism is a theoretical starting point for a scientific understanding of the interactions taking place among participants and facilitator in business networks.

Studying inter-organizational networks in light of insights from symbolic interactionism required the analysis of concrete and contextually embedded interactions. The observations and interviews that have provided the data for the study gave an opportunity to *“close in’ on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice”* (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 235). By capturing context-dependent knowledge of networking through detailed case analysis (Flyvbjerg, 2006), the dissertation provided a deep understanding of what experienced practitioners do in the specific case. To accomplish this, I have observed networking efforts and how value co-creating processes emerged and changed over a period of approximately 1½ year. According to Flyvbjerg (Flyvbjerg, 2006), contextually embedded studies are particularly helpful when it comes to learning and understanding practical expertise. Thus, the most advanced form of understanding is achieved when the researcher places herself within the context being studied, in this way being able to understand the viewpoints and interactions taking place among the participants (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Staying close to the empirical phenomena has provided the study with a lot of deep insight from which the dissertation can produce more knowledge. It has also focused the study toward “How Things Works,” as pragmatism frames it (Watson, 2011), in organizations and thereby organizational constructs and concepts that need to be challenged and adjusted. The dissertation has shown how Mead’s concepts of symbolic interactionism can be applied to organizational studies and offers insight into humans’ reflexive interactions and the ongoing development of meaning and value in networking.

10.8 Limitations of the study

The following five points bring forth for discussion some identified research limitations of this dissertation:

- 1) An ongoing criticism of ethnographic studies points out that narratives like those produced in this dissertation might be biased and therefore invalidate research findings (Geertz, 1973; J Van Maanen, 1988). The understanding, from the critical point, is that the researcher who creates the narratives takes participants hostage by claiming that they speak on the behalf of observed actors. This research has followed the recommendations of Van Maanen (J Van Maanen, 1988) and Geertz (Geertz, 1973) and turned the ethnography writing into a reflexive process where I, as a researcher, has assessed my role in the research, not claiming to speak on behalf of network actors but interpreting the multiple and conflicting experience in the networks. Thus, the ethnographic approach has proven to be valuable and provided the research with informed knowledge. Despite methodological limitations, I believe this study provides a valuable contribution to the development of an empirically validated framework from which the field of inter-organizational networks benefits. I suggest that the ethnographic approach, theoretically framed by symbolic interactionism, provides the basis for a continuing theory development in organizational studies. Future studies can be conducted to test the theoretical propositions in other organizational studies and in various areas of businesses.
- 2) The research took place in Ringsted Municipality with a primary focus toward networks being a part of the municipality's local business development activities. It could be argued that one of the limitations of the study was that both networks are situated in the same setting and facilitated by an employee from Ringsted Municipality. It could have been preferable to include a network in a different setting. Nevertheless, the setting provided access to the phenomena of study and made a longitudinal and thorough study possible. The cases were used as rich empirical descriptions of particular examples of networks and

serve *“as a distinct experiment that stands on its own as an analytic unit”* (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 25). The networks can be described as case study objects, in the sense that it is an intensive study of a particular unit for the purpose of understanding similar settings. Thus, I have chosen theory building from case study research, and the empirical case has been used to create theoretical constructs, propositions, and/or theory (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007), and:

“The theory is emergent in the sense that it is situated in and developed by recognizing patterns of relationships among constructs within and across cases and their underlying logical arguments” (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 25)

The empirical data have focused on understanding the dynamics present in the actual setting. Accordingly, when studying a social phenomenon, the case study is an appropriate method for understanding dynamics in settings where the phenomena under inquiry are embedded in complex relationships. Hence, it is argued that the abductive approach, which has been applied, has the potential of capturing and taking advantage not only of the empirical world but also of the theoretical propositions. The research aimed at developing theory instead of testing it and thus;

“The story is then intertwined with the theory to demonstrate the close connection between empirical evidence and emergent theory” (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 29)

Thus, participants and their networking efforts might not be similar in other cases, but the understanding of the processes supporting the value co-creation can be transferred to other networks whether it is a network facilitated by a municipality or a private organization. More examples and knowledge could be provided through ethnographic studies in other settings.

