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Arresting moments in engaged management research

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Abstract

We contribute to the literature on the production of knowledge through engaged management and organisational research. We explore how relational practices in management and organisational research may interpenetrate and change one another, thereby potentially producing new knowledge. We demonstrate the importance of the disruptive qualities of arresting moments in this process. We present data from within ongoing engaged management and organisational research at an arts festival involving related music, management and research practices, during which two arresting moments arose: one in our own core research practice, the other in related music and management practices. We found arresting moments were preceded by increasingly intense divisions between practices, when practitioners experienced increasingly entrenched views and heightened emotions. Arresting moments sometimes followed, producing an empathetic connection between practitioners, so that they could suddenly see situations from a new perspective. In this way, arresting moments could produce opportunities for (self-) reflexivity and the possibility of reconstructing knowing in relational practices.

Keywords

Arresting moments, dialogue, emotion, engaged research, reflexivity, relational practice

Introduction

In this paper we seek to contribute to the literature on management practising and knowing, particularly the relations between management and organisational research (MOR) and practice. This is sometimes conceptualised as a dialogical process in which practitioners (often managers) and researchers engage – or should engage – as respectful equals (Cunliffe, 2002a; Gergen et al., 2001) seeking to achieve a mutual aim, through which they co-produce new knowledge (Pettigrew, 2001; Van de Ven, 2007). Through a continuous and open dialogical process of engagement, practitioners and researchers may find themselves influenced and changed by the other groups involved, such

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that new understandings about their respective interests and views may be reached, thereby developing new knowledge (Alvesson et al., 2008).

Whilst viewing MOR as an engaged, dialogical process has been helpful in gaining insights about relations between MOR and practice, the continuous and harmonious aspects of this conceptualisation have been questioned in recent years: although dialogical, the process of engagement has been found to be neither continuous, nor harmonious (Beech et al., 2010; MacIntosh et al., 2012). Relations between researchers and organisational practitioners generally can be episodic, enacted through generative encounters rather than as a mutually engaged continuous process (Beech et al., 2010). This process may involve both dialectical and dialogical aspects in terms of the relations between the different participants in their respective roles (Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002; Lorino et al., 2011; MacIntosh et al., 2012).

One way to explore this issue further is to adopt a practice approach. On this view, MOR involves a range of practitioners and practices, including researchers (research practice), managers (management practice) and related organisational practitioners who are involved in the core work of the organisation(s) concerned, such as clinicians in healthcare (clinical practice) or musicians in music festivals (music practice). Sometimes one person in an organisational setting may embody more than one area of practice: for example, a clinician or a musician may also be a manager. In these circumstances, several practices are implicated. They may overlap, operating in relation to, and interpenetrating, one another (Nicolini, 2011; Thorpe, 2008), as in the case of MOR. Thus a 'nexus of practices' (Schatzki, 2005: 470) is formed, through which 'meaningful relational totalities' are produced (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011: 341).

Whilst debate continues about whether – and how – organisation and management research practitioners should interact more closely with other practitioners in management and organisations (and about how the value of this might be assessed), comparatively little work has been done to explore this process empirically, especially from within the moment of practising (Hibbert et al., 2010; Thorpe et al, 2011; Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009).

In this paper we contribute to the literature on the production of knowledge through engaged MOR. We extend current understanding of the dialogical – and dialectical – processes involved from a practice-based perspective. We address the question of how relational practices interpenetrate one another in engaged MOR, such that it makes a difference and new knowledge may be produced. Our contribution is based on empirical data from within engaged MOR, concerning the composition and production of a music album to raise awareness of a particular societal issue, in support of a national arts festival. This involved a range of practices in relation to one another, including management and research practice.

Our contribution concerns the central importance of 'arresting moments' (Cunliffe, 2001: 358; Shotter, 1997), when previously taken-for-granted notions and beliefs may be disrupted in the context of relational practices. We offer an empirically informed, theoretical conceptualisation of the qualities of arresting moments and insights into the circumstances in which they arise, which has been somewhat under-explored in the literature.

The paper is set out as follows. First we set the scene by linking practice-based studies with the concepts of arresting moments and reflexivity, before introducing our research question. Next we introduce our empirical setting, identifying the relational practices we studied. We then explain our methods, before presenting our data in the form of a story of engaged MOR in a music festival. We discuss our findings and explicate our contribution about the quality of arresting moments, demonstrating the importance of emotions and reflexivity, prior to concluding with a summary of our findings and some implications for engaged MOR.

Knowing, arresting moments and reflexivity within relational practices

Since the 1990s, a rich seam of practice-based studies research has argued convincingly that knowing is an inherent aspect of practising (Blackler, 1993; Gherardi, 2001, 2009; Nicolini et al., 2003). Practice involves the situated 'sayings and doings' people perform, and objects that people use (Nicolini, 2009a: 205), through which they produce meaning in their everyday lives. It incorporates both that which is intended (Blackler and Regan, 2009), as well as that which is not, including the 'unspoken and scarcely notable background of everyday life' (Nicolini, 2009b: 1392). This is characterised by, but cannot be reduced to, 'un-reflexive reactions, actions, utterances, linguistic acts, behaviours, and routine conduct' (Nicolini, 2007: 892).

Practitioners become defined by the ability to understand a situation in a particular way, through the knowledgeable enactment of practices in situ (Gherardi et al., 1998), such as flute making (Cook and Yanow, 1993), the use of telemedicine in clinical practice (Nicolini, 2007), haute cuisine (Gomez et al., 2003), organising in social services (Blackler and Regan, 2006) and healthcare and policy practices (Greig et al., 2012). In each of these instances, people are able to differentiate between their core practice (like social work or social work management) and other related practices (such as social work management or social work). Therefore, practices involve dialogical processes which produce shared – and significantly meaningful – ways of saying and doing things, which in turn are mutually constitutive of both the practitioners and their contexts (Corradi et al., 2010; Shotter, 2005). Developments in knowing imply developments in practising (and potentially of practitioners), and vice versa (Nicolini, 2011).

