A perspective on ethical agency in complex adaptive systems:

Providing a philosophical description and analysis of the Cynefin Framework and Sensemaker Suite™

by
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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own, original work, that is has not been submitted in its entirety or in part for obtaining any qualification at any other university, and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged and referenced.

Sara Susanna Williams December 2014

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Abstract

This study explores the implication of complexity theory on our understanding of knowledge before proposing a cognitive shift, to move from a rule-directed business ethics to a more responsive and relational approach to ethics in organisations. I argue that storytelling may be able to accommodate more of the agonistic nature of complex systems while still playing an orientating role, without suffering from the deterministic implications of central control structures like codes and rules.

I base the study on three assumptions: (1) Ethical decision-making and accountability in complex systems are relational rather than based purely on reason and on universally accepted codes or principles; (2) Storytelling can contribute to sense-making in complex situations and to our understanding of appropriate/inappropriate behaviours in ethically challenging situations, and (3) Pattern recognition and analyses could be helpful in reinforcing positive behaviours and weakening ethically risky behaviours.

I approach the study through the lenses provided by Paul Cilliers, Michel Foucault and Alisdair MacIntyre. Through Cilliers, I refer to Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jacques Derrida's notions on the dilemma of knowledge and the fragmentation of meaning in postmodernism. A reading of Foucault provides a view on how the ethical agent emerges through participation in power relationships and through personal practices on becoming an ethical agent. MacIntyre provides a view on how personal history, duty and roles in a community, and the history and traditions of a community combine to define a subject's moral identity. Despite differences in philosophical perspective between MacIntyre (a Communitarian approach) and Foucault (the development of ethical agency through participation in power struggles), both perspectives on agency provide an important basis for the development of my own understanding of the relational character of ethics and the development of ethical agency through agents' participation in relationships.

These philosophical theories provide an entry point into discussing business dilemmas relating to organisational culture and subcultures, and the use of stories to embed ethical values in organisations: Joanne Martin's perspective on cultural studies provide a view on how our approach to culture studies can limit our understanding of what culture entails; David Bøje and Ken Baskin's perspectives on storytelling provide a link to complexity theory and the role of living stories in making sense of complex relationships. Cilliers and Karl Weick provide insights

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on sense-making as a human capability that allows us to organise and simplify our world: Weick, through his description of pattern-creation and pattern-entrainment, shows how certain patterns can be reinforced and others weakened, in order to develop ethical sensibilities in an organisation. Through an exploration of these theories, I propose that storytelling, as a natural sense-making ability of humans, can be integrated into organisational ethics programmes.

I finally analyse the Cynefin Framework and Sensemaker Suite™ process and methods and discuss some possibilities and tensions in using the framework as intervention in enabling ethical sensibilities in complex organisations.

Keywords

Complexity, organisational culture, relationality, organisational ethics, storytelling, antenarrative, sense-making, power, knowledge, pattern recognition, pattern entrainment, Cynefin Framework, Sensemaker Suite.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my son, Quinten E. Williams. Thank you for having confidence in me, for many hours of conversation, and for being my sound board.

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To my supervisors, Proff. Mollie Painter-Morland and Ernst Wolff, thank you. I am grateful for your guidance, your moral support and the critical role you have played in the shaping of my philosophical thinking.

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Introduction

1. The turn of complexity: introducing a new paradigm for business ethics

Complexity theory, described by Richardson, Cilliers and Lissack as a "gray" science for the "stuff in between" provides a new paradigm for business. This "new paradigm" rejects an approach to business that is based on efficiencies, hierarchical decision-making, and command-and-control leadership styles in favour of an approach that is based on "distributed decision-making, individual autonomy and innovation".[1]

It would be reasonable to ask why it is necessary to look for a new paradigm for business, especially when entering a discourse on business ethics. Isn't business ethics a case of following rules and complying with specific ethical guidelines and codes? Isn't ethics something that must be codified, applied, learnt and controlled? From another perspective one could ask whether business ethics is possible at all, or a contradiction in terms: Can one be ethical in business, when the purpose of business is aimed at maximising profit?

When ethics is considered from a logical-analytical perspective, it seems to point to models of the world that simplify reality to such an extent that it is possible to create methods that would enable individuals to make ethical decisions. However, these models have an almost non-human, mechanistic quality to them,[2] and are mostly aimed at improving efficiencies and providing controls through which compliance can be measured. Apart from their inability to provide clear answers to ethical dilemmas and aporias, where no clear answer is possible, they are created from a nominal perspective in which the purpose of the organisation is central. The questions one can ask in this regard can include: Who made the rules and for which purposes? Who decides on the meaning of rules? How are they applied? To whom do they apply?, et cetera.

However, if we acknowledge the humanness of business, it brings business ethics into the realm of an ethics that is focussed more on building trust relationships between people than on creating rules for conduct. An ethics based on relational networks is also more responsive to changing circumstances.[3] Being relational, ethics implies accountability based on a closer relationship with those affected by the organisation and the putting in place of processes that

[1] Richardson, Cilliers and Lissack, "Complexity Science: A 'Gray' Science", 31.
[2] R. Edward Freeman, "Foreword" in *Business Ethics and Continental Philosophy*, xiii.
[3] The ideas of "relationality" and "relational constructivism", with specific reference to the building of interpersonal trust through interpersonal exchanges, have been further developed in the field of leadership by theorists such as Holly H. Brower, F. David Schoorman, Hwee Hoon Tan, Mary Uhl-Bien, Ann Cunliffe, Robert Cooper, and Dian Marie Hosking, amongst others.

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would allow closer interaction. The problem however is that, for business to be properly and fairly conducted in a global market, rules are necessary. How does one conduct a relational ethics when the rules might dictate otherwise? This is a dilemma that mirrors the dilemma faced by individuals in businesses: On the one hand there is a requirement for governance, decision-making structures, processes and control systems in an organisation. These structures are necessary to maintain fiduciary relationships between the management of an organisation and its stakeholders. On the other hand, practical experience has shown that human relationships and interactions do not conform to law-like generalisations.

It is in this way that complexity theory provides a bridge between the rule-based perspective on ethics and a view on humanity that is based on an ontology of what it means to be human, a self in relationships to others, who are also selves. Complexity theory acknowledges the nebulous boundaries between things that seem to be ordered and others that seem to happen in a disorderly manner. When complexity theory is read through a poststructuralist lens, it considers everything that exists and interacts in the world to form part of one complex system that cannot be modelled or understood in its entirety. It is sensitive to the multiplicity of interconnected elements that are part of a human system that connect non-linearly, and respond on the original interactions of the system, so that change happens continuously and unpredictably. Because of this sensitivity to the non-linear relationships and interactions in the system, it can deal with the paradoxical nature of human relationships. These paradoxes can be seen in the conflicts in interest, different experiences, intentions, goals and practices that are all part of the system, and influence one another, as well as other components of the system and the system itself. [4]

The importance of this understanding of relational networks for business ethics is that no part of the network of relationships can be studied or acted on in isolation. Ethics, culture, agency and accountability, as well as the stories we tell about our experiences and actions and the way they are interpreted, emerge from the interactions in the network of relationships. They can only be made sense of within the context of the relational network. It would therefore be important to understand that “emergence” is not considered to be the byproduct of interaction, or a mere situational, surface phenomenon, but, is in fact, the basis of any order that exists. In this regard, complexity theory, specifically the strain of complexity theory that is influenced by poststructuralist theories, challenges certain ontological assumptions of surface versus depth, or fact versus value.

[4] Bevan and Werhane, “Stakeholder Theory”, 47.

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The "fact/value dichotomy" points to the fallacy of the separation thesis, namely that we can separate facts and values in our minds and language, whereas description (facts) and evaluation (based on values) are, instead, entangled in our minds and language.[5] Building on Putnam's theory of the fallacy of the fact/value dichotomy, Purnell and Freeman describe this dichotomy as problematic when it contributes to a "closed-core institution" where ethical decision-making is considered to be distinct from the organisation's core business, and causes a "blind spot [that] stifles meaningful exchanges with stakeholders attempting the need for reform".[6] Instead, they point out that the fact/value dichotomy can be overcome when ethical decision-making is considered less as a value judgement and more as "creating an environment for open conversation throughout an institution and its stakeholders".[7]

In a similar way the concept of the autonomous rational agent can be challenged with the theory that identity is relationally grounded[8] and can be considered from multiple perspectives.[9] Learning can be considered as a relational activity with social learning systems such as communities of practice,[10] rather than a top-down transfer of knowledge. In this regard, knowledge is considered to be socially constructed and distributed.[11] Emergence is thus closely related to the act of relating (or "relationality"),[12] which can be described as a "constitutive feature of human agency" and the "continuous work of connecting and disconnecting in a fluctuating network of existential events".[13]

Many studies through various perspectives have been done on business ethics. There are also many studies on the implications of complexity theory for organisational structures. The argument of this dissertation, in particular, has been influenced by Cilliers, who has drawn the implications of postmodernism and complexity for ethics, and Woermann, who has made a convincing argument for a complex ethics through a postmodern perspective. I hope to contribute to this discourse by building on their arguments to inform my own perspective on ethical agency and accountability, which develop as an emergent property of self-organising systems. Through the theories of other complexity theorists such as Bøje, Baskin and Weick, I

[5] Purnell and Freeman point to Hilary Putnam's work, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomomy and Other Essays*, which they say was able to "unwind" the fact/value dichotomy described by pragmatist scholars John Dewey and Richard Rorty. Putnam points out that it is not possible to separate our thinking into an evaluative part (normative) and a descriptive part (narrative), but that our assumptions and values are always present when we talk about concepts, even though they might not be explicitly stated. (Hilary Putnam. *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.

[6] Purnell and Freeman, "Stakeholder Theory, Fact/Value Dichotomy", 109–116.

[7] Ibid, 110.

[8] Uhl-Bien, "Relational Leadership Theory", 654–676.

[9] Gee, "Identity as an Analytic Lens", 99-125.

[10] Wenger, "Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems", 225-246.

[11] Uhl-Bien, "Relational Leadership Theory, 654–676.

[12] Cooper, "Peripheral Vision: Relationality", 1689–1710.

[13] Ibid, 1689.

