

THE REFLECTING TEAM

Dialogues and Dialogues about the Dialogues

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If it comes by phone one might start a conversation with this person about which persons are regarded as important persons at this time to be present at the first meeting to discuss the issue that is presented on the phone. If the caller is a professional, s/he is also invited to come to the first meeting. If that is difficult to arrange, the person is asked if we can stay in touch with her/him for information or further discussion.

If the connection is by letter, one might respond in writing. "Sometimes more than one person is engaged in dealing with issues like that which you have mentioned in your letter. In such instances it often seems helpful that we get to know as much as possible about the experiences and understandings these engaged people have of these issues. Since we do not know the circumstances around these issues, we want to ask whether there are particular persons who might contribute to our understanding. If there is somebody who could do so, they might come to the first meeting if they find that appropriate. If you are interested yourself, please feel welcome to be part of the meeting. If you cannot come, I hope we can be in touch with you if something comes up in the meeting(s) that we would like to inform you about or discuss with you." The idea is to raise the possibility that as many members of the problem-created process as possible will attend the meetings.

THE FIRST MEETING WHEN WE ARE A TEAM OF TWO OR MORE

If there are any professionals attending the meeting, we talk with them beforehand, explaining that we certainly want to have them inform us about their work with the system. We ask them to determine whether they want to give that information to us before we meet their client(s) or to give it with the clients listening. We say that we prefer the latter, but the professional(s) should choose the way with which they feel comfortable. They should at least not do anything that feels uncomfortable to them. The professional(s) are also given the option of sitting behind the one-way screen, either as member(s) of the reflecting

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GUIDELINES FOR PRACTICE

Tom Andersen

These guidelines might be regarded as a sort of scaffold, as they can be set many ways and are transitional. They represent experiences gathered over time, and they have been helpful when appropriately unusual for those with whom we talked.

The most important part of the conversation resolves around the question, "How can the standstill system and we make a meaningful conversation together?"

Within the framework of that question, we basically talk about the various conversations that have been going on around the problem so far, and discuss which other conversations might be helpful in the future, with which person(s), which issue(s), in which way(s), at what time?

"We," representing the latest professionals on the scene, may be either one or two or three or four. Some of us prefer to be just one, asking the already existing professional(s) in the standstill system to join in a team. Some of us prefer that two or more of us become a team that meets the standstill ones.

WHAT WE CAN OFFER WHEN WE ARE A TEAM OF TWO OR MORE

There is usually one member of the problem-created system that connects with us, often a professional. The connection may be made by phone or by letter.

team or as observer(s) sitting behind the team, just to watch and listen.

We have determined beforehand who will be the interviewer. The interviewer and one other person from the team meet with the standstill system (including the professional(s)) in the interview room, with the rest of the team waiting in another room. The nonprofessional members of the system are told the possible settings: only talking with one (the interviewer) or with two persons (the interviewer plus one other of us), or with the interviewer plus a team. They are also told the position the professional(s) has(have) preferred to take in the session. If a team is present, they are told that the team members will sit behind a one-way-screen. If there are more of us than the interviewer, they are told that once in a while the team might have a discussion about the talk the interviewer has had with the standstill system.

They are given the explanation that all persons who follow a conversation either as participants or as listeners often come up with ideas about what is discussed. Such ideas are often of value to talk about because they have proved to have a positive impact on the dialogue about the presented problem. Therefore, the team members will speak about their ideas openly, with everybody present listening.

If the nonprofessionals are uncertain about what they prefer, we leave them alone to discuss the options they are offered, and let them choose the format with which they feel comfortable.

After their decision upon the format, we introduce our wish to videotape the session, hereby also following their decisions. If there are students who want to follow the conversation, we then ask a final introductory question about that, and they determine whether it is permitted.

We do not hesitate to express what we believe will contribute the most to the conversation, e.g., the presence of the team. If they want to have a team participating, the team always comes into the room and all the team members shake hands with the members of the standstill system.

Before the start of the session we also often dim the light in the interviewing room and light up the observation room after

the team members are seated, so that the standstill system knows where and how the team members sit.

WHAT WE CAN OFFER IN THE FIRST MEETING WHEN WE ARE ONLY ONE

In this case one of us goes to the local professional's office. We do so if the professional has agreed to be part of the meeting. The professional is told that we certainly want to be informed about the work so far. She/he is asked to decide whether that should be done before we meet with the client(s) or whether the information can be given with the client(s) listening. We say that we prefer the latter procedure but always follow what the local professional prefers.

We then say that only one of us will be the interviewer with the other one as a listening observer of the interview. That is explained as based on our experience that two interviewers most probably make two interviews, which can be hard for the attending client(s) to follow.

The local person determines what s/he wants to be, either the interviewer or the observer. The local professional most often prefers the latter.