As the description of practice suggests, some aspects of it are easier to express and discuss than others. In much of the practice-based research, practices are discussed from the 'outside', where the discourse and actions involved in observable, reportable practices are studied and the insights this produces help us to understand them better (Nicolini, 2009b). This involves researchers talking or writing *about* practices through which knowing is constructed (Gherardi, 2009; Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009).

When practices are discussed in situ, from the 'inside', the pre-reflexive and un-reflexive, every-time-anew qualities of practice are highlighted, related to the production and reproduction of embodied practices (Gherardi, 2009; Nicolini, 2011; Nicolini, 2009b). This perspective is closely connected to the notion of 'withness-thinking' which emphasises the on-going, in-the-moment nature of practising (Shotter, 2006: 586). Accounts of practising from the 'inside' yield valuable insights; perhaps the most important is the fore-grounding of those aspects which are so familiar and embodied that practitioners find them difficult to articulate. This may only be possible during moments when on-going practice is disrupted somehow, such that there is a breakdown in the ongoing, pre- and/or un-reflexive quality of practising (Gherardi, 2000).

Such disruptions may be followed by 'arresting moments' (Cunliffe, 2001: 358; Shotter and Cunliffe, 2003). In these moments practitioners have an opportunity to access what Wittgenstein described as 'the background' (Shotter, 2005: 113) or taken-for-granted aspects of everyday practising (Shotter, 1997). When this happens, people notice something new in everyday situations. Seemingly new possibilities for future practice may suddenly appear visible to them, although what they have noticed was probably there all along, almost hidden in 'plain view' (Shotter 2006: 587; 1997). It has been suggested that being able to describe this background to themselves and others would help practitioners – particularly managers – to identify new possibilities or imagined futures in ongoing relational practising (Shotter and Cunliffe, 2003; Cunliffe, 2001).

However, this is not easy: being able to access these background conditions through arresting moments requires the disruption of existing certainties. Chia and Holt (2008) argue that certainties are rooted in taken-for-granted aspects of practice, residing in background conditions, and based on beliefs held by practitioners. They suggest that, in contrast, 'knowledge' requires the presence of doubt. In order to achieve the necessary level of open-mindedness to enable such doubt, existing certainties and strong beliefs need to be disrupted so that new insights about taken-for-granted aspects of practice might be revealed, new imagined futures made visible (Cunliffe, 2008) and new knowing in practice produced. Producing knowledge through this process of disruption in engaged MOR, such that it makes a difference to all practitioners involved – including researchers themselves – involves emotions, which may provoke active and open reflexivity (Hibbert et al., 2010).

Reflexivity involves a complex interplay between thinking and experience, thinking about experience, and questioning the values, norms and assumptions underpinning taken-for-granted aspects of everyday practices, which characterise social interactions and positions (enacted or textual) (Alvesson et al., 2008; Gherardi, 2000; Hibbert et al., 2010). Reflexivity comes in a variety of guises and may be employed to achieve different aims, sparking debate about the appropriate level of reflexive introspection within research (and other) practices (Alvesson et al., 2008; Weick, 2002). However, there is broad agreement that reflexivity can reveal otherwise unseen aspects of the phenomenon under scrutiny. Achieving this in the flow of ongoing practice is notoriously difficult (Cunliffe, 2001; Weick, 2002) and may work differently within different practices, or when situated practices are in relation to one another (Hibbert et al., 2010). Whilst reflexivity may be regarded by some as a relatively routine aspect of (some forms of qualitative) research practice, this may not be the case for other practices. For example, management practice often deals in generalisations and finding patterns to fit across all situations; therefore generalisation may be valued more than specific details of specific situations, which are highlighted through reflexivity (Nicolini, 2009b; Shotter, 2005). It has been suggested a radical, relational and dialogical approach to reflexivity in practising may enable practitioners to challenge taken-for-granted aspects of practice which are no longer considered helpful, and to change themselves in the process (Cunliffe, 2002b; 2003; 2008).

Reflexivity in relational, dialogical practices is central to understanding what can happen following arresting moments in ongoing practising (Cunliffe, 2001; Shotter, 1993). Although the importance of reflexivity in such situations has been noted, little has been written about this process from within the relational practices involved in conducting management and organisational research (Alvesson et al., 2008; Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009). Similarly, there has been some exploration of how practitioners construct the ongoing relations and context as the basis for their ensuing experience of organisational life (Watson, 2009), through re-establishing the dialogue within practice - particularly in management practice (Cunliffe, 2001; Shotter and Cunliffe, 2003). But less is known about how arresting moments and disruptions of certainties occur in relational practice settings characteristic of MOR, particularly in respect of research practice (Hibbert et al., 2010).

Therefore in this paper we explore what happens before and after arresting moments as they occur in relational practices, where practitioners from different core practices interact. We seek to understand more about the quality of arresting moments in such situations, and what this means for the construction of knowledge through MOR. We contribute to understanding this process by drawing on data from researching management and organising practices in music festivals. We pose the research question: how do practices interpenetrate one another in engaged MOR, so that knowing is produced in such relational practice situations. We identify how arresting moments may be recognised and consider the insights we can derive from learning about their qualities.

The empirical setting

Our empirical setting is the music strand of a major national festival, in its fifth year of operation. The festival takes place annually over three weeks and features over 200 gigs and events, distributed across most national regions. The festival was set up to promote positive messages about a (very diverse) societal 'group', to challenge stigma and discrimination suffered by that group. It is organised through a partnership between a charity related to the social group, and professionals who practice in that field.