- 3) My access to the networks was secured through my engagement with Ringsted Municipality. Data collected prior to the network emergence when I was doing participative observations in Business Development Department between August 2011 and April 2012 re-directed the data collection, theoretical focus, and research questions. I was participating in various meetings about how to develop the approach of networking as local business development activities. These informal observations provided a thorough pre-understanding of the setting: What Ringsted Municipality was looking for, which answers the theory already provided, and where gaps could be identified. This gave good possibilities to apply abductive reasoning around the theme of inter-organizational networks; thus, the abductive process of connecting data and theory requires insight. The locus of the study has been how participation in networks becomes valuable, and I have focused toward the processes in networking efforts that make participation valuable. I adopted an emergent, flexible, and abductive process by oscillating between theoretical insights and empirical work. Specifically, the move between theoretical understandings and empirical data resulted in the focus toward value and value creation. Instead of solely focusing toward the interactions among network facilitator and participants, theories could be further informed by addressing new questions of research with a focus toward how participants in networks apply and make use of their participation in networks in their daily business. The study has limited data when it comes to describing how participants apply experiences from the network to their daily practice. It is assumed, for example, that value from participation in the network can be observed in actions and activities in participants' daily practices, and an ethnographic research following participants from networks in their working lives will get a view into how experiences are applied in participants' daily work life.
- 4) As a part of the interpretive and ongoing analysis, I have used what can be called a manual approach to the analysis. I have made all logbook notes and interviews searchable in Microsoft Word although I could have chosen to use computer software, for instance Nvivo, for facilitating the analysis of qualitative data. Using this kind of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software could have allowed me to code text and retrieve the

coded text possibly in a more structured manner. In practice you could say I did the same as computer software could offer, but I chose to do it in this more manual way, using pen and paper. By staying close to the interpretation and reflections upon the data in what could be considered a manual and even old-fashioned way worked for me as a flexible and powerful way of interacting with the empirical data.

- 5) This dissertation offers knowledge about how value co-creating activities in a joint network sphere among network participants and facilitator unfold. It describes how oscillations between imaginative value and more proper conceptualization of value make participation valuable and how these processes can be facilitated. Within this dissertation, the joint sphere has been applied to the relationship between facilitator and participants. Applying the knowledge gained from this study to the area of Service Dominant (S-D) Logic literature might likewise extend our knowledge in relation to how the value co-created among customers and provider can be facilitated. Further, the frame of (S-D) logics can focus on how institutional systems shape the behavior of actors in networks and can be considered crucial in the understanding of networks participants' value co-creation. Applying an institutional logics approach to the empirical data could inform us about how institutions shape heterogeneity, stability, and change by participation in networks. Especially if we take into consideration that cultural beliefs, norms, and rules in the context often play a key role in shaping inter-organizational networks and value co-creation and vice versa. Thus, the broader issue for future inquiry and research concerns the role of networks in enabling institutional structure that would help validate interactions among actors and explain the emergence of inter-organizational networks as value creating entities.

10.9 Future perspectives and research areas

The study of the investigated setting has given rise to a number of limitations and, thus, suggests some avenues for further research.

The present study focused mainly on how participation in network became valuable by describing how participants and facilitator engage in a collaborative networking sphere calling for reflexive interactions. Future research may focus on how participants in networks apply their experiences, and thus the value co-created in the network to participants' daily business life. Since the meaning of values is considered value-in-use, the value itself can be observed in-use when applied in participants' daily work practices. Such research also needs to address how companies are changed over time when employees actively engage in a variety of networking efforts – outside and within the company setting. This could shed light on which ways it is possible for participants to actually render and apply experiences from network participation and how organizations can integrate employees' experiences from networking efforts into the development of the organization.

Further, the phase literature is important for our understanding of how networks develop, but it also has some limitations. Still, the phases come forth as to generic models, and the iterative processes of interactions are less highlighted. What further needs to be explained is the interactions or the actions taking place among the phases; thus, there is a need for further refining the phase model based on life cycle understandings. I argue that the following should be discussed to refine the theoretical phase approach:

- Discuss the glue or the grease making the network move between the phases.
- Emphasize the complexity of the phases and discuss how the facilitator has a role in pushing the network from one phase to another.