Then we introduce the idea of stopping once in a while to discuss the conversation with the client(s) in a listening position. The local person is told to participate in that discussion only to the extent s/he feels comfortable. If s/he accepts the idea of being part of the reflecting team, we say that our experiences have told us that, in order to let the client(s) have the opportunity of being in a listening position, we should concentrate on looking into each other's eyes when we make our reflections. We say that if we look at the client(s) and thereby include them analogically in our conversation, we deprive them of the possibility of being in the listening position or, in other words, having the possibility of seeing the discussed issues from a distance.

If the local professional accepts these procedures, everything is explained again to the client(s) before they determine whether they accept it or prefer another format.

THE MAIN QUESTIONS

From the beginning of the session the interviewer and the rest of the team have some particular questions in mind:

What is the present ones' interest for this meeting? Who had the idea of this meeting first? With whom did this person talk about the idea first? With whom second? Who was then informed about it? Who liked the idea? Who was reserved? Did anyone resent it? Who among those present liked the idea the most? Who is most reserved? If the person who suggested this meeting had not done so, would anyone else have done it? And who?

For us the idea behind these questions is to get acquainted with the person(s) who is (are) most reserved about this meeting. They could be regarded as the conservers of the system. They should be given much attention during the meeting, because most probably they will be those who first give signs if the issue being discussed or the way the meeting is being conducted becomes too unusual. A glance at them every now and then to read facial expressions or a question about whether this is the appropriate time and setting for the discussion of *this* issue will give an answer to that. Who can talk to whom about which issue here and now? What are the issues the present ones want to talk about? What are the permitted formats for these talks? Should all be present? Should someone talk and someone listen? Should someone be behind the screen for a while, thereafter in front of the screen with others behind the screen? Should someone have another place as some others talk here?

All the questions above relate to the establishment of this conversation in *this* meeting with us. Both the interviewer and the members of the reflecting team wrestle with these questions.

Who Is Going To Be Asked about What, and Who Will Be Listening?

There are no firm rules but one idea is to first ask about the history of the idea of coming here if professional(s) are present.

The person who was most in favor of this meeting may later be asked the other main question, "How would you like to use this meeting?" or, "Which issue(s) would you like to discuss in this meeting?"

Everybody is given the opportunity to express commitment to the meeting and also to voice which issue(s) he/she would like to discuss. The further conduct of the session will correspond to this opening talk.

It might be that a particular family member has wanted a new consultant to be part of a conversation about some specific topics. In such case it might be the best to let the attending professional(s) have a listening position for a while before s/he (they) is (are) engaged in a dialogue with the interviewer.

On the other hand, it might happen that the professional(s) wanted the meeting the most. Two examples illustrate this: a consultant (a "specialist") to a standstill system consisting of a family plus a local consultee wanted an additional consultant to join. The "original" consultant had the idea of asking for another consultant. The consultee eagerly agreed. The family agreed politely. The consultant wanted to discuss certain concerns he had about the family. The consultee wanted to talk about some other concerns about the family that she had. The family would not have asked for any additional professional by themselves, and the family had no particular issue to discuss. In this case the new interviewer talked with the consultant and consultee about their concerns with the family listening. Every now and then the family members were invited to comment, which they did very little.

In another case a team asked for a consultation, clearly expressing their fears about recent happenings of unpleasant violence in a family that they thought might recur. During that meeting the consultant interviewed the team about the team's perspectives of the family's perspectives with the family in a listening position all the time. After the consultant had finished his interview, one of the team members turned to the family members and asked them whether they had any comments about what they had heard.

The Issues To Be Discussed

Everyone present is given the opportunity to say which issue(s) s/he would like to talk about. The interviewer talks with each of those who elicit an issue in a sequence and at a length that s/he feels fit the system's own ranking order.

Then it might be suitable to ask the present ones which format will best fit the discussion of the various issues. If the interviewer her- or himself is uncertain about the format, s/he may ask the reflecting team to convey its ideas of the various possibilities. The interviewer's cues for asking about such reflections can be that the flow of the conversation becomes too little to make a meaningful talk, e.g., when too few words and ideas are exchanged, or too much, as it is the case when several persons talk simultaneously in a quarrel. This might end in a shift to another format, e.g., splitting the group in subgroups etc.

By the way, it is important to bear in mind the questions about the format every time a new issue is brought up: "Who is prepared to talk to whom about this issue now?"

From Word to Word

Those who consult us are usually very well prepared for what they want to use the meeting for before we meet them. The first few sentences they come up with are most often composed of highly important information.

The interviewer is waiting for a pause in the system's stream of talking for his/her question, and as s/he waits s/he listens carefully to what is said. Something of what is said will become particularly meaningful in the interviewer's mind. Boscolo, Cecchin, Hoffman, and Penn call such utterances "openings" (1987, pp. 253-254):

An opening is an expression of the meaning system in a family. It can occur in many forms: as an idea, a word cue, a theme, or a piece of analogic behavior. Whatever its form, it acts like an indentation, or an "opening," into the way a particular family

organizes its pattern of thinking, its behaviors, and the combination of meanings they collectively represent. For example, a father may say: "My daughter is too independent." The idea of independence is an opening; it is a word that is heavily invested with meaning for this family; and though a complaint is usually directed to a problem person, the opening has hidden distributions throughout the entire system.