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hope to show how storytelling can help us situate human relationships within a specific context that would enable us to make sense of them, while, through our sense-making abilities, we can become ethical agents who consider ethics as relational, and above all, as an interactive practice rather than pure obedience to a set of rules.

2. Aim

The objective of this study is to unpack the implications of complex adaptive systems theory and the notion of self-organisation for organisational culture and ethical behaviour, and discover the philosophical questions that can facilitate ethical and morally responsive decision-making in organisations. The study aims to provide a perspective on ethics and agency in complex adaptive systems through the philosophical lenses of: (1) complex adaptive systems from a poststructuralist position (Paul Cilliers), (2) the development of the ethical subject through caring of the self (Michel Foucault), and (3) the ethical subject as a member of a community (Alasdair MacIntyre).

By doing this, the study aims to offer a contribution to the philosophical discourse on what constitutes ethical decision-making in complex moments by: (1) pointing out a weakness in excessive rule-based and controlled environments to enable employees to make ethical, responsive and accountable decisions when confronted with complex issues; (2) providing insight into the development of the ethical subject who is actively involved in power relationships, and can contribute as an individual agent to the creation of an ethical environment through his/her influence on and interactions with various others; (3) providing insight into how the subject's actions are embedded in and informed by his/her personal history and the culture of his/her community; (4) pointing out the tensions that might exist between an individual's personal ethical culture, which is informed by his/her experiences and the culture of his or her personal life, and that of the business, (5) pointing out how storytelling can become the means for better understanding of self and others, as well as a material body that also influences and is influenced by the interactions between various other agents, and finally, (6) suggesting essential questions that would engage with an ethics of complexity.[14]

The study will point towards the questions that need to be asked to aid the development of an ethical and responsive culture in which individuals can respond to their environment appropriately and responsibly. It will take the view that ethics and moral decision-making are

[14] Woermann and Cilliers, "The Ethics of Complexity and the Complexity of Ethics", 447.
Woermann and Cilliers describe an ethics of complexity as "as something that constitutes both our knowledge and us, rather than as a normative system that dictates right action." In these terms ethics is inherently part of any real engagement with complex phenomena, which includes us as individual agents who make models of the world, based on certain choices. In this regard, an ethics of complexity points to a self-critical attitude when we frame and model our reality. It also points to the recognition of the limitations of our knowledge and an engagement with the knowledge we are creating. An ethics of complexity therefore implies a descriptive and normative approach to the world that is complex in itself.

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challenging issues in complexity theory, and important issues to consider when doing organisational culture and values research and interventions. The study hopes to point out that making ethical decisions is not something that could happen by merely following a set of rules or principles that govern behaviours, but that ethical decision-making in fast-changing and complex environments involves a process of probing and sensing what the appropriate action would be in particular instances, and then acting accordingly. These instances are typically instances where there are tensions between the rules that exist, emergent properties of the system, and the institutional culture that governs the way in which individuals go about following, or not following, these rules. Apart from the apparent tensions that are derived from power struggles, tension may also exist when decision-makers are or become aware of their own limitations in controlling the known and unknown consequences of their actions on their immediate Other,[15] while, at the same time, they remain cognisant of their responsibilities towards the institution, as well as their accountability to others. In the aftermath of global scandals such as Enron, World Con and Tycon, this acknowledgement of organisations' accountability towards other stakeholders who are affected by their operations, and not only to shareholders who gain or lose from the organisation's financial and operational performance, has found an institutional grounding in the drive towards managing organisational culture within governance frameworks such as King III.

Governance frameworks are aimed at fighting systemic corruption by providing a framework for business according to which they are answerable to their stakeholders for their operational activities. Two basic approaches can be followed, namely a "comply or else" approach, through which non-compliant companies face legal sanctions if they do not follow the rules, or a "comply or explain" approach, which allows companies to voluntarily comply to a code of principles and actions in addition to certain governance issues that are legislated. The latter approach is followed by South Africa and other members of the Commonwealth and the European Union.[16]

The building of an ethical corporate culture is described in King III "Practice notes" as "the ultimate objective of managing organizational integrity".[17] It makes provision for both formal ways of ethical culture building and informal aspects of culture-building.[18]

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[15] The capitalisation of "Other" refers to a Levinasian use of Other as "not the same" but a "face-to-face encounter" with another being, where the self, or the I, is singled out by the Other and drawn from its "context of self-interest" into giving an account to the Other. (Bettina Bergo, "Emmanuel Levinas", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.)

[16] Institute of Directors in South Africa, King Report on Governance for South Africa 2009.

[17] Institute of Directors in South Africa, King III Practice Notes, Chapter 1, "Ethics Management for a Culture of Organisational Integrity", 2.

[18] Ibid.

Formal ways of ethical culture building includes: compiling an ethics risk and opportunity profile, developing a code of ethics, integrating ethical standards, and reporting on and disclosing the company's

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"Managing organizational integrity [or culture]" remains a difficult issue, however, as organisational culture is in itself complex, consisting of various interrelated factors and relationships that influence behaviours, attitudes and values of people within an organisation. In this regard, the idea that, when people engage in social interaction, their ideas, perceptions and interpretations of events converge,[19] but also undergo change, underpins the notion of the emergence of patterns and a pattern-based understanding related to complex adaptive systems. As it would be useful for business to have a process and narrative methods that can be applied to make sense of informal, complex factors that influence the ethical character and culture of an organisation, a philosophical analysis is made of Cognitive Edge's Cynefin Framework and Sensemaker Suite™ in the final chapter.

The Cynefin Framework and Sensemaker Suite™ are a sense-making framework and research instrument that have been developed for complex social and organisational research and knowledge management. A philosophical analysis of the framework and the instrument will provide a view on their potential usefulness for ethics research and the implementation of an ethics framework in complex organisational environments. For this analysis, it will be important to understand how people make decisions by recognising and entraining patterns, and how the organisational culture and its ethics could be influenced by making certain values more salient (thus more visible as patterns) than others in an organisation.

3. Introducing the argument

The perspective I take in the development of the argument in this study is that, when ethics and ethical agency are read through the lens of complexity, it implies a relational process in which identity is part of the emergent properties of the system.[20] The individual is never the pivotal point, as a "'relational' orientation starts with processes and not persons".[21] In this regard, the notion that an individual's identity is bounded, and that he/she is "a self-motivated human agent that acts on its environment" is challenged.[22] I base this argument on the critique in poststructuralist literature of the autonomous, rational subject, who is capable of rational reasoning and able to distance him/herself from his/her physical or social environment, personal attitudes and beliefs to evaluate his or her internal motivations.[23] Instead, I support the argument that agent and environment should not be considered as "relatively independent" categories of things, but rather as interrelated, or "complexly mixed together as a field of dynamic interchanges in which locatable terms lose themselves in a dense interspace of

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ethics performance. Informal ways of ethical culture building includes understanding informal norms, role modelling and mentoring, rituals, myths and stories, and language use.

[19] Ford and Seers, "Relational Leadership and Team Climates", 258 – 270.

[20] Cunliffe and Eriksen, "Relational Leadership, 1425 – 1449.

[21] Uhl-Bien, "Relational Leadership and Gender", 655.

[22] Cooper, "Peripheral Vision", 1689-1710.

[23] http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/personal-autonomy/

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relations".[24] This interspace becomes the instigator of human practices, the "prime mover of human agency in the continuous work of cultivating its world".[25] Our multiple and multi-faceted interactions as members of an expansive, non-linear network of relationships contribute to the continuous adjustments in the system. Through feedback on our actions and interactions, and by giving feedback on others' actions and interactions, our perceptions of who we are in relationship to the many others with whom we interact, are affected. In this way, an individual's concept of self as an ethical agent amongst other ethical agents emerges through his/her participation in power relationships. This implies that human agency and identity come forth through complex interactions and interdependencies, or as Uhl-Bien *et al* put it, through, "the tensions and qualities that exist in the interactions and interdependencies among agents (people, ideas, etc.) and their social context, their hierarchical divisions, organizations and environments".[26] Through these interactions, and the limitations created in response to the effect these interactions have on one another, we organise our environments and can be held accountable for our actions to others in the contexts we share. This means that our ability to perceive, remember and recognise recurring narrative patterns that emerge through our interactions allow us to make sense of, learn from, and respond to other agents.

This ability for pattern recognition and entrainment, I argue, allow us to cope with the multiplicity of phenomena we perceive, as well as the continuously changing environment towards which we contribute through our actions and interactions. However, I also point out that the environment within which we live and work forms our attitudes and serves as cultural attractor that influence the way we perceive and give meaning to our responsibility and accountability to one another. In this regard, culture, learning from one another, as well as the rules of our societies and organisations by which we live, are important factors in creating ethically responsive and accountable environments that enable individuals to live with the awareness of others and their needs. In addition, learning, and becoming aware of who we are in our relationships, constitute a continuous adapting process through which we are transformed, or grow into ethically aware and responsive beings.[27]

Being a specimen of the species Homo sapiens does not make a person ethical by default. Ethical agency is not situated in a beginning or end product, but can be described as a transformative process by which agency is socially constructed through the relational dynamics

[24]Cooper, "Peripheral Vision", 1690.
[25]Ibid.
[26] Uhl-Bien, Marion and McKelvey, "Complexity Leadership Theory" 298–318.
[27] Uhl-bien, Marion and McKelvey, "Complexity Leadership Theory", 299.
Uhl-Bien *et al* describe a similar process for three types of leadership that develop when complex adaptive systems (CAS) are enabled within bureaucratic systems, namely (1) administrative leadership ("grounded in traditional, bureaucratic notions of hierarchy, alignment and control"), (2) enabling leadership ("leadership that structures and enables conditions such that CAS are able to optimally address creative problem solving, adaptability, and learning"), and (3) adaptive leadership ("leadership as a generative dynamic that underlies emergent change activities").