Following this recommendation establishes an interesting challenge for the collection of data. Being present when knowledge from value is applied in the daily practice might be a lucky strike for the researcher to observe; thus, different methods of collecting data should be considered. Bosse and Apollo presented at EGOS Colloquium 2012, Helsinki, a full paper in Sub Theme 22 New Forms of Organizational Ethnography, a suggestion in form of an ethnography-based technique that actively involves actors in producing ethnography-based data concerning their everyday practices. With the help from smartphone technology it is possible to complement

ethnography-based research methods when involving the actors and having them create small voice memo narratives (Bosse & Apollo, 2012). Applying this method creates insights of actors' everyday practices without the direct presence of a researcher and could be considered a step toward meeting the dilemmas of research in complex fieldwork settings and could be a method applied when collecting data about how network experiences are integrated in participants' daily businesses.

Further, the following ideas are recommended for future studies:

- Continue the use of ethnographic approaches in combination with symbolic interactionism to unfold how network experiences are applied in organizations.
- Observe how networks create value when the (socializing) facilitator takes into account actions / activities recommended from the present dissertation.
- Develop and conduct ethnographic studies within marketing relations to apply the knowledge developed here about co-creation in joint sphere.

10.10 Practical implications

Understanding network value co-creation and the processes whereby value is co-created is a major concern for not only facilitators but also participants. The findings offer a new perspective to practitioners for understanding value co-creating efforts in networks. It indicates a way to re-evaluate and re-design networking efforts and facilitation. As recommended in Chapter 7, the facilitator should stay close to participants in order to understand their challenges and opportunities. This implies that the facilitator not only is active when participating in the networking meetings but extends her knowledge of participants by 1) visiting participants' daily practices, 2) interviewing participants about their expectations and value of participation, 3) and discussing how networking processes can be applied as a way of mutual problem-solving. This requires an intimacy between the facilitator and participants, an intimacy the facilitator has to work for and which requires a trusting relationship, as discussed previously. Accordingly, the

socializing facilitator is much more than a facilitator of meetings; it is a role that is time-consuming, dedicated, and indeed emotional. The facilitator works as a socializing agent, not only within the network meetings but also outside the network meetings. The socializing facilitator helps participants critically reflect on their networking experiences and how participation creates value, based on an understanding of participants' practices. With serious attention to participants' practices, the facilitator can provide a learning environment for participants to engage actively and cooperatively in the network meetings with relevant topics. The facilitator recognizes the importance of being relaxed when challenges arise. What seems important is that the facilitator keeps guiding participants toward the enactment of value, and telling how value is and has been framed together. It can be an advantage if the facilitator can commit participants to have a role in the planning and facilitating in order to make it explicit that the co-creation is a shared matter. In this way, it gives the facilitator the benefits of jointly planning parts of the meetings and gives the opportunity of matching participants' expectations. Participation in a value co-creating network can be challenging for participants. It takes some overcoming to participate and a willingness to search for value, and often participants must develop their networking skills to experience the value of participation. Trust allows network participants to feel comfortable in their sharing and discussion of sensitive topics. Especially in the network of study where participants are local and often related in other ways outside the network, participants must agree that topics discussed are not to be shared outside the network. The facilitator has a role in emphasizing patience. Value doesn't occur overnight, so for participants it demands patience and that they keep coming for some time for value to occur. For participants it is an intimate affair that requires openness and a willingness to participate in the problem-solving interactions, if they are to experience value.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Article about the research project

Ringsted

FORSKER I VÆKST OG SYNERGI

Gennem de kommende tre år skal erhvervsforsker Mette Apollo Rasmussen undersøge, hvordan kommunen kan facilitere og understøtte de eksisterende virksomheder i Ringsted. Projektet er et samarbejde mellem RUC og Ringsted Kommune, der har ansat Mette Apollo Rasmussen for at bidrage til den lokale vækst og udvikling.

- Jeg skal undersøge, hvordan virksomhederne kan bruge hinanden anderledes i netværker, og få synergi og vækst ud af det. Vi skal se på, hvordan kommunen kan understøtte udviklingen, og hvordan vi sikrer, at virksomhederne kan udnytte hinandens kompetencer og derved sammen stå stærkere, siger Mette Apollo Rasmussen.