I prefer to regard such openings as invitations for continuing the dialogue. One such opening becomes the basis for the next question.

Since we have to wait and see what the last sequence of talking contains, we can never know the paths the dialogue will take. We can only go from word to word.

The Observing System Chooses the Direction of the Dialogue

Those we talk with most often present many openings from the moment they start to answer one of our questions until they pause. They actually invite us to participate in more than just one new path of the talk. The interviewer chooses only one invitation at a time. What s/he chooses is his/her choice. Why s/he makes just these choices is impossible to answer completely. We prefer to believe that our choices are guided by our intuition about which opening will best serve the ensuing dialogue.

We hold it as an important rule to not follow an opening the interviewer her/himself experiences as unpleasant. The reader will hopefully remember from what has been said before that the interviewer, as well as all the other members of the team, represents organizations which must be given the possibility of conserving themselves.

The opening to choose may be the one that arouses some kind of curiosity. Cecchin says that such curiosity is very different from neutrality (1987, p. 406):

In order to avoid the trap of oversimplifying the idea of neutrality, I propose that we describe neutrality as the creation of a

state of curiosity in the mind of a therapist. Curiosity leads to exploration and invention of alternative views and moves, and different moves and views breed curiosity. In this recursive fashion, neutrality and curiosity contextualize one another in a commitment to evolving differences, with a concomitant nonattachment to any particular position.

Issues that are felt to be unpleasant tend to restrain the curiosity, sometimes very greatly.

The Questions That Create More and Hopefully New Openings

These are the appropriately unusual questions. The response of the receivers of questions is the only indication we have of whether our questions are too usual, appropriately unusual, or too unusual. In order to "diagnose" our own questions we have to be sensitive to the responses of those we talk with. The too usual ones do not create any tension in those we speak to. The appropriately unusual ones do and that can be detected as some kind of shift in the person's activity, e.g., from easy thinking to hard thinking, a shift of the body from one position to another, from looking very at ease to a bit more uneasy, etc. — and all this occurs without any reduction in the flow of exchanges in the dialogue.

Too unusual questions also result in shifts in the person's activity, but these shifts are limitations of the person's openness for perturbations (our questions), e.g., they listen less attentively, become distant and uninterested, their answers are shorter and fewer, the activity of the bending muscles of the body increases and can be seen (e.g., a wrinkling face, arms being crossed over the chest, restrained breathing). If our senses are open for it, we can experience a reduction in the flow of the conversation. If we notice neither all the responding signs of the too unusual that are expressed nor the decrease in the flow of the conversation, we might notice that we ourselves are in a state of pushing: the less they receive our questions, the harder we push on them. This state of pushing can be noticed

by our becoming more and more speedy, with a corresponding increased tension in our bodies. Therefore, we also have to be sensitive to our own state during the conversation.

Unusual Questions

There are many unusual questions one might ask at an opening. There is never only one question. Which question one chooses will certainly influence the direction of the discussion, too. The following is an attempt to offer ideas about a repertory of unusual questions from which one might choose.

The questions relate to descriptions of the activities around the presented issues, to the explanations of these activities and to what one can imagine if some(thing) of the activities shift. The three types of questions might be regarded as belonging to three different levels of the same phenomenon (Blount, 1985, pp. 150–151):

We discuss epistemology, the rules for what counts as a fact and how facts are ordered into meaningful ideas, when we are discussing the organisation of the clinical services in an agency, because in systemic thought these are different perspectives on the same phenomena. Epistemology is the study of the ordering of premises in a particular setting. Agency structure is the organisation of behaviours or communication patterns in a setting. These are the same phenomena in any given instance. At any particular moment, the form of the act of communication and the form of what is being communicated cannot be separated. "Pattern of behaviour" is the concept used by an observer who is watching the pathways along which communication is travelling, i.e. the people who are communicating. "Premise of interaction" is the concept used by an observer watching the difference or information which is travelling along these pathways.

The shift from one type of question to another, which the interviewer does when and how her/his intuition tells her/him to do so, involves dividing descriptions from explanations and

vice versa. People who stand still in a problematic situation easily confuse these two levels in their talking.

All questions are based on the crucial idea that people do not relate to the problematic issue "out there" but to their understanding of the problematic issue. A consequence of this crucial sentence is that we can neither describe nor explain the issue but can only describe their descriptions and explanations and give tentative explanations to our descriptions (of their descriptions and explanations). So one asks: "What did you see?" "What did you experience?" "What was your perception?" "What was your understanding?" etc., instead of asking questions like, "What is it?" "How is it?" In other words, people act in the problematic situation in accordance with their understanding of the problem.