The music strand is run by two well-known musicians in their field. Financial surplus from the previous year was used to make an album, concerning some of the issues affecting the societal group, which was launched on the opening weekend of the festival and performed live at two major concerts during the festival we attended. The production of the album incorporated three practices: musical practice, in which songs were written, chosen for the album, refined, recorded and performed; professional practice related to the social group (referred to as well-being and anti-discrimination – henceforth WBAD – practice, for confidentiality reasons); and organising practice, through which people, ideas and resources were brought together to produce the album and associated concerts at the overall festival. These three practices involved a range of practitioners including: musicians, musician/organisers, and WBAD practitioners/festival organisers. Each was a knowledgeable practitioner within his/her core practice, and all were overtly committed to working collaboratively in order to further the festival cause.

The two principal WBAD practitioners responsible for the overall festival were interested in learning more about the process of producing the festival. One knew about our research interests and invited us to be involved. Given our ethnographic research approach, we became participants in the on-going process of producing the festival, in our capacity as research practitioners (Cunliffe, 2002a; Shotter 2006). As a result, we engaged reflexively within the empirical setting and story of the festival, such that our research practice became an explicit aspect of our data. In our findings we highlight instances of interpenetration between relational practices which generated new possibilities for future practising and the production of knowledge (Cunliffe, 2001; Schatzki 2005; Shotter and Cunliffe, 2003).

Methods

Our empirical material is drawn from an example which incorporates both 'inside' and 'outside' perspectives on the relational practices (Gherardi, 2009) upon which our data is focused. First, we gathered data from observations, conversations and participation when we were 'inside' the relational festival practices of music-making, festival organising, WBAD, and researching; second, we gathered data from interviews, recordings and analytical, reflexive conversations when we were 'outside' music, festival organising and WBAD practices, but 'inside' our core research practice (see Table 1 for details). All names in our data are pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

We followed a polyphonic narrative approach (Rhodes and Brown, 2005; Sims, 2003), in order to develop a perspective on the complexity of being in the organisation (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1998), by moving beyond monological accounts which deal with complex reality in a highly reductionist way (Boje et al., 1999). We acknowledge this still involved selection and editing when writing this part of the story, but we have sought to be reflective and reflexive about this (Cunliffe, 2002a). Accordingly we radically questioned our own interpretations and the assumptions which underpinned those interpretations.

Table 1. Empirical data gathering details.

Methods	Event	Number & duration	Practice
Participant observation	Live concert performances: – backstage (food for performers etc.) – front-of-house (being audience members) – wore official festival staff t-shirts and passes	2 evenings	Music
	Inter-agency review day: – research presentation (R1) – attendance as researchers	1 day	Research & WBAD
Non-participant observation	Pre-festival album launch	1 half day	Organising & music
	Steering group meeting	1 half day	Organising & WBAD
	Pre-event visit to festival office	1 day	Organising & research
	Sound checks for live performances	2 days	Music
Interviews	Pre-event visit to festival office + separately arranged interviews	15 (of which 4 organising/ WBAD), average 70 mins	Organising Organising/ WBAD
	Separately arranged interviews, pre- and post-festival events	34 (41 artistic interviews in total), 32mins–115mins, average 60 mins	Music
	Festival events including 2 live music performances	147 audience, 5–12 mins	Research
Reflexive discussions	During festival	6 (min. 2 hours each)	Research
	After festival	14 (min. 3 hours each)	Research

Choosing a reflexive dialogical framework (Alvesson et al., 2008; Hibbert et al., 2010) strengthened our prior data analysis by focusing on four types of text (Cunliffe, 2001). These were festival participants' text (transcripts and other written artefacts including song lyrics, and album sleeve text), our interpretations of those texts (emergent themes in field notes, analysis notes, emails), what other academics have written previously (extant literature), and the reader's text (here, our own interpretation of what we thought previously, taking all other forms of text – including an earlier version of this paper and reviewers' comments – into account, creating a new interpretation of previous analysis and interpretation as we progressed). Accordingly, we decided to focus on data concerning the production of the album, and one song in particular (the

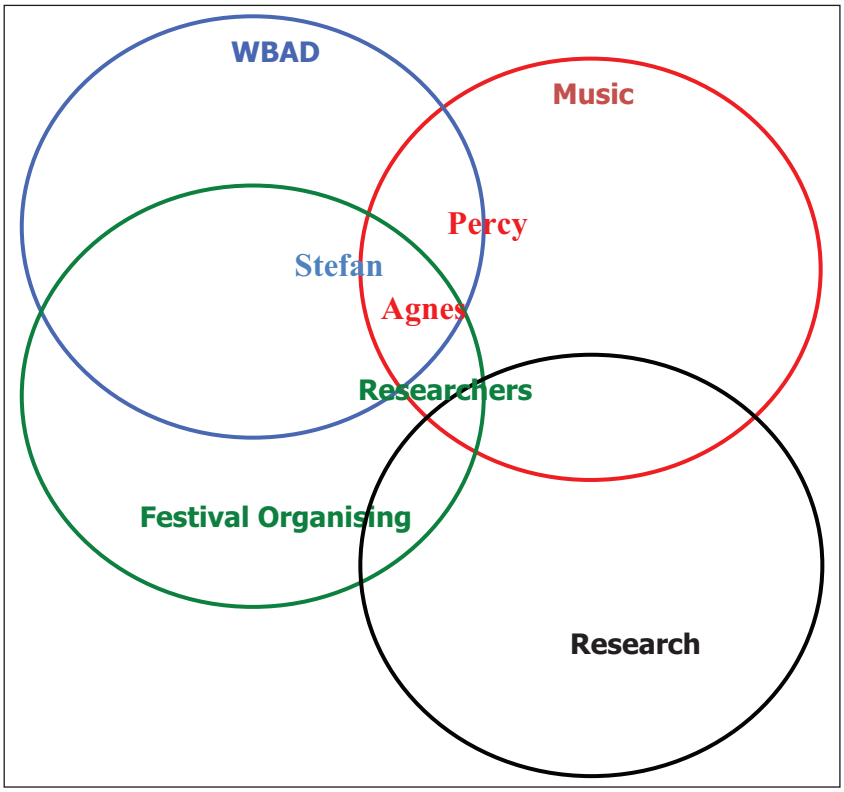

Figure 1. Relational practices.