Hvad skal der til

Hun angriber opgaven ud fra en etnografisk metode, hvor hun ser på hvilke relationer der allerede eksisterer, hvad der fungerer godt eller mindre godt i dag, og hvad der skal til af konkrete handlinger for at styrke netværkerne.

- Kommunen er jo en neutral spiller i forhold til virksomhederne og har en interesse i at støtte alle typer af erhverv. Vi samarbejder med virksomhederne i Erhvervsforum og interviewer de enkelte virksomheder, og der er en positiv stemning overfor initiativet, understreger forskeren, som også peger på at selve processen med at udvikle nye samarbejdsmuligheder skaber synergi. I løbet af de tre år skal Mette Apollo Rasmussen - foruden at skrive en afsluttende rapport - offentliggøre artikler og afholde seminarer for kommune og erhvervsliv, hvor det er muligt at dele viden og ideer til samarbejde, og derved forhåbentlig skabe et endnu stærkere erhvervssamarbejde.

www.ringsted.dk

Et PhD-projekt skal afdække, hvordan Ringsteds erhvervsliv kan få endnu mere vækst og synergi ud af et samarbejde med kommunen

TEKST: Gunnar Lomborg FOTO: Peter Sørensen

- Kommunen har en interesse i at støtte alle typer af erhverv, siger erhvervsforsker Mette Apollo Rasmussen.



Source: (Lomborg, 2011)

Appendix 2: Observation guide

Theme	Ethnographic description
	Agenda Place for meeting: Schedule: Participant: Facilitator: How are participants and researcher positioned (draw):
Before the meeting	How do participants arrive? How do they engage? What do they discuss?
During the meeting	Describe participants' engagement (focus toward particular participants) Describe the atmosphere Describe how they act, engage, and participate Who is active? – who is less active? Body language How do they communicate?
Main topics	Which topics are discussed? How are topics chosen? Are certain topics neglected? How are discussions opened? – closed? How do participants agree?
After the meeting	How is the meeting closed? What is summed up? What do participant do?

Appendix 3: Interview guide - exploration phase

Company	
Address	
Respondent – name and position	
Date	
Short briefing about the project	
Theme	
Introduction	<p>Establish frame for interview. Semi-structured interview approx. 45 min</p> <p>Please when possible provide concrete experiences</p>
Interview phase	
Introducing the business	<p>Describe your business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Products - Employees - Activities <p>How are you engaged in the local setting?</p> <p>What are your major challenges?</p> <p>Who do you collaborate with locally?</p> <p>Where do you get your local information?</p>
Business relations	<p>How does your network look like? – Who are you primary contacts?</p> <p>Who do you collaborate with locally / regionally?</p> <p>Any particular relations you have a focus toward developing?</p> <p>How is trust an issues? How does trust develop and how it is experienced?</p> <p>Explain a concrete experiences where a new business collaboration developed</p>
How do you (the company) participate in local business development initiatives?	What is your relation to the municipality?
How can the relationship	How can the municipality support the collaboration?

between local businesses and the municipality be developed?	<p>How do you experience local business development initiatives?</p> <p>How can you imagine a closer collaboration with the municipality can be developed?</p> <p>How can the municipality have a role in solving some of the challenges your business is experiencing?</p>	
Summing up		
Concluding remarks		

Appendix 4: Interview guide – network participants

Company	
Address	
Respondent name and position	
Date	
Themes	Questions
Introduction	Establish frame for interview. Semi structured interview approx. 45 min Please when possible provide concrete experiences
Network engagement	What position do you have in your company, and how it is relevant for you to participate in the network? How did you get involved with the network? Why does your organization participate in the network? How is the network important for you and your organization? Can you tell me about specific experiences with the network, which are of particular value for you? What happened? How has your daily practice changed by participation in the network? How has participation become valuable? Explain how you have experienced participation in the network and what it means to you Explain how the network has changed over time
Value creation	What has made participation in the network valuable? What has been challenging / advance of participation – and what makes you keep participating? Have you experienced that expectations of participation have been fulfilled? How have you experienced that network's participation has become valuable?
Relations in the network	Which new relations have you developed based on network participation and how have they developed over time? Which challenge has the network met? - Have the challenges been solved? How? – and by whom? Have you experienced that participants' engagement has changed over time? What does the developed relations mean for your participation? What is your contribution to the network? – and what is your role / position in the network?
Concluding questions	How has participation become valuable? Have you experienced that the time used on network participation has been valuable?