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that take place throughout the system, and structured through the discipline that develops from within the system.[28] For business to be considered ethical in its relationships with its various stakeholders, it would be important to understand its history and strengthen its purpose, and the values and codes that allow people to contribute to constantly creating the ethical environment. In this regard, storytelling and other narrative ways of interacting with the various people who make up, or are closely related to, the business's strategic and functional areas, can offer a way of building trust relationships. These relationships are not limited to internal and external stakeholders or shareholders, but include other people and entities in the business's relational network, such as local communities, the environment and other organisations.[29]

Trust is related to the ability to speak out, knowing that another is hearing and responding and will not take advantage of one's "willingness to be vulnerable to another party".[30] Trust is therefore one of the necessary attributes that can develop from the sharing of stories, and that leads to more responsive ethical relationships and a greater sense of personal accountability to one another. In this regard, I argue that participation and interaction of many, diverse agents sharing their stories allow patterns to emerge and allow meaningful and trusting relationships to develop.[31] These are strengths to build on in creating ethically sensible work and social environments. However, for ethical and trust relationships to develop, ethics must become a practice embedded in the purpose and vision of an organisation and practised as a value in all of its daily operations.[32] It has to be kept in mind though that the notion of trust is in itself a complex relational issue, which is related to ethics and embedded in relational networks.[33] However, it cannot be done justice to in the scope of this dissertation.

The viewpoint of this study has been informed by the debate between the proponents of a strictly rule-based and compliance based approach to ethics[34] and those who propose a more

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[28] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 117.
[29] Institute of Directors in South Africa, King III Practice Notes, Chapters 1 and 2.
[30] Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, "An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust", 709–734.
[31] Brower, Schoorman and Hwee Hoon Tan, "A Model of Relational Leadership", 227–250.
[32] Institute of Directors in South Africa, King III Practice Notes, Chapter 1, 5.
[33] Brower, Schoorman and Hwee Hoon Tan, "A Model of Relational Leadership", 227–250.
An in-depth description of trust as a relational construct falls outside the scope of this dissertation but it has to be noted that trust is intertwined with the concepts of relational leadership, ethics and accountability. As Brower *et al* point out, trust is contextual, and building trust-relationships is embedded in complex relationships between leaders and team members, and amongst individuals themselves. In this regard, Brower *et al* point to differences in the way that people engage with one another, as well as in the way leaders engage with different subordinates. In their view, the element of risk and vulnerability are central to the definition of trust.
[34] Some literature on the standardisation of corporate responsibility includes: S Waddock, "Building a New Institutional Infrastructure for Corporate Responsibility", *Academy of Management Perspectives* 22 (3) (2008), 87 – 108, and S. Waddock, "Corporate Responsibility/Corporate Citizenship: the Development of a Construct", in G. Palazzo and A.G. Scherer (eds.), *Handbook of Research on Global Corporate Citizenship*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar (2008), 50 – 73; J. Nolan, "The United Nations Global Compact with Business: Hindering or Helping the Protection of Human Rights?", *University of Queensland Law Journal* 24 (2005), 121 – 124. Goldman Sachs, *Introducing GS Sustain*, (London: The Goldman Sachs Group, 2007).

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participative and relational approach to ethics practice in complex environments.[35] Rasche, for instance, distinguishes between three types of corporate standards, namely principle-based standards, 2) reporting standards aimed at standardising reporting according to comparable performance indicators (e.g. Global Reporting Initiative), and (3) certification standards, aimed at providing performance measures against which a company's performance can be audited (e.g. Social Accountability 8000).[36]

I argue that complexity thinking provides us with the means to make sense of the multiple and diverse interactions that take place in complex organisations and an understanding of how these interactions can have unintended and unexpected results. When this understanding is related to organisational ethics and business ethics practice and interventions, it is apparent that compliance to a linear set of rules or guidelines and controlled behaviours is not sufficient for ethical decision-making in dynamic business or social environments: alternative strategies for ethics practices have to be found.

These alternative strategies should allow participants to make sense of and contextualise the complexities of unanticipated ethical challenges, engage in conversation, and negotiate and participate in the ethical decision-making process – a process of participative design and distributed leadership, where, in Aughton's words, "control and co-ordination are located with the people who actually do the work".[37] In such an organisation both learning and decision-making take place in a distributed fashion as people learn from one another through discussion and the making of decisions, taking responsibility for them, and being accountable for actions related to these decisions are shared by all stakeholders.

Websites referring to various standards referred to by Rasche include:
UN Global Compact at: www.unglobalcompact.org;
Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) G3 Guidelines at: www.globalreporting.org;
Social Accountability International (SAI), SA 8000 Standard Document. New York: SAI (2008), at: www.sa-intl.org.
For a critical look at the effectiveness of the Global Compact standards, http://globalcompactcritics.blogspot.comhttp://globalcompactcritics.blogspot.com, accessed on 3 August 2014.

[35] The proponents of a more participative and relational approach to ethics practice include the primary and secondary sources used to substantiate the claims made in this dissertation. These include contemporary management theorists and philosophers such as Hugh Willmott, David Bevan and Patricia Werhane, Carl Rhodes, Mollie Painter-Morland, as well as theorists whose theories about relationality support the stance taken in this dissertation. The latter includes: Robert Cooper, Ann L. Cunliffe, Matthew Eriksen, Mary Uhl-Bien, and Holly H. Brower, F. David Schoorman and Hwee Hoon Tan, amongst others.
[36] Rasche, "Corporate Responsibility Standards", 263 – 282.
Rasche points out that there is evidence (Goldman Sachs report), that financial markets prefer organisations to implement standards because they help to anticipate business risks. A limitation in the business ethics discourse, he observes, is that business ethics literature mainly describes or evaluates the various standards from different perspectives, but does not reflect on the idea of standardising a concept such as corporate responsibility, or consider its limitations.
[37] Aughton, "Participative Design", 68.

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From the paradigm of complexity thinking, the complex organisation can therefore be described as a participative organisation that responds to internal and external interactions and interacts with its environment so that the organisation and the environment are changed through these interactions. Practically, this would require drastic fundamental changes in every aspect of organisational life, including our understanding of what ethics, as a relational and interactive activity in open organisations, entail. It would also necessitate us to reconsider our understanding of ethical agency and accountability, as well as the way in which we try to make sense of ethics challenges in complex situations, and do ethics interventions in organisations.

Complexity relates to multiple non-linear interactions taking place at the same time, influencing all interactions in the complex system. When business and society are seen through a complex lens, it would include interactions with individuals who are not of a similar mindset or part of the business culture, who form a part of the ethical relationships of the business. In this regard, one should be aware that the perspectives described in this dissertation, as well my own perspective, are fully situated in a Western mindset, and cannot be generalised as if it applied to the entire human species.[38] The practical implication for business ethics is that any interaction with another, at individual or organisational level, implies "a myriad, almost infinitive responsibilities" to one another as individuals, as well as organisations and societies. [39] We can never escape this accountability, and can never understand it fully, even though we can try to decentre ourselves as nominal agents and invite the other as a participant in our interactions. In this regard, the question, from the perspective of Levinas's egology, is whether morality is ever possible if we try to view the Other from the perspective of the self. [40] As Bevan and Werhane point out, Levinas challenges our attempt to theorise and rationalise our responsibility to a collective and not an individual responsibility. Responsibility, as they say, "does not arise from some rationalization of (stakeholder) claims, but in the encounter with the Other and outside of the self".[41] In other words, responsibility and acknowledging one's accountability to others become possible through the emergent complexity of the unexpected meeting with the Other.

For business ethics and storytelling, the implication is that an individual or organisation cannot merely "share" experiences or "tell" stories as if they are the *only* stories, without attempting to understand and consider the effect of our actions on others, and the perspectives of different

[38] Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan, "The Weirdest People in the World," accessed 19 March 2014.
[39] Bevan and Werhane, "Stakeholder Theory", 55.
[40] Bevan and Werhane describe the problem of stakeholder theory through the lens provided by Levinas's egology. Egology, as they explain, is in itself a neologism that means "knowledge in my own terms". For business ethics the implication is that, when the Other is considered in terms of the business, the various stakeholders are reduced to a group, rather than a collection of individuals. Considering the Other and my responsibility towards the Other in and on my own terms is ethically problematic.
[41] Bevan and Werhane, "Stakeholder Theory", 53.

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groups in the extended stakeholder network. We therefore need to understand the context of the interaction, and invite the others in the network to provide their stories and their own interpretations of their stories within the business and social network.

In this regard, the Cynefin Framework provides an opportunity to discover various perspectives on the world through a narrative intervention. Its related software component, Sensemaker Suite™, provides the opportunity to map and self-signify multiple, different stories from vast geographical, cultural and social areas. The mapping of multiple stories based on signifiers that emerge through these interactions are helpful to recognise recurring patterns of beliefs, behaviours, values or perceptions. These are also the strengths of the sense-making framework. However, the quality, type of questions, and perspectives implied by the questions are crucial elements to consider in the design of the signification framework, in order to uncover meaningful emergent patterns in these stories.

In an open, self-organising system ethical decisions can only be made when information flows freely, people are willing and able to listen, to disagree and to offer their insights, and to work co-dependently within certain agreed boundaries. These procedural dynamics, which allow for the openness that sustains differences, form the basic normative core of poststructuralist thinking. In this regard, Cilliers points out that Derrida's notion of différance reminds us that we cannot simply see the society as a self-contained, complete system in which the system will organise itself in the best way for its own survival. This type of closed self-organisation would not allow for transformation, but only for adaptation and evolvement.[42] In contrast, open self-organisation allows us to consider differences, as well as the past and the possibility of the future when we try to establish the meaning of an event. In this way, self-organisation, from a poststructuralist position, places the burden on us to live with the aporia that "we have to take responsibility for the future effects of our decisions, but we cannot know those effects, nor can we wait to see what they are. We have to make the decision now".[43]

In this way, the methods used to create a Cynefin Framework can be utilised to delve deeper into issues, relationships, values and actions in order to provide a discursive platform. Utilised superficially as a descriptive, categorisation framework, the Cynefin Framework and

[42] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 139.
Cilliers refers to Cornell's analysis of different interpretations of the notion that we are all constituted by a complex set of relationships. Cornell challenges the position taken by Niklas Luhman who describes society as a complex, self-organising system of which we are irrevocably part, and from which we can never escape. In this regard, Cornell points to Derrida's notion of différance as making the difference in interpretation: whereas Luhman and others who take a "weak" or "constructivist" stand "privilege the present", the notion of différance reminds us that we cannot only focus on the present, but has to take into consideration the influence of the past and the possibility of the future in making sense of, and taking responsibility for, present decisions.
[43] Ibid.