Questions of Descriptions

It is essential to ask questions that produce double descriptions. Double descriptions give perspective to a phenomenon. Such questions comprise all variations of differences; they contain such words as:

- *in comparison to:*

"How is it now compared to then?" (difference over time/change) "Who liked it the most?"/"Who was most concerned?" (describing the phenomenon as part of a relationship) "Meeting with which grandchildren makes grandfather most happy?" (comparing relationships) "Who did what?"/"What helped the most?" (comparisons of attempted solutions), etc.

- *in relation to:*

"What were the circumstances?"/"Who has been involved?"/"Who (of the present ones) has not been involved?" etc.

- *different from:*

"When did it start?"/"When did it become worse?"/"When did it become less?" (different before and after a particular point of time), etc.

The reader's attention should be alert to the questions proposed by Mara Selvini Palazzoli et al. (1980), Peggy Penn (1982, 1985), and Karl Tomm (1987a,b, 1988).^{*} These articles particularly describe circular questions. These questions will not be described here but only commented on. A whole issue of the Dulwich Centre Newsletter is devoted to articles on questions and questionings; the authors are Eve Lipchik (1988), Michael White (1988) and Laurie MacKinnon (1988).

An interviewer might think about this process as if s/he is asking the client: "Imagine that you have made a film of the problematic situation which contains all persons' movements and talks and ideas and feelings, etc. Pretend that you rewind the film and play it forward again in slow motion. When you do so, please tell me what you see and hear."

Sometimes questions about differences might be too unusual for those who receive them and, therefore, provoking. In such instances one just slows down and waits to ask them at a more appropriate time.

Sometimes people respond to questions about differences by pointing out and underlining the similarities of their various meanings. In such cases, if people heavily reject questions

^{*}Our questions do not have the openly declared inventive or changing intentions Karl Tomm mentions. For me inventive and changing intentions seem to be in correspondence with instructive interaction, which according to Maturana we do not believe is possible (Tomm, 1987a, p. 6):

This decision-making process is implied but not adequately accounted for in the three interviewing guidelines that the Milan associates originally described. Hence the appropriateness of delineating a fourth to guide therapists in making these choices. Strategizing may be defined as the therapist's (or team's) cognitive activity in evaluating the effects of past actions, constructing new plans of action, anticipating the effects of consequences of various alternatives, and deciding how to proceed at any particular moment in order to maximize therapeutic utility. As an interviewing guideline, it entails the therapists' intentional choices about what they should do or should not do in order to guide the evolving therapeutic system toward the goal of therapeutic change. In labeling this guideline, I chose the root term "strategy" to emphasize that therapists adopt a stance with a definitive commitment toward achieving some therapeutic goal. The gerund form, -ing, was chosen to emphasize its active nature; that is, it is an active process of maintaining a network of cognitive operations that result in decisions for action.

about differences, one might ask about the tendency to be similar. "Has it always been like that?" "How come?" "Did it emerge by itself?" "On purpose?" "By tradition?" etc. "Has it ever happened that anyone saw something a bit differently?" "If such will occur in the future, who might that be?" etc., etc. But if such questions are also too different, we ask about the issues without eliciting differences, knowing that if we follow what they feel comfortable with, there will be a time for questions of differences.

Questions About Explanations

When differences are elicited, one might ask, "How can that be explained?" "How can that be understood?" "How come it happened at that point in time?" Unanswered questions about explanations may be very good questions in the sense that they create a wondering curiosity and a search for an answer.

After a change (a difference over time) has been described in formulating the question about explanation, one might think, "Which difference made that difference?"

When one deals with the history and notices that there are leaps from the better to the worse and also jumps from the worse to the better, one might think, "Which difference made the difference to the worse, or, correspondingly, better?"

By the way, talking with a group of people, e.g., a family, it seems that it is easier to speculate on questions about, "Which difference(s) made the difference(s) to the better?" than on questions about the differences that made a difference to the worse. Working with the latter rather negatively connoted question, one easily turns on people's "defenses" and they close us off from the conversation in order to conserve their integrity.

Questions About the Various Conversations

Double or multiple descriptions are extremely helpful ways out of a difficult situation. These come about through the exchanges of ideas of descriptions. When such flow of exchanges

halts, the problem arises. Questions about past, present, and possibly future conversations are therefore significant, e.g., questions like these:

"Who has talked to whom about which issue in which way?"

"What are the various meanings of the issue(s) and what are the meaning(s) of the solutions to the problem?"

"To what extent are the meanings negotiable?"

"Who are at present able to talk to each other about this issue(s)?"

"Who not?" "How can that be explained?"