Controversial Song), because it seemed to exemplify the construction of knowing in MOR through relational practices.

The analytical process through which we made that empirical choice was both iterative and abductive. We read interview transcripts separately then discussed salient points together, generating queries from the data as a result. We realised that tone and how things were said were important, so in order to address our queries, we returned to listen to the original recorded interviews, to hear the utterances as they were spoken in the context of the interviews (Cunliffe, 2003). We held further analysis sessions where we discussed, and recorded, our new emerging impressions and insights. We revisited the interview data collectively, both in transcript and aural form. We also listened to the album and read the song lyrics. During this part of the process, new questions arose about our initial interpretations of the data and we arranged further interviews with participants to explore incomplete areas in the account of the Controversial Song, including this data in our on-going analysis.

We then returned to the recordings we had made of our earlier analysis discussions before, during and after the festival. This helped us engage in an enhanced level of reflexivity through which we sought to surface underlying assumptions, held by all research participants, relevant to the production of the Controversial Song, including ourselves as participants in the ongoing research process. This involved research dialogue (Cunliffe, 2002a; Cunliffe, 2003) over a period of four months, through which we developed an understanding of the nature of arresting moments from within the range of practices involved in this aspect of the festival (see Figure 1).

We present our story next.

The Controversial Song

Characters

Stefan: Festival Director/WBAD practitioner with an active interest in research
Agnes: Festival Chair/WBAD practitioner with keen interest in music
Percy: Successful Musician/Album coordinator, keen on promoting WBAD messages
Ben: Musician/song writer
Wilf: Musician/song writer
Researchers: R1, R2, R3, R4

We were researching in this festival because we were interested in how organising and music practices related to one another. Some literature in the field (for example Caves, 2003) proposes a tension between organising and artistic work and we noticed what appeared to be an example of this in the production of the album, *de novo*. Tensions arose involving three of the relational practices involved in our empirical example (music, WBAD and festival organising), concerning artistic freedom in music practice, promoting positive messages about the societal group in WBAD practice, and programming in festival organising practice. This culminated in one song potentially either being edited or excluded from the album. Practitioners involved were: Percy, album artistic director, engaged in musical practice combined with organising; Stefan, main festival programme director/WBAD practitioner, involved in organising practice with WBAD purpose together with some artistic engagement; and Agnes, funding and overall festival organising/WBAD practitioner, mainly involved in WBAD practice with an overseeing role in festival organisation.

Creating the album began nine months before the festival. Percy selected and persuaded a number of song-writers to compose new songs relating to the festival theme.

The album-making process involved a musical retreat, whereby all the song-writers went to a rented house in a rural setting to write. At the end of a week there were drafts of enough songs for an album and Percy agreed that they would work up the songs in pairs to get ready for recording.

The Controversial Song

During a pre-festival interview with all members of the research team, Stefan alluded to an instance of tensions between organising and music practices concerning the inclusion of a 'controversial' song on the album. R1 and Stefan had talked about this previously prior to the festival and Stefan had mentioned the difficulties this had created for his subsequent interactions with Percy. R1 asked Stefan if he could say more about this for the benefit of the other team members. Stefan agreed and explained the tensions arose around the lyrics for one of the songs, which were about:

> …incest and beasts and raping your sister, and all of that. (Stefan)

This conveyed a message that was counter to the festival's core purpose and was unacceptable in WBAD professional practice. As Festival Director, Stefan said that he wanted to 'pull' the song. This put the whole album-producing process in danger: Percy was insisting on including an apparently unacceptable song, thereby risking both the viability of the album, and a major negative impact for the festival. However, Stefan was very concerned about the effect the lyrics could have on a sub-set of the group about whom the festival was designed to promote positive messages:

> I was thinking young [group members] … a *really* high proportion of whom sit with the headphones on all day ... Repeatedly listening to *that* [the Controversial Song] is really highly dangerous. So really we had an argument ... (Stefan)

> I did not want it [the Controversial Song] in … they [Percy and album production collaborator] insisted it stayed in and that was an interesting source of tension because ultimately it gets down to who controls the product and the art and what the purpose of all this is. (Stefan)

According to Stefan, the situation was resolved by Agnes in a three- hour, early morning phone conversation with Percy, during which they reached a compromise so the album could go ahead. This solution involved putting a disclaimer on the album about content, to maintain the integrity of the non-stigmatising festival message. In addition a 'parental advisory' sticker had to be put on the cover. Stefan was still uneasy about the song:

> ...but it [the song]'s still in … with a qualifying sentence or two. (Stefan)

He and Percy did not speak for several weeks.