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Sensemaker Suite™ have limited utility as regards the building of ethically sensible work environments.

4. Methodology

The research takes the form of a literature study followed by a philosophical analysis of the ontological framework on which the Sensemaker tool is based, namely the Cynefin Framework. In this analysis, brief reference will be made to selected Sensemaker Suite™ narrative methods and a signification framework, as the focus is not on the description of a signification framework or an analysis of specific methods. The focus falls on the ontological and epistemological foundations of the framework.

The study commences with a brief description of the terms that form the subject of this dissertation, namely complexity, complex ethics, business ethics, agency and accountability. This is followed by an unpacking of the assumptions on which the dissertation is based, by placing them within the philosophical framework of complexity theory. Insights are drawn from Cilliers (with a description of Lyotard and Derrida's theories), Foucault and MacIntyre, as well as contemporary theorists in the field of organisational ethics, culture and sense-making. The study then turns to the concept of human sense-making from a complexity perspective followed by a philosophical analysis of Cynefin Framework and Sensemaker Suite™. The analysis of the Cynefin Framework and Sensemaker Suite™ is based on insights derived from the philosophical discussion of the assumptions underlying this dissertation. It concludes with suggestions for utilising the instrument, by pointing out the philosophical questions that need to be asked to facilitate ethical and morally responsive decision-making in organisations.

5. Assumptions on which this dissertation is based

As a point of departure, this dissertation acknowledges that ethics and values can be read through various philosophical lenses. This study is an attempt to read ethics through the lens of general complexity theory, mainly through the work of Cilliers. Through a general complexity lens ethics implies a relational process in which ethics, accountability and responsibility develop through the emergent complexities inherent to interrelations, and the individual is never the pivotal point. Cilliers makes it clear that ethical behaviour suggests *responsible* following of rules, and even the possibility of breaking the rules without invalidating them.[44] In this regard, Cilliers draws from Lyotard, as well as Derrida/Levinas and Cornell, for an understanding of multiplicity as well as difference/différance as opposed to consensus. A limitation in this perspective is that it does not provide us with a view on *how* the individual becomes an ethical agent who can be held responsible for making, following or breaking rules, or for his or her interactions with others. I therefore turn to Foucault to understand how an individual's

[44] Ibid.

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understanding of who he/she is emerges through the subject's participation in power relationships and discourses, and how the agent is always in a process of becoming ethical through self-reflective processes.

A reading of Foucault provides an insight of the ethical agent who is embedded in institutionalised relationships and whose sense of ethical agency develops through his/her participation in the discourses of his/her time. However, it does not provide a sense of who the morally and ethically sensible self is who can participate in social relationships and give an account for him/herself and his/her actions to another, based on some kind of shared value or purpose. MacIntyre's communitarian perspective on the subject's development as a member of a community with a shared value system, whose personal history is linked to the history and traditions of a community and his/her duty and roles in a community, provides the link with relationality in a complex system. It also provides an understanding of how an individual's sense of morality and his/her moral identity as a member of a community is formed through the narratives and stories underpinned by the value system and traditions of the community. The perspective I get through a reading of MacIntyre therefore allows me to close the gap left by my understanding of the ethical agent from a complexity perspective, as well as from my reading of Foucault. Therefore, the insight I derive from MacIntyre allows me the entry point into storytelling as a basis for sense-making in complex situations.

In conclusion, I draw on Cilliers and his specific poststructuralist perspective on complex adaptive systems as self-organising, open systems, as well as on Foucault and MacIntyre to provide different perspectives on ethical agency and accountability, and in this regard, to complement one another in what I perceive to be their limitations. By looking at business ethics and agency through the different perspectives provided by these three theorists, as well as others whose work is sensitive to complexity theory, I can base this study on three assumptions, as summarised below:

(1) Ethical decision-making and accountability in complex systems are based on relational, embodied models of reasoning and not on abstract, cerebral reasoning and the universality of certain moral codes;
(2) Storytelling and other narrative activities provide us with the means to make sense of complex situations and understand ourselves and our relationship with others in an open network, as well as contribute to our ability to develop a better sense of what the appropriate behaviour would be in ethically challenging, unexpected or complex situations; and
(3) By recognising and analysing emergent patterns derived from these narratives, it would be possible to reinforce behaviours that strengthen the moral fabric of relationships or intervene to influence attitudes and behaviours that pose a risk to the ethical environment.

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These assumptions challenge various traditional views of business and ethics, for instance: as mentioned before (footnotes 5 and 6) the fact/value dichotomy described as the "The Separation Thesis", namely that business and ethics are separate discourses that bear no relation to each other (Freeman, 1994, as cited in Werhane and Freeman); [45] the existence of universal truths, that ethical decisions and accountability are based on universally accepted moral truths; and a certain understanding of rationality, that making decisions and being accountable for those decisions can be expected of any rational, ethical being, and that individuals can therefore be trained to understand and follow the rules.

It is important to keep in mind that a relational ethics implies a continuous process of interaction between various agents in an open network, and that changes occur through these multiple interactions as well as through other, external influences on the system.[46] As the context changes, the relationships between the different agents in the network change and new relationships are formed, with renewed expectations and a renewed sense of accountability by the agent for his own actions in the relationship with others.

Each of these assumptions will be discussed separately in chapters 1, 2, and 3. It is hoped that this will further support an argument for a more integrated approach to ethics where agency and accountability become relational issues rather than an empirical-normative or a descriptive-prescriptive issue.

6. Description of terms

6.1 Complexity theory, complex systems, restricted complexity

Two dominant streams of complexity theory can be distinguished, namely (1) restricted complexity and (2) generalised complexity.[47] Restricted complexity is vested in the scientific paradigm within which it is believed that a complex system is organised according to an underlying set of rules that can, in principle, be discovered. In other words, these systems are merely complicated systems,[48] for which unified theories (or laws) of complexity could be created if we had the computational power to understand the relationships between the various parts of the system. As Woermann describes the paradigm of restricted complexity: "… complexity – in their eyes – is a function of our knowledge (epistemology) rather than an inherent characteristic of certain systems (ontology)".[49] When working in the paradigm of

[45] Werhane and Freeman, "Business Ethics: the State of the Art", 2.
[46] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 139.
[47] Morin, "Restricted Complexity, General Complexity", 10.
[48] Paul Cilliers, *Thinking Complexity*, viii.
[49] Woermann, "A Complex Ethics", 116.

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generalised complexity, she points out that, "the notion of complexity itself is taken seriously, which necessitates that we undertake an epistemological, cognitive, and paradigmatic shift, which bears on the whole organisation of knowledge".[50]

Generalised complexity theory considers complex systems to be open systems where the interactions between the different parts of the system and the interaction between the system and its environment cannot be explained by analysing its components. Instead, the complexity of the system resides within the system itself, which makes it unknowable in its totality. Open systems thus refer to systems where the relationships are not fixed, but shift and change, often as a result of self-organisation. These shifts and changes allow new, unexpected features of the system to develop. These new relationships are referred to as the "emergent properties of the system".[51]

It is worth noting that, according to Cilliers[52] and Woermann,[53] the distinction between "restricted" and "general" complexity is not always unproblematic, because some complex systems turn out to be merely complicated upon further investigation. This consideration will be relevant for the analysis of the Cynefin framework, which distinguishes between different types of problems, those for which rules can be discovered (in the simple and complicated domains), and complex problems, whose complexity is intrinsic to the shifting and non-linear nature of the system.

6.2 Complex ethics/ethics of complexity

Understanding the difference in viewpoint and purpose between restricted and general complexity is relevant in the attempt to define a complex ethics: Restricted complexity theorists implicitly accept the ideals of explanation, prediction and the facilitation of control (Woermann, citing Chu *et al*.[54]), which would result in a mapping and description of the moral world. Conversely, generalised complexity theorists try to develop strategies and processes to help us better deal with the complexity that characterises not only living systems, but also social systems. In Woermann's words, "complexity theory offers an integrated, multidimensional approach, which can successfully be related to the real-world situation."[55] And citing Ghoshal,[56] "As such, complexity theory provides a broader and richer alternative to the reductionist and

[50] Ibid, 93.
[51] Cilliers, *Thinking Complexity*, viii
[52] Ibid, 3.
[53] Woermann, "A Complex Ethics," 116.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Woermann, "A Complex Ethics", 116.
[56] Ghoshal, "Bad Management Theories", 75 – 91.

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partial theories that have been developed in, and applied to organization and management studies over the last 30 years."[57]

When decision-making capabilities are considered in terms of a complexity ethics, where multiple, different perspectives compete for attention and relevance, Foucault's theories on power and knowledge demonstrate how knowledge (or the perspective on a specific situation) is always related to the power relationships that exist in the system. In applying Foucault's description of the power/knowledge relationship to complexity theory, one could ask whether the relationship between power/knowledge and Foucault's concept of ethics as the "conscious practice of freedom"[58] could be understood in terms of the agonistics of a non-linear system as an adaptive and self-organising system, which is inherently characterised by continuous internal conflicts and competition. If ethics is to be considered as practices that are "embedded in the power relations that constitute organizations"[59], it suggests that ethics takes place in and through the interactions of a complex system, and is powerful in its ability to influence, and be influenced, by people's self concept and sense of being ethical subjects.[60] Both a person's sense of him/herself as an ethical subject and others' perception of a person's ethicality depend on the non-linear relationships constituted through interactions with others, as well as how the "regimes of governmentality constitute these relations in organizations" .[61] In this regard I argue that Foucault's analysis of these relationships can assist us in identifying the power relationships underlying our perspectives of the world and the priorities we assign to certain decisions above others, as it emphasises the ongoing strategic element inherent to institutional life.

From an agency perspective, one could therefore ask how our understanding of the working of an agonistic system can help us to understand the development of ethical agency in complex situations. From a relational perspective, one could ask how it would be possible to choose between multiple perspectives that might inform or influence an individual's understanding of ethical options available to him/her. Furthermore, a practical question that could steer ethics research and interventions is how to use our understanding of an agonistic system to allow dissenting and marginalised voices to be heard.