English summary

The dissertation investigates through two ethnographic case studies how value co-creation takes place in inter-organizational networks that have been facilitated by a municipality. The contribution of the study to business network research is the emphasis on development phases of networks and the facilitation of business networks in a local business context. In previous research, inter-organizational networks have been seen as frameworks for exchange of information or as learning communities that emerge bottom-up. Little attention has been paid to business networks that are facilitated by a municipality and how participants in such networks come to experience the value of networking over time.

The overall research question is:

How do processes of network facilitation support value co-creation in local business networks?

The dissertation is positioned within the field of inter-organizational network studies. Based on Newell, it is argued that two major streams of literature about networking can be identified: 1) Network as channels and 2) Network as communities (Newell et al., 2009). Yet, these say little about how business networks may be dynamically created within a local context and how participants in varied ways come to grasp the meaning of networking. The dissertation draws on insights from the Service-Dominant (S-D) Logic to explain how networks can be seen as spheres for value co-creation. Co-creation as a theoretical construct has evolved from varied streams of service marketing research and within the Service Dominant (S-D) Logic. Attention is given to how provider and customer together co-create value for the customer, the so-called value-in-use of a given product or service. In this dissertation the co-creation construct is applied to studying the value of networking taking place among network participants (=customers) and network facilitator (=provider).

The study draws heavily on the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism to explain how networking interactions lead to value co-creation. Symbolic interactionism offers a solid

perspective for analyzing and discussing ethnographic data concerning social interaction. The theoretical framework brings to the fore an analysis of the emerging reflexive interactions taking place among participants and facilitator. A reflexive and interpretive approach to the empirical data has been applied in order to make use of symbolic interactionism in the study.

Two in-depth ethnographic case studies provide the empirical basis for the dissertation. The dissertation has constructed ethnographic narratives of the following two networks in Ringsted Municipality:

- Network 1: CSR network
- Network 2: Network for managing directors

The dissertation develops thick descriptions of the networking efforts taking place among participants and a facilitator in these two business networks, which have been closely investigated during their ups and downs over approximately 1½ year. Through the ethnographic narratives, the study shows how the facilitator and participants carefully tried to transform their imagined value of participating in the networking into more proper and realistic conceptualizations of value. The narratives show how participants and facilitator in both networks engage in reflexive interactions to determine the value of networking. The concept of “imaginative value” (Beckert, 2011) is used to explain the oscillating behaviors observed in the two networks. Imaginative value can be defined as symbolic value that actors ascribe to an object, in this case the network. I argue that the group practices in the networks led participants to create imaginative values, but that the network participants also continuously struggled to escape the impression of imaginative value through reflexive strategies. Further, it is discussed how boundary objects and trust are phenomena with importance for processes of value co-creation in the inter-organizational networks

By examining the various activities taking place within the networks, it has become possible to highlight collaborating crisis as a networking phases. Furthermore, the study has extended our understanding of the facilitator’s role, and it developed the notion of a “socializing” facilitator, who interacts with participants in a network over time and comes to know them well. The

facilitator's role is extended with processes of *Managing networks during timeout*, highlighting how and when a socializing facilitator has an important role to play in networks.

Dansk resume

Afhandlingen undersøger gennem to etnografiske casestudier, hvordan value co-creation foregår i inter-organisatoriske netværk som er igangsat af en kommune. Afhandlingen bidrager til forskningen indenfor forretningsnetværk ved at fokusere på, hvordan netværksaktiviteter kan stimuleres i en lokal forretningskontekst. I tidligere forskning har netværk været betragtet som rammer for udveksling af information eller som læringsfællesskaber, der opstår nedefra og op. Som følge har der ikke været opmærksomhed på forretningsnetværk, der etableres og opretholdes af en kommune. Der har kun været begrænset opmærksomhed på, hvordan deltagere i netværk, over tid, oplever værdien af at deltage i et netværk.