While the issue appeared to be one of control for Stefan, Agnes saw it as different perspectives and levels of expertise:

> The difficulties lie in that we all come from different perspectives … Percy [knows] a lot about music … ha[s] lived experience of [the issue at the heart of the festival] … and [my expertise] is in WBAD. Percy may *think* he knows – and that has already happened with [the album] this year – a lot … about … [WBAD practice] and the world of people who are affected [by stigma and discrimination issues], and how they might respond to things, so … there is all of that learning to respect each other's knowledge. (Agnes)

Agnes knew that members of the festival steering group, who had the job of tackling negative messages and stereotyping of the societal group, were likely to share Stefan's view about dropping the song because of the written lyrics in the album sleeve, despite Percy's strength of feeling:

> Percy was not happy at all ... I am underplaying that, [he was] extremely unhappy about going back to the artists about saying that their song was not going to get into [the album] ... I think there were egos involved ... [they] would have been quite angry and I don't think Percy ... wanted that level of conflict with them. (Agnes)

Agnes did not elaborate further and concluded that a somewhat uneasy compromise – and some mutual understanding – was reached, although:

> [Percy] will probably feel a bit sore that we got involved in the creative process – I still feel a bit edgy and worried about ... the lyrics ... We need to reflect. It is not the time just now ... post festival would be the time to have a think about it. (Agnes)

During the interview, Agnes was clearly uncomfortable. R1 noted she shifted position, her hand gestures quickened and she seemed to be consciously trying to control her emotions. R1 felt as if Agnes had had an experience and had no desire 'to go back there', but to move forward from it. Quite a lot was left half said, sentences were incomplete. R1 felt that Agnes thought R1 knew/understood more than was the case: there seemed to be a degree of shared awareness between them about this, which remained unsaid.

Interlude 1

Our impression at this point was that Agnes had solved the problem. Stefan talked of her as able to establish trust and cooperation. Both Agnes and Stefan talked of her continuous diplomatic efforts with funders and others in the context and in Stefan's telling of the story it was Agnes who had 'smoothed things over'. This was also the main thrust of Agnes' story of the song.

Three weeks later we attended the festival. We undertook non/participant observation at various events (see Table 1).

During the festival we attended sound checks and R1 and R2 observed Percy acting in a way that seemed power oriented and hierarchical, whilst Stefan – who attended later that evening – seemed uncomfortable. This was consistent with the discomfort Stefan mentioned previously to R1.

R1, R2 and R4 attended two concerts, when songs from the album were performed. Subsequently, R1 and R2 listened in detail, repeatedly, to the album. R2 identified the Controversial Song.

A few weeks later, after initial analysis of our data, we wrote an earlier version of this paper. Through the review process, we revisited our data. R2 noticed a 'twist in the tail' about the Controversial Song in the transcript of an earlier interview with Ben, the song-writer. He seemed completely unaware that there was any issue with the song. Perhaps more significantly, in Ben's view, no one else knew what the song was about:

The thing is about me, I don't tell anybody what they [songs] are about. Nobody in my band knows what any of my songs are about and at the [festival] nobody knows what any of my songs are about, I keep that all to myself … (Ben)

Interlude 2

Our interpretation was that there was confusion between participants about the song's meaning which had produced deadlock in the on-going production of the album and festival concert planning. Stefan and Agnes interpreted the lyrics as being completely unacceptable to them and their festival Steering Group colleagues, primarily due to their embeddedness in WBAD professional practice. Their firm view was that the song should be excluded from the album, based on their core practice knowledge. Meanwhile Percy found Stefan's reaction unacceptable: it seemed like organisational interference in the creative process. Percy decided the solution was to keep the song unaltered, thereby protecting artistic freedom and not offending the musicians. Clearly these two ways forward were incompatible. It was as if a 'red line' had been crossed in each core practice, producing a dialectical situation. However, Agnes and Percy managed to overcome this and reach a compromise. The certainty with which Stefan and Percy had taken up positions regarding the meaning of the song seemed to derive from their own interpretations, related to their respective core practices. An interesting question, therefore, was why this occurred and how Agnes had apparently managed to smooth the way to go on with the album as part of the festival.

At this stage we had not been able to secure an interview with Percy despite several attempts, but we were keen to hear his version of the story. R2 managed to arrange an interview with Percy but was somewhat apprehensive about it given the perception we had started to build up of him based primarily on interviews with Stefan.

R2 was unsure about how to raise the subject of the Controversial Song with Percy but any concern was misplaced: Percy was friendly and participated fully and talked freely. He explained that when Stefan raised the issue of the song initially:

I immediately went bananas and said ... you cannot censor artistic content in a project like this. (Percy)

Percy told R2 that the issue of lyrics being acceptable to funders had arisen earlier, during the making of the album. This had annoyed the musicians who became aware of this at that time, including the Controversial Song writers. When Stefan raised the issue again, Percy recognised the need for resolution, although he felt the lyrics were fine. His priority was to keep the album in its entirety. Eventually he calmed down and the problem was resolved in discussion with Agnes and others involved in the festival, through the inclusion of a disclaimer.

R2 and R3 noticed that Percy told R2 three versions of the Controversial Song incident as they read the transcript and engaged in reflective discussion. These versions became increasingly revelatory as R2 established a rapport with Percy during the interview. The most revealing emerged when R2 revealed, 'I was really worried about asking you about the Controversial Song'. Percy said it was fine: he had over-reacted, but did not want any of the musicians to be excluded from the album and to feel bad subsequently.

Telling 1: The problem began when printed lyrics 'raised a few red flags ... I don't want to name names …' The festival organisers were not worried personally by the lyrics, but were worried about what funders might think. The situation was resolved after 'I stomped my feet a bit', by putting 'a disclaimer really' on the album sleeve, 'saying we had to deal with certain stereotypes and to raise awareness of some of the issues'.

Telling 2: Percy says he 'immediately went bananas' when the issue was raised but that the disclaimer solution worked. In the end, 'everybody was happy' and 'everybody calmed down', although 'everybody fell out' for a while. 'Myself and Agnes had a bit of a – well not a fall out – I said something in the heat of the moment ...', it all became a bigger issue than it should have, 'but I can completely and utterly understand why'. He felt Agnes perceived he was over-reacting, but the problem was actually 'the tone of my voice was probably not correct in the way I responded initially ...' What he said was misunderstood as a result, but in the end it was 'all ironed out, which was the main thing – everybody was friends and ... happy, and the whole thing [album] was put to bed, more importantly'.