ALTERNATIVE DESCRIPTIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

"Future-questions" have been described by Peggy Penn (1985, p. 300):

According to the Milan associates, future questions break the pervasive rules that govern communication in the family – i.e., the rules for who is allowed to say what. Since the future is often indicated but not "set," no one is bound by formal contextual rules, and a different pattern may be imagined. For example, if you ask a family member a hypothetical question regarding future events, because the event is only now being considered, the system is free to create a new map. Then the communication of these new ideas about the future becomes important information introduced back into the present "time" of the system. They include fantasies, wishes, opinions, hopes, etc., all a part of the ongoing system and now unexpectedly called into play as part of the family's expressed interactions. In fact, repeated hypothetical questioning of an outcome – if this or that event obtained – gives the family a sense of their own potential to imagine new solutions. At that moment I would say the family are in the process of feedforward. In considering how things could turn out *if*, you are addressing a basic descriptor of the system: its capacity to evolve. It is that much harder for the system to restabilize when its evolutionary potential is evoked. The question is how (through what therapeutic mechanism) can one leave contextbound experiences and move ahead to new organizations.

might also be so provoking that they do not serve as helpful perturbations. The best thing to do is to wait and try again later when those who talk feel sure that the dialogue will not threaten their integrity.

If hypothetical questions about the future are constantly rejected, one might discuss the space for a self-determined versus a pre-determined future. "To what extent is it predetermined? Totally, or is there a small opening for something to be determined by you?" "Is it predetermined by destiny, a force, etc.?" "Will it be like that forever?" "If that changes, when will it mostly likely occur?" "If it will not occur who is most confident with that?" "Who will take the longest before accepting it.?" etc.

LISTENING POSITIONS

A person in a listening position only participates in the inner dialogue. Circular questioning as it was implemented by the Milan team has a very powerful impact on the inner talk of that person to whom the question is connected, who actually is in a listening position. We arrange listening positions through the various versions of the reflecting team. The listening position could just as well be called a reflecting position.

Various Formats of the Reflecting Team

The team can be composed of one (the interviewer only) to four or even five (the interviewer plus three to four team members) people. That part of the team that listens to the interviewer's talk and thereafter talks with the interviewer-system listening to them is called the reflecting team.

If the interviewer is alone, s/he talks freely out in the air about her/his speculative ideas every now and then. If there is only one person in addition to the interviewer, this person most often sits in the interview room, but sometimes behind a one-way screen. When reflections are discussed in this format, the interviewer and the other person do that together.

An act is linked to a premise: the appropriate, the possible, the interesting, the unavoidable, the ought-to-be, etc. A change of the act or the acts connected to the act may challenge its premise and even change it.

"I noticed that you did the things in that sequence. If you change the sequence such or such, what would happen?" (Introducing and testing the possibility of change)

"I noticed that it has been done by him/her all the time. If s/he had to leave for a while, who would do it instead?"/"If you did it that way instead of this way, which problems might be raised?" (Introducing dilemmas: that another attempted solution creates another problem)

"If someone starts to talk about it, who would it be?" "You mentioned a certain dilemma, might there be other(s) to discuss it with?" "Would that be a friend or a relative or a previous close one who now is dead?*" "When would that happen?" "What would it be most natural to start to talk about?" "How should it be initiated: to write, to call, to go to the graveyard?" etc.

If we notice in the story people tell us that someone is deceased, we ask (as probably all of us will do) whether they still miss the person. If they do, we might ask whether the person is still somehow around. If the person is, we might ask how they communicate with the person. Then we might introduce the idea of making a conversation with the deceased one in order to find new ideas about the dilemma they are in (introducing the idea that other conversations might also be of value belongs to the cover-question, "Who might talk to whom about this issue in order to search for more descriptions and explanations?").

As with questions about differences, hypothetical questions

*A presentation by Arlene Katz inspired us to work out such questions about possible conversations with the dead. She let us see glimpses of a videotaped session when she visited us in North Norway in 1986: A young woman and her mother had physical ailments. The mother was the only survivor of a holocaust family, and her daughter the only person she now had in life. During the talks with Arlene the young lady had the idea of traveling to Poland to visit her grandmother's grave to talk to her. She did and brought with her a little bit of the soil of the grave, which she and her mother buried in the American soil. This event had a strong beneficial effect on the two women's physical health and also on their relationship.

The reflecting team composed of two or more, working either in the interview room or behind the screen, maintains one important practical guideline: the team members look into each others' faces when they talk, and they do *not* look at the members of the standstill system. If one were to look at them, one would invite them analogically to take part in the reflecting discussion. That would move them out of the advantageous listening-at-a-distance position.

If there is more than one person in addition to the interviewer, these people most often sit behind a screen, but they may sit inside the interview room. Sometimes, when there is a screen, the two groups shift rooms when the reflecting team talks. If there are practical facilities with double sets of microphones and loudspeakers, the two groups remain in their rooms and dim the light in the interview room and lighten the room where the team sits. The sound-transferring is correspondingly switched.