Cilliers draws from Lyotard the importance of paralogy to critically investigate the meta-narrative underlying our normative decisions [62] , and from Derrida the notions of deconstruction[63] and "différance"[64].

[57] Woermann, "A Complex Ethics", 108.
[58] Foucault, 1997, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self", 284.
[59] Ibarra-Colado *et al*, "The Ethics of Managerial Subjectivity", 48.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 114 – 119, 147.

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One should guard, however, against the assumption that hearing dissenting and/or marginalised or different voices would necessarily improve the ethical quality of decisions. In this regard, we can draw on Foucault's emphasis on genealogical knowledge of power structures, as well as the practices that enable the self to continuously work on him/herself and reconstitute him/herself, to temper the risk of relativism, or to prevent being swayed by various risky, marginalised voices. In addition, as pointed out before with reference to Putnam, Purnell and Freeman, the strength of common values that serve as attractors in human relationships should not be underestimated. As values emerge from the everyday practices and interactions of humans, they are, in Painter-Morland's words, the "often unspoken beliefs of which individuals are not always conscious, but that can have an influence on their behaviour regardless".[65] In this sense, being cognisant of dissenting and marginalised, or different, perspectives should open the possibility for discussion and reflection and not be considered as relativistic.

6.3 Agency and ethical responsiveness

When business is seen as a complex adaptive, open system that forms part of a "dynamic moment" in which change happens too fast to process or comprehend,[66] and not as an ordered or a closed system of rules, principles, causes and effects and specific outcomes, the assumption is challenged that the decision-maker is an impartial and rational agent.[67]

Questions about the sustenance of relationships inevitably lead to questions about agency and accountability. Cilliers describes an agent in complex adaptive systems as a node in a network that interacts, effects changes in relationships and gets changed itself in the process. The agent is thus not seen as an isolated moral agent who makes decisions based on universal ethical principles,[68] but as an actor whose decisions and actions are determined, to a great extent, by the intricate, continuous, asynchronous and often unpredictable interactions in a network of relationships, referred to as "self-organised criticality".[69]

An important consideration for our understanding of ethics and ethical agency is that self-organised criticality implies that "the system organizes itself to a critical point where single events have the widest possible range of effects… and the system is tuned to optimum sensitivity to external inputs".[70] Also important is that such a point can represent a stable state and becomes an "attractor", or it can represent an unstable state and becomes a "repellent". A

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[63] Ibid, 34 - 37, 42 - 46, 54 – 56, 80 – 88, 135 – 142.
[64] Ibid, 43 – 46, 83.
[65] Painter-Morland, "Agency in Corporations", 31.
[66] Painter-Morland, "Defining Accountability", 516.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Woermann and Cilliers, "The Ethics of Complexity", 447.
[69] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 96.
[70] Ibid, 97.

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system that is too stable has only a few attractors and becomes sluggish in its responses to influences, while an unstable state shows chaotic behaviour, erratically responding to all influences. According to Cilliers, the theory of self-organised criticality therefore implies that a self-organising system will try to balance itself at a point between rigid stability (order) and instability (chaos) to allow itself to be adaptable to change. For our understanding of agency, self-organised criticality means that agents can be accepting of differences and otherness and be responsive to change, while they are still grounded enough in some sort of a stable state to make a responsible judgement. This adds to the complexity of relationships.

In this regard, Cilliers points out that responsible judgements involve (1) "respecting otherness and difference between agents as values in themselves, (2) gathering as much as possible information, notwithstanding the fact that it is impossible to gather all the information (3) considering as many of the possible consequences of a judgement, notwithstanding the fact that all the consequences cannot be considered, and (4) making sure that it is possible to revise the judgement as soon as it becomes clear that it has flaws…".[71] Drawing on Derrida, Cilliers's understanding of moral agency therefore implies that judgement takes place in the aporia of the moment, causing continuous angst, and placing the burden of responsibility on the agent every time when he/she becomes aware of the imminent and unavoidable possibility of a flawed judgement.

Cilliers draws a connection between the poststructuralist theories of Lyotard and Derrida and a connectionist model to describe the interactions in social networks. He relates Derrida's notion of deconstruction, with specific reference to the aporetic moment, to the idea of self-organisation. The aporetic moment is a moment of anguish when the decision-maker has to take a leap, take a risk in making a judgement that can never be based on prior conditions, rules or norms. It is not a moment of indecision before a decision is reached, but the condition for any decision to be made. In other words, making the decision does not end the aporia; every new decision is a new event in which the undecidable has to be confronted again.[72] Encountering the aporia of undecidability and being compelled to make a decision is the moment in which ethical consideration is made. By using the notion of deconstruction and undecidability, Cilliers shows that complexity, through the lens of poststructuralist thinking, provides a view of the continuous demand on the agent who interacts in a network of relationships to be responsive to the moment and be accountable for his/her decision.

It would be necessary to take a brief detour to understand how the interacting agent negotiates the network of relationships by being an ethical subject, and how the recognition of the Other's

[71] Cilliers, *Thinking Complexity*, 140.
[72] Raffoul, *The Origins of Responsibility*, 296.

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demands on the subject (after Levinas and Derrida) provides the conditions that are necessary for a relational and responsive ethics. By reading complexity theory through Derrida and Lyotard's theories, it will become clear how language is a complex system of meaning consisting of traces of similarities, contrasts and differences, which provides some insight on why a rule-based ethics is not sufficient. However, this understanding of language as a complex system does not provide a view on how the *ethical subject* becomes *ethically sensible*. Michel Foucault's philosophical theories on the development of the ethical subject provide this connection.

Foucault traces in his earlier works the effect of our use of institutionalised words and knowledge structures on the self, causing the kind of identity-constructs that could have deterministic consequences. In his later work, however, he points out that individuals are freer than they realise and argues for a human being's obligation to question, negotiate, and act within fields of discipline and control. This is done by cultivating the self; by learning how to act in a self-disciplined manner in our relationships with others.[73] This freedom, which is not an unconditional freedom or liberation from domination, is, according to Foucault, a condition for being human, and therefore also a condition for becoming an ethical subject. The becoming of the ethical subject in this regard is a continuous process of participation in power relationships in which the individual is concerned with his/her own well-being. Through self-critical reflection and allowing others to question his/her intentions, the individual enables him/herself "in taking up his rightful position in the city, the community, or interpersonal relationships, whether as a magistrate or a friend..." .[74] The implication is that, the care for the self extends to the care of others; Foucault provides us a way to understand how the individual's active participation in the network of complex relationships can provide the impetus that is necessary to respond ethically to complex challenges.[75] It allows us to ask: where is power situated in this relationship, and where do I stand with regards to this power? It also allows us to ask how individuals' moral identity is shaped according to their institutional identities. However, Foucault's analysis is limited in the sense that it does not provide a sense of the agent as a member of a social and moral community. More specifically, it does not show us how a subject's moral sensibilities and sense of self are formed through his/her interactions within a context of shared symbolic meanings, or how meaningful interactions become possible through the practices of a community, and accountability to one another is implied by a person's embeddedness in the community.

[73] Foucault, "The Hermeneutic of the Subject," 99.
[74] Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and truth*. London: Allen Lane, 1997, as quoted in Crane, Knights and Starkey, "The Conditions of our Freedom: Foucault, Organization, and Ethics", 311.
[75] The tension between the earlier and later Foucault creates some difficulties in locating him with respect to issues like the "freedom to question, etc." However, the scope of this dissertation does not allow for an in-depth exploration of these tensions.

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MacIntyre's communitarian position fills the gap left by the limitations presented by Foucault's analysis and allows us to ask, "Who am I?" and "What are the stories and traditions of which I am part?" It therefore allows us to consider agency from the perspective of a self who can be held responsible to his/her proclaimed identity and intentions, as well as to the values, attitudes and beliefs of the social community of which he/she is a member. In this regard, MacIntyre's concern with the re-establishment of the virtuous character that has the capacity for judgement and the practical wisdom to live its life as a responsive member of the community becomes relevant. He provides an insight into how the accounts given by an individual of his/her own actions as well as the stories told about these actions can form an individual's identity. In this way, the telling of, and listening to, personal accounts help us to understand our place and our responsibility in our network of relationships. MacIntyre's communitarian perspective therefore provides us with an understanding of how agency can be considered from a relational and responsive perspective.

It is important, however, to remain aware that the concept of a homogenous "community" is problematic in complex environments. Complex environments are constituted of individuals that belong to different communities, cultures and sub-cultures, each comprising different traditions of virtue and making different claims on us. MacIntyre's value for this study remains, however, in the provision of a philosophical framework which would enable us to understand how an individual can learn how to live and work within a system of shared values, and how s/he can be held accountable *for* actions and decisions, as well as *to* others in this relational network. In this regard, ethics from the perspective MacIntyre provides, is not just about how to be ethical as an individual, but also to find out who we are in relation to others in our local organisations and communities. As he says, "what we have to learn from heroic societies is two-fold: first that all morality is always tied to the socially local and particular and that the aspirations of a morality of modernity to a universality freed from all particularity is an illusion; and secondly that there is no way to possess the virtues except as part of a tradition in which we inherit them and our understanding of them...".[76] Ethics, and agency, from this perspective, are therefore embedded in our interactions in particular, localised contexts, a notion which shows a leniency to the complexity theory concepts of history, local interactions and a relational accountability.

7. Brief introduction of Cynefin Framework and the Sensemaker Suite™

The Cynefin Framework[77] provides a conceptual model that can be used in organisations to distinguish between different knowledge domains. As a knowledge management framework

[76] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 126.

[77] "Cynefin" is a Welsh word that points to the many roots we have individually and collectively, which influence our interactions. The Cynefin Framework was developed as a knowledge management tool by

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developed within the fields of ethnographic research and complexity theory, it aims at providing decision-makers in organisations with a sense-making paradigm that could help them make contextually appropriate decisions in circumstances defined by the shifting relationship between cause and effect.

It further aims at sensitising business leaders to different hermeneutic possibilities in a complex business environment. The framework is based on a multi-ontological view of the world, describing the world as a complex system in which ordered and complex adaptive systems co-exist and are continuously and simultaneously interacting and transforming.