Telling 3: 'Stefan phoned me up at 7 o'clock on a Friday night and dropped it on me – "there's this song", and I'm just going bananas ...' He emailed Agnes (immediately) and Stefan (next day). Each replied, explaining they each felt the song was unacceptable. A three-way email exchange ensued over the weekend. During this time Percy said 'I was tearing my hair out' and had a 'weekend of just being fuming, man'. He was still angry by Monday morning, when he had a phone conversation with Agnes as she travelled to work on the train. During the conversation, he tried to say it would have been best not to show the festival organisers – including Agnes – the lyrics out of context (because of the ensuing problems) but it sounded as if he was saying, 'you have caused all these problems'. Agnes got upset and 'started crying on the train ... [She hung up] ... I phoned back ...' Agnes then explained the wider picture and Percy saw the problem from her perspective. He explained that because he had been 'fuming' all weekend, 'I got to the point where words were flying out of my mouth without necessarily me thinking about what they might be. Unfortunately it all went pear shaped ... [Agnes crying], but it was fine – we did not fall out over it long term, just for five minutes'.

R3 had not yet heard the Controversial Song and borrowed the album from R2. R2 decided not to say which the Controversial Song was to see if it were obvious to the first-time listener. R3 decided that it was track Y and then cross-checked with the printed lyrics.

R3 was really pleased and emailed R1 and R2 to tell them that it *was* possible to identify the Controversial Song from listening to it, although R3 did not think the song lyrics reflected Stefan's dramatic description (rape/incest):

> wouldn't get wound up about it … Interesting insight to Stefan's thinking though. (R3, email)

R2 replied:

> No speedboat for you! Sorry, you don't win the prize: track Y is *not* the song. (R2, email)

R3 was puzzled. We agreed to talk further when we reconvened for another analysis session later that morning. Meantime, R3 read the interview transcripts, looking for information about the song. R2 arrived. R2 and R3 laughed about R3's choice of the wrong track, although R3 continued to be puzzled and sought clarification from R2 about which track was, in fact, the Controversial Song. R2 said it was track X, written by Ben.

This confused R3 more, who agreed that the transcripts referred to Ben, but thought it was not Ben A but Ben B, who was the main writer on a song performed by Wilf. R2 and R3 looked carefully at the transcripts together before the others arrived: Percy and Stefan both say clearly that Ben B was the writer of the Controversial Song. This meant track Y *was* the Controversial Song, *not* track X. R1 arrived and R2 and R3 shared this new information amongst the research team.

This felt like a dramatic moment because just as Stefan, Agnes and Percy had apparently formed very certain views based on their core practices, we as researchers had constructed our interpretations based on a clear and certain view of which the Controversial Song was. We were forcibly struck by this and experienced a mixture of emotions about this insight which felt like a bombshell dropping within our core research practice. One reaction was laughter (the confusion over the tracks and 'Bens' seemed funny) and another was relief (that we noticed this and found the correct Controversial Song). However, R2 felt anxious about what the rest of us thought of this 'mistake', and R1 was worried about the implications of this discovery for our analysis. When R4 arrived and heard what had happened, we all laughed (some nervously) together.

> Interlude 3
>
> We were forcibly struck by what felt like a revelation about the song. We realised we had not seen this detail which was 'hidden' when 'in plain view' (Shotter, 2006). We called this our 'Starbuck moment', reflecting situations where theoretical knowledge has been based on inferences drawn from erroneous data analysis (Starbuck, 2006). However, this arresting moment became significant for us as it was a direct experience in our own practice of what we were seeking to understand in other people's relational practices. We realised R1 and R2's views about Percy and the Controversial Song incident had been coloured by Stefan's views: in earlier conversations with R1 (including at the festival launch event), Stefan made semi-explicit references to Percy and the song, which he re-iterated during the later pre-festival interview with the whole research team. We realised we had not 'heard' these views being contradicted in the subsequent interviews about the song with Percy and Agnes. Our view had become prematurely certain.

At this point, we did not know what Ben B – the writer of the actual Controversial Song –and Wilf (who performed it) thought about the song. R2 approached them for interviews through which we learned that Ben B had written the song whilst distracted; he was unhappy with its quality:

> I think that it is the worst thing that I have ever done in my entire career … there was a football match on the television and I was aware that I had to write this song … I just wrote it through one half of the match and I sent it to Wilf… the thing that I sent him was just supposed to be the first draft … and he changed

about three or four words and then did it exactly as it was. For me it was totally unfinished and a little kind of crazy…. (Ben B)

Ben B explained that the song was about the stigma often associated with the societal 'group', told from a child's perspective. This meant that several apparently problematic sentiments in the song actually meant the reverse of a literal reading. Ben B had not intended it to be in any way controversial – nor did he feel it was a significant piece of art, worthy of strong defence by Percy.

It seemed that both Stefan and Percy had interpreted significances into the song that were not there from the perspective of the writer. So although our earlier conclusion about Stefan and Percy forming certainty of knowledge claims from within their respective core practices was based on an analysis of the wrong song, it turns out that a similar interpretation may be drawn about the right song, based on our data.

Discussion

We explored the construction of knowing between and through relational practices in dialogical MOR (Cunliffe, 2002a; Nicolini, 2011), including the dialectical elements of conflict, tension and opposing views this entails (Beech et al., 2010; Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002; Lorino et al., 2011). We were interested in extending the understanding of how these relational practices may interpenetrate one another, such that it makes a difference to the process of engaged MOR. Arresting moments are understood to be important in the process of constructing new knowledge as they bring the background, taken-for-granted aspects of practice to the fore (Nicolini, 2007; Shotter, 2005, 2008). Although the importance of arresting moments in practice has been emphasised (Cunliffe, 2001; Shotter, 1997), little has been written about them in empirical terms, especially not within MOR (Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009). We discuss two arresting moments, having identified one and experienced the other, through our empirical study of the music festival. We therefore offer empirical insights about – and from within – relational MOR practices.