There is, as the reader hopefully understands, no single way of organizing a reflecting team. There are many ways to form it, depending on practical circumstances and the participants' wishes and preferences. Just to avoid misunderstanding it has to be made clear that the interviewer is always in the same room as the standstill system.

The Listening Reflecting Team

The interviewer conducts the talk totally independent of the other team members. This means that the reflecting team never interrupts to propose questions or advice.

Each team member just listens. If the team members sit behind the screen, they do not discuss the interview. The only talking that happens is when one member asks another what was said in the interview because s/he has not heard it. The idea behind not discussing is that a discussion behind the screen easily limits the team members' attention to only one idea or only some few ideas. When the team members do not talk to each other they will probably come up with more ideas and these ideas will probably be different ideas.

When the team members listen they collect in their minds the various openings as they emerge through either words or analogical expressions. One might say that they particularly select that opening which seems to be of great significance. If another opening emerges that seems even more important, one may let the first one go and start to elaborate on the new one. There are no rules about how a team member should work on an opening when s/he is in the listening position.

Basically I follow the same guidelines as the interviewer, "How can the mentioned issue be described? How can it be explained? What would happen if something else had been attempted? Are there any issues under discussion that at a first glance seem unrelated yet after a closer look are somewhat related? Is there anything expressed analogically that underlines something that is spoken? Are there analogical expressions in the sessions which are unrelated to and different from that which is spoken? Might these expressions be reflected on by the team or would such reflections be something that someone in the standstill system is not ready for?"

I often find myself asking about the characteristics of the talk's form and about those of the talk's contents. Is it the form of many monologues or of dialogues? Is there a stream of many ideas or of only a few? When the actual reflections are delivered one might think of this, "Should they be given in a monologue's form or as part of an exchanging dialogue? Should one stick strictly to just one certain idea or offer many ideas? Is the talk of the standstill system more intellectual and 'cool' or a bit more artistic or 'flowery'?" That might lead the reflections to be more straight forward in the first case and a bit more in the direction of metaphor and images in the latter. What is the speed of the talk?

THE SHIFT

There are two ways to shift positions: The interviewer may ask for the reflecting team's ideas, or the team members may let it be known that they have ideas available. It might also be

a good idea to offer the standstill system the chance to initiate a break by requesting the team's reflections.

The interview system is regarded as totally autonomous in terms of the issues they discuss and how they discuss them.

If the team has ideas, they are introduced this way: If anyone on the team has an idea s/he believes might be useful to the interview system, this person says so to the other team members and asks whether it is time to announce this or whether the team should wait. If they agree that the time has come (only rarely do the others reject the idea of announcing because they usually think the proposer has a good reason to suggest the announcing), the person with the idea knocks at the door to the interview room and says to the interviewer, "We have some ideas that might be of some value for your conversation here. If you would like to have them, please let us know when that will be convenient."

The interviewer and those s/he talks to then decide whether they want to listen to the ideas and eventually when. It has never happened that the ideas have not been reflected on, but it has happened that the interviewer has waited many minutes before the team was called. In such instances the team may reflect on other openings than those they originally thought of, as new openings have emerged in the interim.

THE REFLECTIONS

If the reflections are given inside the room where the standstill system sits, the interviewer usually announces the shift, saying that the team will talk now. "You can sit back and listen to that conversation if you want, or think of something else if you want. This arrangement allows you to listen to and see what you yourself have been talking about from a more distant position." We have found this clear statement of the boundary to be useful.

Each member of the reflecting team bears in mind all the time that there are many versions of the issues that have been discussed, and that each member has his/her own version, which is different from the other ones. This calls for being a bit

uncertain when one speaks, "I am not sure . . . , maybe . . . , one could think of . . ." etc. Additionally, we use the word-pair both-and, "both this can be seen and this," "both this can be thought of and this," "in addition to what they saw I saw this . . ." "I heard some strong explanations, maybe the following explanation could be added to what have been the explanations so far . . ." etc.

The context of the reflections is what has gone on verbally and analogically in the interview room. We carefully omit from our reflections that which was shown during the interview that the person herself/himself seems to prefer not to have mentioned, e.g., a man might struggle in order to cover up his anger, or another cannot help showing a behavior of excluding someone but does not want that to be seen.

Our reflections often find the form of a dialogue and we put a lot of unanswered questions into them. We comment to each other and ask each other whether the others think of more or of something else.

There are very few rules to follow. The rules we have are all about what we shall *not do*: We shall not reflect on something that belongs to another context than the conversation of the interview system, and we must not give negative connotations.

As indicated above, we find it useful for the team to start to elicit the various members' most important idea or impression or issue, etc. Then we start to talk about the idea or the impression or the issue. When we first started to work this way we often found ourselves giving monologues. Over time we have turned to much more conversations among the team members, speculative conversations. One asks the others a question; they answer by raising more questions. If we understand that the standstill system wants advice and that it would be too unusual if we did not give any, we might discuss how another system in a similar situation tried to solve the problem. But we emphasize that a possible attempt to do the same should be stopped if it turns out to not help *this* system.