The Cynefin Framework and its supporting research and analysis software, Sensemaker Suite™ will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

David Snowden of the Cynefin Centre. The Cynefin Framework and Sensemaker Suite™ instrument are trademarks of Cognitive Edge (www.cognitive-edge.com).

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Chapter 1: Philosophical analysis of decision-making capacities in a complex ethics: Cilliers and Foucault

> ***The ritual cat***
>
> *One day, when the spiritual teacher and his disciples began their evening meditation, the cat that lived in the monastery made such noise that it distracted them. So the teacher ordered the cat be tied up during the evening practice. Years later, when the teacher died, the cat continued to be tied up during the meditation session. And when the cat eventually died, another cat was brought to the monastery and tied up. Centuries later, learned descendants of the spiritual teacher wrote scholarly treatises about the religious significance of tying up a cat for meditation practice.* [78]

The first assumption on which this study is based is that ethical decision-making and accountability in complex systems are relational rather than based purely on a conscious, rational process typical of choice-based theories and the universality of certain moral codes. This chapter provides an overview of the discourse informing this assumption.

The ontological basis for this assumption can be found in the view of the group of complexity theorists who supports the notion of a "general" (Morin[79]) or "critical" (Cilliers[80]) complexity that considers complexity as an inherent characteristic of certain systems. This is opposed to the "restricted" view of complexity as a descriptive approach used to "grasp and explain the interplay of the elements of a system in terms of rules".[81]

Morin, who argues for a general approach to complexity, points out that the goal of restricted complexity is to discover the rules of complexity by studying the multiple, interrelated processes that constitute complex systems. In this regard, multiple complex phenomena are collected, collated, interpreted and analysed computationally in order to draw the relationships between these phenomena. The purpose of discovering the rules of complexity is to uncover some fundamental principles that would enable us to describe the rules governing these social phenomena, in order to predict future events. Conversely, the assumption that complex systems' are complex *because of* the dynamic relationships in the system negates the possibility

[78] "Zen stories to tell your neighbors", web page.
[79] Morin, "Restricted Complexity, General Complexity."
[80] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism.*
[81] Woermann, "A Complex Ethics," 105.

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for discovering simple universal rules and causal relationships that govern these relationships. [82] Epistemologically, the difference between a restricted view and a general view of complexity is that the restricted perspective considers the complexity of phenomena to be the result of our physical and cognitive inability to make sense of the multiplicity of interactions in the world, while a general complexity considers complex systems to be inherently complex. It is important to note that Woermann and Cilliers make it clear that there is no irrefutable proof that "complexity is an ontological category of the world". [83] They argue, however, that not knowing whether it is an ontological category or an epistemological consequence does not give us permission to consider complexity as merely a practical problem (which can ultimately be solved with enough computing power). As they say, "One cannot simply 'cut-up' complex systems in order to understand them, since what is of interest is the dynamic, local interrelations that exist between the parts of a complex system, and which give rise to emergent phenomena (which are often not reducible to base laws)." [84]

Based on the possibility, or at least, the *plausibility* of complexity as an ontological category of the world, the first assumption of this study therefore challenges two generally held assumptions, namely: (1) the assumptions of causality and universal truths or laws governing social interactions, and (2) the assumption of an abstract, cerebral type of rationality, which forms the basis for many ingrained beliefs around accountability. Rooted in critical complexity thinking and the poststructuralist perspective on how knowledge is acquired and decisions are made, the first assumption disputes one of the influential traditional understandings of ethics as a set of rules or universally accepted codes that could govern decision-making, and to which a rational and impartial agent could be held accountable. This choice-based perspective on ethics, agency and accountability is found lacking on a practical level by the realities of the contemporary business environment in which business risk and challenges involve the interaction of multiple and diverse elements of which the emergent outcomes cannot always be calculated.

Starting with Cilliers's question, "Can regulated behaviour be considered ethical at all?"[85], this chapter provides a view on the current discourse that will inform the perspective on complexity theory, storytelling and sense-making. It will eventually inform the analysis of the Cynefin framework and Sensemaker Suite™ as a framework and instrument to assist decision-making in complex adaptive systems. In this chapter, I take a closer look at the discourse related to the epistemological differences in complexity theory/thinking, which, not surprisingly, mimics the age-old disagreement about how we know about the world and what constitutes evidence

[82] Morin, "Restricted Complexity, General Complexity."
[83] Woermann and Cilliers, "The Ethics of Complexity," 449.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 137.

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about the world: When relationships in the world are perceived through a reductive lens, the focus is on categorising these relationships according to the perceived order between causes and their effects. In contrast, when the focus falls on the meaning created by and through these interactions, these relationships become much more complex.

In this regard, I will explain Cilliers's epistemological viewpoint in more detail, especially looking at how a self-organising model provides a useful way to understand critical complexity, which, in turn, shows an affinity to poststructuralist theory. Lyotard and Derrida's theories will be discussed briefly to show similarities between the connectionist model and poststructuralist theory on the relationships between power, knowledge and subjectivity. The discussion of these theories will also show how our ability to use language and narrate our experiences is important in making sense of multiple experiences, sharing experiences and entering into critical discussions that would make a relational ethics possible. I further unpack the relational aspects of knowledge generation and ethical decision-making, leading to a question about individual agency and the role and development of the ethical agent.

In the final section of this chapter, I will turn to Foucault's conditions for ethics and his notion on how the ethical subject is continuously formed through self-reflection, as well as by participating in power relationships. This provides the link between a complex, relational ethics where individual agents participate in the "agonistics of the system" and the forming of the ethical subject through his/her participation in power struggles and by caring for him/herself.

1. Cilliers: 'Can regulated behaviour be considered ethical at all?'

Cilliers's rhetorical question, "Can behaviour in accordance with an abstract, universal set of rules be called 'ethical' at all?",[86] is an invitation to open the discourse around organisational ethics and codes of conduct that are devised to regulate employees' behaviour. While they are the norm in organisations that attempt to comply with regulatory requirements for good governance, their soundness as tools to manage, measure and control people's ethical behaviour can be scrutinised from a critical complexity theory perspective. As Cilliers points out, at stake is the very meaning of the word, "ethics".[87]

Good governance is an imperative for organisations based on the understandings that (1) organisations have a fiduciary relationship with their shareholders who trust the board and leadership to make decisions that would benefit their shareholders, but also (2) that organisations make decisions and act in ways that can harm people or the environment in their practices. In this regard, corporations are considered to be moral and legal agents that can be

[86] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 137.
[87] Ibid.

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held accountable for their actions. Legally, a business can also be held responsible for the wrongdoings of its employees in the fulfillment of their tasks. Governance processes are therefore driven by a company's board of directors and executive leadership, putting the processes in place to create an ethical and compliant culture, and providing the systems of accountability against which managerial actions can be judged. However, an exclusively compliance-driven approach to organisational culture is limited in its effectiveness. As Painter-Morland points out, "despite all of the theoretical discussion of corporate 'personhood' and 'citizenship', the current reality is that moral agency still seems to be located primarily within the individual human agents within corporations."[88]

One of the questions that can be asked from a complexity perspective is how to assign responsibility in the complex network of decision-making structures. Another question relates to the ability of individuals to make rational decisions with clear intentions: to which extent do humans shape, and are they shaped, by their institutions? Furthermore, one can ask to which extent an individual is capable of making ethical decisions when his/her actions are controlled by clear rules and procedures.[89] In this regard, Cilliers points to Zygmunt Bauman's analysis of modernism's attempt to structure our existence and his conclusion that, instead of providing us with the language and the knowledge to behave ethically, these structures "[lead] to ... our imprisonment" .[90]

Ethical decision-making, in contrast, involves responding to an uncertain situation where there is no clear route to follow: Making the right decision remains a dilemma. In such situations, codes and rules are limited in their ability to guide decision-making, as decisions based on rules are reduced to calculations of what the rules dictate. In Cilliers's words, "Following a universal set of rules (assuming such rules exist) does not involve decision or dilemma, it merely asks for calculation." [91] As a result, accountability in a rules-based decision-making environment becomes a question of whether the rules have been followed or not.

The problem with blindly following rules is that neither the rules nor the possible outcomes of applying a rule are questioned. Employees who never learn to ask questions, or dare to differ, can become insensitive to emergent ethical challenges, because, to reiterate Bauman's point, they don't have the language or knowledge to behave ethically. In addition, they can shrug off their own moral obligation to point out ethical and moral inconsistencies. When codes and rules are drawn up purely to comply with legal or regulatory requirements, they tend to comply only

[88] Painter-Morland, "Agency in corporations", 23.
[89] Ibid, 18 – 24.
[90] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 138.
[91] Ibid, 137.

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on those terms and are considered a reporting requirement only: often they are ignored in the daily running of the business. They do not stimulate questioning, discussion or moral discretion, and as such, they might be considered an insult to employees' moral intelligence when they are required to sign a code of conduct.[92]

When we turn to other theorists in the field of business ethics, a similar trend in their thinking and criticism of rigid ethics codes and rules of conduct can be detected.

Werhane and Freeman, for instance, describe a rule-directed ethics as an "ethics shunted to one side under the guise of descriptive-prescriptive",[93] while Painter-Morland points out that a rule-based view of accountability is "practically and philosophically flawed", as is demonstrated by the increasing number of corporate scandals globally, despite more restrictive rules and codes.[94] This indicates that "legal theory and compliance-driven ethics interventions fail to engender accountability on both individual and corporate levels".[95] For Kjonstad and Willmott,[96] as cited by Painter-Morland,[97] the over-emphasis on codes of conduct and related instructions is indicative of a "restrictive ethics", which can be counter-productive, as it does not affect the ethical attitudes that actually inform individual behaviour. In contrast, they point to an "empowering ethics" that would support moral learning and development in a more intuitive manner. The question is how to deal with governance systems as well as with a more naturalistic approach to ethics. What does it mean to be "more intuitive" and "empowering" in organisations that are, by definition, governed?