The two moments we discuss differed from one another in the way they occurred in respect of the relational practices involved, the level of emotion expressed, the depth of reflexivity engendered by the experience, and the subsequent difference this made in the ongoing construction of knowing in engaged MOR. Arresting Moment 1 occurred in the interactions generated through festival organising, WBAD and musical relational practices, focusing on the lyrics of the Controversial Song. Arresting Moment 2 occurred after the festival during the course of research practice.

We found that practitioners' beliefs and understandings became amenable to change, depending on the level of reflexivity such moments engendered. This produced the potential for all practitioners (including us) to develop new knowledge about themselves, others, their own practices and perhaps the practices of others.

The onset of arresting moments seems to be associated with almost excessive certainty in some practitioners' views. We found this was associated initially with reflex reactions (Cunliffe, 2002b) when practitioners tended to act immediately and unthinkingly. These reactions preceded both arresting moments. We identified examples prior to Arresting Moment 1: Stefan's reaction to the Controversial Song, Percy's reaction to Stefan's intervention, and Agnes' reaction to Percy's stance regarding artistic freedom and song lyrics. We then experienced an example ourselves, prior to Arresting Moment 2, in R2's reaction to R3's identification of the 'wrong' song.

Reflex reactions highlighted corresponding increases in levels of practitioners' certainty in their own positions *and* tension or conflict with the 'otherness' of others (and their respective – increasingly certain – positions). In our empirical example, this produced an oppositional stand-off between practitioners whose core practices differed, but who were involved in other associated

Table 2. Relational practices around arresting moments.

Practitioner	Situation	Reflex (Re)action	Core Practice/ Associated Practice	Emotion	Interactions	Ensuing Reflexivity
Stefan	Reads song lyrics Festival launch/ concerts	Contact Percy – exclude song	WBAD/festival organising	Anger Distaste Anxiety	Initial 'stand off' Avoided Percy Finally agreed compromise	None: excess certainty Interview with all research team members – reflexivity
Percy	Receives Stefan's email Phones Agnes	Email Stefan and Agnes Call back to make amends	Music/music organising	Anger Anxiety Guilt	Initial 'stand off' Talks to Agnes Finally agreed compromise	None: excess certainty Conversation Discussion with R2 Reflexivity (and self-reflexivity?)
Agnes	Reads lyrics Phone call #1 Phone call #2	Cries Hangs up Uneasy resolution resolution	(=) Festival organising – WBAD	Anxiety Upset Embarrassment Anxiety Anxiety	Email – Stefan and Percy Talked to Percy WBAD/ music/ festival steering committee	Interview with R1 Reflexivity
R1	Pre-festival interviews Festival launch/ concerts Analysing data	'knows' which song it is Certainty re song	Research	Shock Anxiety	Stefan Stefan and Percy R2, R3, R4	Open minded Developing certainty/ Excess certainty Discussion re 'wrong' song – Reflexivity and self-reflexivity
R2	As for R1 Analysing data	As for R1 Certainty re song Percy: interview	Research	Anxiety Embarrassment	Stefan/Percy R2, R3, R4 Percy	Open minded, Excess certainty, Reflexivity and self-reflexivity

practices to meet a mutual aim (like producing the album to promote positive WBAD messages). We suggest excessive certainty may be associated with (possibly erroneous) beliefs which practitioners hold dearly, as in our examples. Such beliefs seem to be associated with taken-for-granted aspects of practitioners' core practices (see Table 2).

Chia and Holt (2008) suggest that such positions illustrate beliefs which are not open to doubt. Based on our data, we suggest such beliefs are indicative of strength of feeling and emotions (Coupland et al., 2008; Cunliffe, 2002a).

Practitioners' emotions become evident in their descriptions of how and why things happen in ongoing practising, often based in their core practice. They may invoke specific or generalised others who call forth a particular positioning from the practitioner, for example, potential victims calling forth defence (Beech et al., 2010; Gabriel, 1995). Both Stefan and Percy justified their reflex (re) actions to one another in this way by invoking, respectively, a subset of the societal group affected by WBAD and musicians involved with the album. They distanced themselves from their emotions (distaste, anger, anxiety) by purporting to speak on behalf of these 'victim' groups. But they also revealed the depth of their emotions through their excessively certain and oppositional positions (Coupland et al., 2008). This simultaneous emotional closeness and distance seemed to bring even stronger emotions to the fore (Hibbert et al., 2010), including shame, guilt and embarrassment.

In such situations, this may increase emotive force. When this becomes sufficiently strong and is important to the practitioner, the tension increases; when there is a similar but opposing view from another practitioner, a division may occur between practices, almost like a sea wall. This may produce an arresting moment, as the tensions become so heightened by emotive force that these crash like waves over this wall between the practices. This is what happened when Agnes cried in the interaction with Percy: according to their accounts of the interaction, Percy identified feelings of shame and guilt, whilst Agnes felt embarrassed. Such embodied reactions are examples of 'reminders' (Cunliffe, 2002a: 135; Chia and Holt, 2008; Shotter, 1997, 2006) of the background of ongoing practising, which 'reveal' practitioners' deeply held beliefs and values to them in the arresting moment. Through this disruption, practitioners may experience a change in their values and beliefs, and even in themselves, (Hibbert et al., 2010), although our findings suggest this is by no means guaranteed.