When those we meet talk in monologues, sometimes the team does the same; when those we meet are more towards the artistic side, we sometimes offer a metaphor.

The team very often speculates about which conversations might be helpful for the various issues. An issue is often talked about in terms of a dilemma, e.g., a family was very tolerant and understanding of other people's demands. "How was it for the various family members to stretch themselves so much?" "Might it be sometimes under certain conditions that someone did stretch him- or herself too much?" "If such situations occurred who could the persons discuss that dilemma with?"

The work of the Dublin group (Nollaig Byrne, Imelda McCarthy and Philip Kearney) has inspired us greatly. In their paper on incest, they define the incest situation as having created several dilemmas for many persons, e.g., should one disclose or deny? Blame or protect? Punish or support? Treat or punish? Define anybody as good and another as bad? Propose a hospital stay or a prison stay or a stay in a monastery? Self-punishment or punishment from men or God? Quiet atonement or open repentance? Etc. (McCarthy & Byrne, 1988).

We wonder to what extent we may reflectively present the feelings that emerge in us when we listen to the standstill system's story. Most probably such feelings have two contexts: the dialogue we listen to and something from our own lives. For us how we shall handle such feelings is an open question. One family met with us because a teenager ran away; she was also a shoplifter. She was a daughter from the mother's first marriage. The mother had remarried and during the last three years had had two new babies. The stepfather seemed more attentive to his own two children than to the stepdaughter. One of the team members, feeling that the teenager had been excluded from the new family, talked about how he thought the girl might feel. When he reached the words, "Maybe she feels she is excluded," he had difficulty continuing. The feelings in the team member were so strong that he had to take several breaks to be able to finish. The family was stunned, and the runaway and shoplifting disappeared overnight.

The reflecting team (RT) usually talks between five and ten minutes, sometimes more. They are never interrupted by the interviewing system unless the reflections become such that those who listen cannot take it anymore. It happens very sel-

dom, for us only twice. Once a small boy in a rather big marriage-family became restless and very sad when the team talked about the family's long journey and wondered whether everybody had found a safe position within the new family system. His sadness and restlessness behind the screen were understood by the interviewer, who stayed with the family. The interviewer asked the family members whether they felt that they had heard enough. As they said yes, the interviewer knocked at the door and informed the RT that the family had heard enough.

THE INTERVIEW SYSTEM TALKS ABOUT THE REFLECTING TEAM'S TALK

When the reflecting team has finished its talk, the positions are reversed, with the interviewing system back to talking and the reflecting team back to listening. The interviewer starts the discussion with an open question, "Is there anything from what you have heard you would like to comment on, talk more about, etc.?"

Every person who does not talk spontaneously is given the chance to talk, since the question is put to each of them. When a person elicits an idea or more ideas, the interviewer asks about these ideas, following the same guidelines as before. After all who want to comment have given their ideas and discussed them (if they have any), the interviewer might her-/himself present for discussion the idea or ideas s/he came up with while listening to the team.

THE NUMBER OF SHIFTS

Usually we shift once or twice, unless it happens that the dialogue in the interview system is so rich, with so many new ideas, that reflections from the team seem redundant and therefore are not offered. Sometimes there might be more than two shifts; four is the most for us.

There is no rule that says shifts must occur. Both systems can offer or ask for ideas at any point in time.

Our rule is that the interview system shall always have the last word of a meeting.

THE FINAL PART OF THE MEETING

The future of the relationships of the present system, i.e., the interview system plus the team, is discussed in the final part of the meeting.

Do members of the standstill system already know whether they want to meet us again or not? If they know, do they know when that might be? Do they know who might come next time? Or would they prefer to think it over and call if and when they want another meeting?

In this passage of the dialogue we might discuss whether there were others to meet with instead of the team or someone in addition to the team.

One thing we have noticed since starting to discuss a possible future relationship this way is that we have the impression that people tend to need us less than we believed.

FOLLOW-UPS

Our wishes to follow up are stronger than our corresponding acts. When we suggest a follow-up it is said to be for our interest in knowing how they actually decided to handle their situation. When they come back some of the most interesting questions are about what they remember the most from our meeting(s). We ask those questions because we believe that what they remember the most has the most significance for them.

WHAT CONTRIBUTES THE MOST TO OUR FAILURES?

When we fail that can be readily felt, in that the standstill system has a decreasing interest in participating in the ongoing dialogue. In such instances we discuss immediately after the session, "How come?" If possible, reviewing videotapes can be very helpful in working with this question.