"Governance" implies not only compliance to laws, but also to "formal structures, reporting relationships and organisational forms such as hierarchies".[98] Rules are therefore an organisational construct related to human actions and behaviour. The words "more intuitive" and by implication, "with less routine", therefore should not be interpreted as "total abandonment of rules" in one respect, and "overtaxing individuals with ethical responsibilities" in the other, but should be read in terms of a critical and participative approach to applying rules, or questioning the application of rules in specific circumstances, and even as regards judging under conditions where no particular codified rule applies. This requirement for critical participation points to the development of an ethical culture in which "members are enabled to take responsibility for 'self-scrutiny'"[99] and in which they can voice their concerns. In addition to

[92] Painter-Morland, "Questioning corporate codes of ethics", 266 – 267.
[93] Werhane and Freeman, "Business Ethics: the State of the Art", 2.
[94] Painter-Morland, "Defining Accountability", 516.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Kjonstad and Willmott, "Business Ethics: Restrictive or Empowering?, 445 – 464.
[97] Painter-Morland, "Questioning Corporate Codes," 266.
[98] Bridgman, "Performance, Conformance and Good Governance in the Public Sector", 150.
[99] Willmott, "Organizational Culture", 83.

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reflection and voicing of concerns, Woermann argues for the contextualisation of ethical practices, in order to "account for norms that guide our relatively stable practices, but [to] prevent these norms from being naturalised and tuned into transcendental categorically binding rules and principles".[100]

The alternative is often the breakdown of ethical relationships, as has been described in accounts of ethical violations in corporations such as Enron that are driven by compliance to rules rather than the development of critical ethical sensibilities.[101] When emergent issues are ignored or exploited for personal gain, relationships can break down in all areas of a business. As organisational theorist Knowles explains, the breakdown of trust relationships can result in an organisation becoming "incoherent and floundering, [and] ... unable to learn and to improve ...," and therefore inclined to implement more rigid management and control measures in an attempt to exert stricter control. However, he points out, more rigidity in the system rather leads to a breakdown in communication, the isolation of individuals as well as "silo" forming of groups, and the danger of "creativity [that's] driven into negative paths" .[102]

Apart from the fluidity of multiple relationships that defines the complex organisation, the multiplicity of possible outcomes of decisions makes it risky to depend on rigid management and control measures. From a complex, albeit leaning towards a restricted complexity perspective in cognitive psychology, Weick points to "requisite variety" as an important factor in complex environments. Where there is insufficient variety in terms of people's viewpoints, important information could be missed, and short-sighted remedies applied. This could cause problems to be magnified rather than reduced.[103] According to Weick, requisite variety is enhanced in teams of divergent individuals, because they look for different things, and "when their observations are pooled, they collectively see more than any one of them alone would see". [104] However, Weick warns that teams grow more alike over time and through training, and become used to doing certain things in certain ways. This poses the danger that group observations can become less varied – a term which is commonly known as "group think". In this regard, it is clear that an ethics for complexity cannot be based only on the various insights provided by multiple voices, but needs to have more substance. The question we need to ask is how we make sense of complex situations in which we, as subjects and objects of our complex interactions, are embedded. Secondly, we need to ask how we make ethical decisions in complex moments when we can't predict what the implications of our actions might entail.

[100] Woermann, "A Complex Ethics", 81.
[101] Willmott, "Organizational Culture", 75 – 77.
[102] Knowles, "Self-Organizing Leadership: A Way of Seeing", 117.
[103] Weick, "Organizational Culture", 112.
[104] Ibid, 116.

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It must be kept in mind that complexity serves as a compound term for different worldviews and epistemologies that influence the methods and ways employed to understand the interactions in the world and describe the relationships between phenomena. These ways of understanding guide our decisions and influence our approach to knowledge. A helpful insight from Schlindwein and Ison is that we must be aware of our choice and willing to take responsibility for it. In their words, "being epistemologically aware opens up more choices for action."[105] A range of perspectives can thus be valuable in the generation of knowledge as long as we are always aware that there are always other possibilities and interpretations. This insight, in the spirit of Derrida's notion of deconstruction, will be a useful consideration in the analysis of Sensemaker Suite™ as a sense-making tool.

2. A brief overview of some epistemological approaches to restricted complexity, general complexity and critical complexity

Broadly two approaches can be distinguished in the complexity discourse around our knowledge about the world, how we generate this knowledge, and what the status or value of the knowledge is. Within these streams of thought a variety of epistemological points of departure can be distinguished, all of which show various degrees of difference in their approaches towards making sense of complex phenomena.

In the first stream of thought, which Morin labels "restricted complexity", the underlying epistemology is that we can understand the world in a rational manner by discovering the principles on which events and experiences are based, and our knowledge of the world can, in principle, be provided in an objective and universally valid manner by means of mathematical calculations or the advancement of computational capabilities. This would enable us to gather information, categorise it, describe it, store it and manipulate it. Woermann describes restricted complexity as a "wagon behind the truth locomotive, [which] therefore, still remains within the epistemology of the classical sciences".[106] In her view, restricted complexity resonates well with post-modern realism, systematic/systemic modernism (Hassan) and critical modernism (Habermas),[107] three philosophical approaches that still assume the discovery and description of

[105] Schlindwein and Ison, "Human Knowing and Perceived Complexity", 238.
[106] Woermann, "A Complex Ethics", 93.
[107] Ibid, 78 – 81.
Woermann provides a critical analysis of the terms post-modern realism, systematic/systemic modernism and critical modernism by referring to Hassard's view on systemic modernism and post-modernism as described in J. Hassard, *Postmodernism and Organizations* (London: Sage, 1993) and Habermas's notion of critical modernism in J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. F. Lawrence, intro. T. McCarthy. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), and J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. I: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. and intro. T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press).

In this analysis she points out that there is little difference in systemic modernism and post-modernism as defined by Hassan, as both techniques depend on sophisticated technologies to describe the world "out there" in the right way.

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social order, either by means of greater technological advances (in the case of post-modern realism and systematic modernism), or by means of rational argumentation and critique (in the case of critical modernism). These theories, as Woermann points out, claim that truth is attainable either by means of better technology or by means of reaching consensus by reasoning.

A restricted view of complexity does not necessarily imply a simplification of the complexities of the world, but rather an epistemological commitment to objectivity, which, in the view of Schlindwein and Ison "seems to miss the point".[108] In this, they reject Rescher's explanation of why the claim for an ontological simplicity of the world is "somewhere between the hyperbolic and absurd".[109]

Instead, Schlindwein and Ison call for the "reintroduction of the role of the observer into the explanations about complexity", as well as for a systems approach to understanding complexity and managing in complex situations.[110] In this way, they want to approach complexity theoretically through systems thinking and reintroduce it as such into the scientific discourse. Epistemologically, they consider the systems theory approach as a model to engage with complexity and "learn our way towards purposeful action that is situation improving."[111]

Woermann (after Morin), however points out that, although the systems thinking approach to complexity has some useful characteristics, such as (1) considering the system as a complex whole, and (2) the interdisciplinary nature of the study of systems, it is often characterised by the problem of reductionism by simplifying and reducing the constituent elements of the

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Critical modernism, as Habermas defines it, is an attempt to critique the Enlightenment rationally with critical reasoning. Habermas contends that postmodernism cannot provide a sound basis for social critique. In his view we can only recover a form of natural reasoning through common sense of language and argumentation, and can only judge and critique knowledge claims through the arguments we hold. In such a way consensus can be reached. Woermann's critique on this theory is that critical modernism claims that it would be possible to achieve a "horizon view of intersubjective truth". Instead she argues for a closer focus on the practical context in which ideas are enacted when thinking about ethics in complexity.

She supports Willmott's notion that the moral task of the individual is "voicing" and "reflection" on moral judgements, as well as Parker's argument for "thicker" descriptions, in which ethics is described as "situational, contextual and a highly specific practice". In this regard, she points out that, reflection and contextualisation of ethical practices are important for us to "account for norms that guide our relatively stable practices", but at the same time, they prevent the naturalisation of these norms into "transcendental categorically binding rules and principles".

[108] Schlindwein and Ison, "Human Knowing", 235 - 238.

[109] Rescher, *Complexity: A Philosophical Overview*, 58.
In Rescher's view, the development of knowledge remains a "matter of complexification since nature is ontologically complex". Rescher nevertheless believes that it would, in principle, be possible to describe the world objectively, if we could extend our cognitive limitations through advanced technology.

[110] Schlindwein and Ison, "Human Knowing", 236.

[111] Ibid 237 – 238.

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system to the composite.[112] In this sense, both the traditional scientific approach that tends to study the elements of a system to gain knowledge of the composite, and the holistic approach, where the individual components of the system are reduced to see the whole, provide a one-dimensional, simplified view of the system.

In contrast to "restricted complexity", the second stream of complexity, labelled "general complexity" points to complexity as being fundamental to the nature of the system. In other words, a complex system is irreducible and cannot be modelled by any model that is less complex than the system itself. This is clarified by Cilliers, who approaches general complexity from a poststructural perspective. In his words, "there is no overarching theory of complexity that allows us to ignore the contingent aspects of complex systems. If something is really complex, it cannot be adequately described by means of a simple theory. Engaging with complexity entails engaging with specific complex systems."[113] Cilliers further clarifies the idea behind the modelling of complex systems by pointing out that computer technology can be utilised in the modelling of complex systems, but that those models have to be as complex as the systems they model and should never reduce or simplify the understanding of the system itself. Cilliers uses neural networks as an example of complex adaptive models (the theory of connectionism) and draws out the similarities between the working of neural networks and postmodern theory in the creation of knowledge and meaning.

Cilliers emphasises a "self-critical rationality" as the epistemological basis for his understanding of how knowledge is generated in complex situations. This "rationality" however, should not be confused with the self-governing reason underlying Immanuel Kant's concept of the rational agent. In contrast to the Kantian concept of rationality, "self-critical rationality" does not claim to be objective nor does it elevate the subject into a nominal position where he/she is master of his/her own reasoning.[114] It rather points to a reflexive and explorative approach to knowledge creation, as in Richardson, Cilliers and Lissack's explanation that follows below.

Richardson *et al* point out that a principal requirement for a complexity-based epistemology would be the exploration of perspectives, which could be intraspective (a weak type of exploration in which a particular perspective is examined critically and compared to other perspectives based on the differences it displays) or interspective, which encourages the "sucking in" of available perspectives in the attempt to synthesise all perspectives into a situation-specific perspective.[115] According to these writers, the two types of exploration

[112] Woermann, "Complex Ethics", 112.
[113] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, ix.
[114] Woermann, "A Complex Ethics", 93.
[115] Richardson, Cilliers and Lissack, "Complexity Science: A 'Gray' Science", 25 – 35.