Det overordnede forskningsspørgsmål, som afhandlingen stiller, er:

Hvordan understøtter faciliteringsprocesser værdiskabelsen i lokale netværk?

Afhandlingen tager sit afsæt i litteraturen om inter-organisatoriske netværk. Baseret på Newell et al. hævdes det, at der kan identificeres to retninger indenfor netværklitteraturen: 1) Netværk som kanaler og 2) Netværk som læringsfællesskaber (Newell et al, 2009). Disse to retninger siger meget lidt om, hvordan forretningsnetværk skabes på dynamisk vis i en lokal kontekst, og hvordan deltagerne på forskellig vis danner deres egen mening om netværksaktiviteterne.

Denne afhandling trækker på indsigter fra Service-Dominant (S-D) logikken til at forklare, hvordan forretningsnetværk kan betragtes som rammesættende for fælles co-creation af netværksværdi. Co-creation er, som teoretisk begreb, anvendt indenfor forskellige retninger af service marketing og Service-Dominant (S-D) Logic forskningen. Forskningen har været rettet mod, hvordan leverandør og kunde skaber værdi sammen. I afhandlingen anvendes co-creation som teoretisk begreb til at undersøge værdien af de netværksaktiviteter, der finder sted blandt netværksdeltagere (=kunder) og facilitator (=leverandør).

Afhandlingen benytter symbolsk interaktionisme i analysen af, hvordan netværks-interaktioner fører til co-creation. Symbolsk interaktionisme er et teoretisk perspektiv der muliggør solid

analyse og diskussion af etnografiske data bestående af sociale interaktioner. Den teoretiske ramme muliggør en analyse af de refleksive interaktioner, der finder sted blandt netværksdeltagere, og mellem dem og facilitatoren. Der er anvendt en refleksiv fortolkende tilgang i det analytiske arbejde med de empiriske data for at følge fordringerne fra symbolsk interaktionisme i studiet.

To etnografiske casestudier udgør det empiriske materiale for analysen. Afhandlingen udvikler etnografiske narrativer af forløbet i følgende to virksomhedsnetværk i Ringsted Kommune:

Netværk 1: CSR netværk

Network 2: Netværk for administrerende direktører

Et vigtigt element i afhandlingen har været at skabe fyldestgørende beskrivelser af de netværksinteraktioner, der finder sted blandt netværksdeltagere og facilitator i de to virksomhedsnetværk i løbet af ca. 1½ år. Gennem de etnografiske narrativer beskrives det, hvordan netværksdeltagere og facilitator sammen forsøger at ændre deres forestilling om værdi ved deltagelse i netværk til en mere hensigtsmæssig og realistisk definition. Narrativerne beskriver, hvordan netværksdeltagerne og facilitatoren i begge netværk engagerer sig i refleksive interaktioner for dermed at definere værdien af netværksaktiviteterne. Begrebet "imaginative value" (Beckert, 2010) anvendes til at forklare de interaktioner deltagere og facilitator engagerer sig i de to netværk. Imaginative value defineres som den symbolske værdi aktørerne tillægger netværket som objekt.

Jeg hævder, at den praksis, der etableres i netværket giver deltagerne mulighed for at diskutere den forventede værdi, og at de på baggrund af disse interaktioner, sammen skaber reel netværksværdi. Endvidere diskuteres det, hvordan boundary objects og tillid er fænomener med betydning for processerne i den fælles værdiskabelse i inter-organisatoriske netværk.

Ved at studere forskellige aktiviteter der finder sted i netværkene, har det været muligt at synliggøre hvordan *samarbejdskriser* er en fase netværket gennemgår. Endvidere har afhandlingen udvidet forståelsen af facilitatorrollen, og udviklet ideen om en socialiserings-

facilitator, der over tid interagerer med deltagerne i netværket, og dermed etablerer tætte relationer mellem dem. Facilitatorrollen er udviklet med processen *Managing network timeout*, som synliggør hvornår og hvordan facilitatoren kan have en vigtig rolle i et netværk.