Additionally, in relational practice situations, excessive certainty may indicate when practitioners have been in close proximity to another related practice, such that views from another practice become part of their own practice. This happened to two of the research team in our example – R1 and R2 – who had been closely involved with Stefan's festival organising practice, and took up a certain position about the Controversial Song. This position was erroneous but they became certain of its veracity: despite hearing clear accounts to the contrary in interviews and seeing the transcripts, they did not notice this was the case.

This illustrates one instance when practices may have interpenetrated one another (Hibbert et al., 2010; Schatzki, 2003). When premature or erroneously excessive certainty from one practice is produced in a related practice, practitioners may become emotionally committed to a belief, such that they unwittingly build up an emotional defence of the position. It is only when this position is disrupted that alternative views come to the fore. Therefore emotive force seems initially to reinforce, but subsequently may disrupt, excessive certainty. This may produce an arresting moment through which new insights become visible. These insights seem to be related to the background details of practice such that what is taken-for-granted is rendered suddenly accessible in a striking way to the practitioners so that they, and/or their views, change.

When reflexivity becomes evident like this, practitioners suddenly have the ability to 'see' the taken-for-granted elements of their practices that they normally do not think about, but which are there at all times (Shotter, 2005). In MOR, reflexivity is an everyday aspect of certain methodological research approaches (Alvesson et al., 2008; Johnson and Duberley, 2003). But to what extent researchers are able to radically question the values and assumptions in the background of their own research practice (Cunliffe, 2002a; Hibbert et al., 2010) may depend on the presence of prior reflex reactions to problems encountered in the process of engaged MOR. Conflict and heightened emotional tension between practices may be the catalyst for new insights and

the potential generation of knowing in engaged MOR, such that practitioners from all relevant practices – including research practice – may be changed and know something new. This is a second instance when it would become evident as to whether (or to what extent) practices had interpenetrated one another, this time possibly producing new insights.

We do not to suggest there is a hidden repository of knowledge awaiting discovery, nor do we seek to create a dichotomous view (Lorino et al., 2011) of background and articulated knowing in practice. Rather, we suggest that the particular aspect of practice which is known and fore-grounded is related to the particular circumstance in which it occurs. Emotions, certainty and reflex reactions are all related to the occurrence of arresting moments, but it is in the moment-by-moment relational practising that the specific conditions which produce them are themselves produced.

We are not saying these moments may be engineered: far from it. But we are suggesting that enhancing our understanding of the circumstances preceding them may help us to identify when they may be happening, or are about to happen. When we feel embodied emotional responses such that we act without thinking, this might make us aware that we may be about to notice something about the background of our practice. Although uncomfortable, this may help us to understand ongoing relational practising better. Of course, such a way of becoming aware could itself become a normal everyday part of our practice, such that it becomes part of the background of our newly developed practice; we would then need a new way of disrupting what could become the new taken-for-granted aspect of ongoing relational practising.

Conclusion

In this paper we have addressed the question of how relational practices interpenetrate one another through the process of engaged MOR, such that it makes a difference and new knowing may be produced. We extend current understanding of the dialogical – and dialectical – processes involved in MOR in relation to other practices. Our contribution has been to explore the qualities of arresting moments in relational practices, to show what happens before and after such moments, and to identify the role of emotive force and reflexivity in this aspect of a process of producing knowledge.

We found that arresting moments are not simply an accumulation of either reflex actions or reflection; they are qualitatively different. They potentially reconstitute practitioners' perspectives in situations where related practices have become conflicted and it is difficult to find a way of 'going on' (Shotter 1997: 350). One consequence of this quality is that relational practices may interpenetrate one another: when associated practices acquire new meanings, core practices may also change. Certainty and emotive force provide impetus for these shifts in meaning, which disrupt existing practice. This may happen when practices are in relation to one another: within-practice views can become entrenched, such that practitioners 'know' their practice view is naturally 'right'. Hence, if this is breached and a break through occurs, it can seem of great consequence because what is being changed is inherently complex, contextual, embodied practice. The vehemence of 'known' certainty can increase as tensions between practices intensify, as we saw above in relations between organising and musical practices; the imagined difference of the other reinforcing certainty within the core practice.

Although tension and conflict play a significant role in constituting situations which provoke disruptive arresting moments, the potential break through appears to occur through empathetic connection. Empathy in this sense incorporates the ability to imagine the thoughts and feelings of the other as if they were one's own. In the arresting moments we discuss, the break through occurred when emotions such as feeling upset, embarrassed, anxious, guilty or happy were uppermost in the

practising. These human feelings enabled people to experience a jolt in their 'known' certainty within their practice. In that moment, there was an opportunity to reframe their core practice.

An implication of this conclusion is that practitioners in organisations and/or MOR should seek arresting moments as a way of developing knowledge. However, in our analysis, arresting moments are events that occur to people rather than being things that people do. Therefore, there is no recipe for 'having an arresting moment'. However, it is helpful to be aware that they are not merely an accumulation of reflection or reflex action. Neither is it necessary to try to establish longitudinal empathy with others (although there may be other good reasons to do so). The first point is to be able to recognise the context within which an arresting moment may be helpful and possible. We suggest this may be when there is excessive certainty imbued with emotive force, tension and opposition to or distance from another relational practice. Emotions may include feeling that one has the moral high ground, that one 'knows', or satisfaction in being right.

Second, the reconstituting quality of an arresting moment, experienced through empathetic connections, can challenge and override embodied certainty in core practices. Therefore, practitioners in research or other forms of practice need to be open to such possibilities and be willing to experiment with such changes. Associated emotions can be feeling upset or even horrified. Therefore, there is a need to be willing to move from comfort to discomfort, from certainty to disrupted thought. Although the practitioner may not be able to simply make this happen, it may be that 'what if….' thought experiments, asking, for example, 'what if I felt differently about this, what would that do to my state of knowing?', could help to engender conditions for arresting moments to occur.

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