So far we can usually relate our failures to two themes. One

is that we have not discussed thoroughly enough with the professional part of the standstill system which format the session should have. An example may clarify: A hospital ward we consulted for the first time met with us for only half an hour to discuss the format of the session before the family came. During the session with the family present we became aware that the routines on the ward (e.g., decision-making that seldom included the patient or his family) were in strong contrast to the more open and equal-participation-for-all style of our team. In hindsight we understood that we should have spent one meeting only with the ward staff to become acquainted with their mode of thinking and practicing, so that we would not be too unusual for them when we met with the family.

The other contribution to failure is that we do not discuss enough (or even forget to discuss) with the emotionally engaged (nonprofessional) part of the standstill system (family, friends, neighbors, etc.) the history of the idea of coming and becoming connected to us. It has happened that we have talked with someone all through the session without understanding that he had neither asked for nor was very interested in talking with us, even though a referring person was interested.

SOME FEW IDEAS ON PRESENTING

I have noticed that some persons in an audience who ask questions within a frame of "first-order cybernetics" have difficulties in receiving my answers, which belong to a "second-order cybernetics" frame. Therefore, it has been of some help for an audience to contrast the major ideas that characterize "first" and "second-order cybernetics" (Table).

After such an overview is posted on the wall, it seems to bring some relief to say that we all are constantly moving in our thinking back and forth between the left and the right side. It is easier to be on the right side when we have some distance on the issue in question, e.g., when we are "calm" in relation to it. On the other hand, it seems more natural to be on the left side when we are very eager in dealing with an issue or emotionally disturbed by it, e.g., angry or sad or fearful.

One does not have to be either on the left side or on the right

TABLE

First-order cybernetics	Second-order cybernetics
The "thing" (e.g., a disease) is seen as something in itself	The "thing" (e.g., a disease) is seen as part of and related to a shifting context.
A professional works with (treats) the "thing" (e.g., a disease)	A professional works with the person's understanding of the "thing" (e.g., a disease)
A person discovers the "thing" (e.g., a disease) as it is. The "thing" has only one version.	A person creates an understanding what the "thing" is, which is just one of many possible versions.
A personal change can be directed from outside; therefore, it is predictable.	A personal change evolves spontaneously from inside and one can never know what it will be or how it will be or when it will happen.

side. It is helpful to know where one is when one makes distinctions—in other words, to know where one's thinking is when one asks questions. If someone in an audience raises a question which belongs to the left side, one can say that an answer belonging to the right side might be confusing. Therefore, it might be of help to discuss the epistemological basis of the question before answering it. This should also apply to our own thinking.

Harold Goolishian reminds us all the time that "... you cannot not have a theory. But, remember that you must not fall so much in love with it that you have to carve it on a stone!" Such reminders help us to constantly revisit our own thinking. Maybe the shifting throughout our practice, from talking to listening positions, back and forth, also helps us revisit our thinking.

There is something in my article on "The Reflecting Team"

(1987) that deserves to be revised. I refer to page 424, the last sentence under the headline. Warnings: "The team must remain positive, discrete, respectful, sensitive, imaginative and creatively free."

On the one hand, this sounds like a command; on the other hand, it sounds as if the persons in the team have to be like that, i.e., to carry these qualities as parts of their persons. I think it would sound better this way: "If the time and the territory make it possible, one may try to bring a question or remark that is a bit unusual. So much unusual that it represents a surprise. Not necessarily a sweet surprise. But so much a surprise that the persons are given a possibility to be moved to another position and from there leave out of and/or add something to the descriptions they had before. When our right hand gives the surprising questions, it would be good if the left hand were open to receive and feel the person's reactions to what we uttered."

LET COME AND LET GO

The reader has come to the end of our guidelines, and soon s/he will let this part of the book go. This gives us an opportunity to deal with the words "let go" and "let come."

As Maturana says, life is constantly moving. The characteristic of the living is that it shifts all the time; life comes by itself. The moving life exists there, to let come, also with dialogues and the shifting descriptions and explanations they bring. The (shifting) dialogues exist as parts of the moving life. One does not have to make dialogues. Dialogues are already there to let come.

We included an interview with Aadel Bülow-Hansen in the book we wrote about her physiotherapy. In the middle of the interview she said: "I have to demonstrate something before you leave." One hour later, when I got up to leave not remembering what she had said, she said: "Don't go, I said I would demonstrate something.... Put one of your hands on my throat and one hand on my stomach. Now I will bite my jaws firmly. Notice that the breathing of my stomach stops.... No-

tice now. . . . I let the tension of my tongue and the jaw go. . . .” She laughed and said, “When I let go the tension of my tongue and the bite, my stomach started to breathe again.”

She continued, “Over the years I have noticed that many have difficulties with letting the breathing come by itself. It is as if they want to control it. There is something strange with letting the breathing come by itself. That seems to take a lot of courage” (Øvreberg & Andersen, 1986, p. 10).

PART II

Dialogues About the Dialogues