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cannot be isolated. The more perspectives there are available, the deeper the scrutiny of each perspective, and the deeper the exploration, the higher the possibilities of assessing the value of other perspectives.

An important consideration for Richardson *et al* is that the decision as to which perspective to use is deferred until after the exploration process, as it is actually an emergent property of the process itself. As the writers note: "While scepticism plays a central role in the exploration process, it plays a lesser role during implementation... In order to implement a decision confidently, we must learn to fake positivism ... but always be aware that conditions will change and might require substantial rethinking of the implementation design itself."[116] This approach is called "abduction".

In the article, "Complexity, Deconstruction and Relativism", Cilliers warns that complexity thinking should never be considered the final answer to understand the world completely. It also does not provide us with the exact methods to solve our complex problems. Epistemologically, it can only show us why these problems are so complex, and it can make us aware that it is impossible to fully understand a complex system.[117] If we acknowledge the complexity of the world in which we live, we also have to acknowledge the limitations of our understanding of the world and remain modest in terms of our claims of knowledge. This, as Woermann points out, calls for "an epistemological, cognitive, and paradigmatic shift, which bears on the whole organisation of knowledge", but is the responsible position to take. [118] In Cilliers's words: "The failure to acknowledge the complexity of a certain situation is not merely a *technical* error, it is also an *ethical* one (Cilliers's emphasis)." [119]

Although the position taken by Cilliers and Woermann seems to be normative, the criteria they point to seem procedural rather than a substantive. The epistemological, cognitive and paradigmatic shift they point to leads into an understanding that Cilliers's description of a connectionist model provides a useful way to understand the dilemma presented by the proliferation of knowledge as poststructuralist theory describes it. This will be expounded on below.

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[115] Cilliers, "Complexity, Deconstruction and Relativism", 256.
[116] Richardson, Cilliers and Lissack, "Complexity Science", 31.
[117] Cilliers, "Complexity, Deconstruction and Relativism", 256.
[118] Woermann, "Complex Ethics", 93.
[119] Cilliers,"Complexity, Deconstruction and Relativism", 256.

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3. Cilliers and Lyotard: Knowledge and justice

Cilliers draws from Lyotard an explanation of the complexity involved in the generation and distribution of knowledge in the post-industrial epoch. Lyotard ascribes the problem of knowledge as a problem of legitimation: neither the narrative of emancipation, which has as project the emancipation of the individual through science, and endeavours to search for truth, nor the speculative narrative, which has as a project generating knowledge for the sake of knowledge, can be considered as trustworthy ways of legitimating knowledge in a postmodern world. Lyotard refers to these as "grand narratives" which attempt to describe all branches of science in a uniform manner, or in Lyotard's words, in a uniform "language game". These "grand narratives" are problematic for Lyotard in two respects, namely: "the speculative narrative does not respect the heteromorphy of language games, while the narrative of emancipation does not respect their untranslatability."[120]

Apart from the de-legitimisation of metanarratives or "grand narratives", which Lyotard calls the "crisis of scientific knowledge"[121], he also points to a change in the *purpose* of knowledge in the post-industrial society, namely to increase performance efficiency and profitability: The predominant form of legitimisation of knowledge has changed from truth (emancipatory narrative) and justice (speculative narrative) to a metanarrative of "performativity". The difference lies in the question at the root of knowledge generation. Brügger explains it as follows: "As regards the grand narratives, what is at stake for research and teaching is the question: 'Is it true?', while for the social it is: 'Is it just?' As regards performativity, what is at stake in both science and the social is the question: 'What can it be used for?' ('Can it be sold? Is it effective?')".[122]

When we turn to organisational stories, the difference between different types of stories and narratives told in an organisation becomes important. When a story is told in, what Gabriel calls, the "managed spaces"[123] of the organisation, with a specific purpose, which can be a performative purpose aimed to influence people to accept a commonly held truth, it often becomes a metanarrative which defies any other truth. In this way it can become persuasive to the point of creating a sense of absolute truth. Czarniawska calls these types of dominant narratives "petrified" narratives, "artifacts forever petrified in organizational reality out there waiting to be collected" .[124] In "unmanaged spaces" in the organisation, other types of narrative exist, the small, personal stories, anecdotes, hints and jokes. Bøje calls these emergent stories "antenarratives", the living stories that materialise spontaneously through the interactions in

[120] Lyotard and Brügger, "What about the Postmodern?", 77-92.
[121] Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition,* 3, 8-39.
[122] Lyotard and Brügger, "What about the Postmodern?".
[123] Gabriel, *Myths, Stories, and Organizations*.
[124] Czarniawska, *A Narrative Approach to Organization Studies,* 14.

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the organisation, and have the potential to support the dominant narratives of an organisation, exist alongside, or become the stories that counter the dominant narratives.[125] This thread will be picked up again in the next chapter, where the relation between culture, storytelling and complex ethics is discussed in more depth.

In contrast to the criterion of performativity, Lyotard points towards two other criteria for the legitimisation of knowledge in postmodern conditions, namely consensus and paralogy, and points out that consensus should be a phase of a discussion and not its purpose. In complexity terms, Richardson *et al* calls this moment of consensus "a fleeting moment of positivism before the system goes in disequilibrium again".[126] In addition, "paralogy" when considered through a complexity lens, points to dissent, the disequilibrium of the system where it has to be sensitive to the simultaneous, non-linear interactions of multiple different discourses, in order for it to continue.

The term "paralogy" [127] suggests a radical reconsideration of our methods of doing research and distributing knowledge. Whereas consensus is commonly considered as the way to get people "on the same page" so that they "speak out of one mouth", complexity thinking and poststructuralist theory favour paralogy as a means to generate knowledge and keep the system flexible. Cilliers cites Lyotard who considers consensus as "impoverishing"[128] and a reductionist strategy that underestimates the complexity of social systems. As a reductionist strategy, consensus means that only discourses that support the favoured discourse are acknowledged as being valid. Conversely, dissent destabilises the order and capacity for explanation, and so, creates the potential for new norms of understanding.

The notion of "dissent" is important in terms of our understanding of an ethics of complexity. Cilliers points out with reference to Feyerabend that dissenting voices in the discourse does not mean that they get preferential treatment, but rather that "they enter into the 'agonistics of the network'"[129] where they compete with all the other voices in the web of relationships. Their relevance is determined by the history of the system, the system's requirements for change, as

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[125] Bøje, "Breaking out of Narrative's Prison", 28 – 49.
[126] Richardson, Cilliers and Lissack, "Complexity Science", 31.
[127] Lyotard and Brügger, "What about the Postmodern?" 75, 82.
On a point of interest, Brügge points out that Lyotard distinguishes between paralogy and dissent, where paralogy is more than disagreeing on certain issues where the rules of the language game are the same. Paralogy, in contrast to dissension, refers to "generally unacknowledged battles within the field of knowledge". In other words, paralogy requires openness to narratives that are not based on the same truth statements, moral codes or values. In this sense, paralogy also does not refer to invention, as "invention is required by the system to improve its performance".

[128] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 118.
[129] Ibid.

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well as the system's goals.[130] Cilliers describes the history of the system as memory, distributed throughout the system as "traces" (a term introduced by Derrida[131] that points to "the influence that each component of the system of language has on every other component".)[132]

The notion of dissent forms part of the discriminating process in which selection takes place of how to read a particular situation and how to act in particular circumstances. This means that the system can be flexible, in the sense of not complying to rigid central control, as well as robust, in terms of its ability to "dynamically adjust [itself] in order to select that which is to be inhibited and that which is to be enhanced". [133] However, a system does not have an infinite capacity for difference. Cilliers points out that too much information can lead to a system becoming overloaded. This can result in "pathological behaviour".[134] As he says, pathological behaviour refers to both chaos and a total system failure or "catatonic shutdown". [135] Overloading the system with information therefore remains a risk from which no-one can escape. In Cilliers's words, "Reverting to rigid, central control does not make the information overload go away".[136] It could, however prevent the system from responding appropriately.

In this moment of selection, we make one reading of a situation instead of another, and act in a certain way and not in another. However, in a similar way as what Lyotard argues for consensus not to be considered the outcome of interactions, we could also claim that dissent should not be the outcome, but inherently part of complex sense-making processes.[137]

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[130] Ibid.
[131] Derrida's notion of deconstruction will be discussed briefly in the next section.
[132] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 46.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid, 119.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Based on Woermann's discussion and critique of Habermas's notion of critical modernism (36 n. 107), one could argue that dissent should not be considered as the theorising property of the process and action as the practical part of a two-step process, but that critical thinking (dissent or skepticism) and action are interwoven into the same process and practices of ethics, and are situated in a specific context in which one thinks and acts. The alternative, namely, considering dissent or skepticism as a rational property of a higher or different order, that either leads to action or maintains its skepticism of the chosen actions, would affirm the notion of critical modernism and a restricted view of complexity.

When skepticim and action are seen as part of the same integrated process, our actions include our commitment to perceiving reality in a certain way at a certain time and in a certain place, even though our perception of reality is limited and based on our particular understanding of the world. In this way we are continuously maneuvering through a world that we do not understand, going from one island of knowledge to another. We act in certain ways and do things we think are right in certain circumstances, to find out at times, that we did not consider and are incapable of considering all the complexities, including the unexpected results of our actions that add to the complexity.

Being flexible, in this regard, does not categorically lay claim to a meaning of being good, but is rather an appeal for a modest approach to our knowledge claims in the vein Cilliers refers to modesty. Being more flexible in our outlook on what is right or wrong would allow us to reconsider our belief or value structures and be more open to other perspectives. In this way it could allow us to question or adapt to changes that

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With the understanding that knowledge is generated in the relationships between individuals, the decision-making process cannot be not based on first principles, origins, goals or codes, but remains a complex process that is defined by its (inter)actions. It is through the principle of "decentring" of the subject in the creation of knowledge that a relational ethics can exist, because then, the question about the ethical basis for decision-making that needs to be answered is not: What does the rule mean?; or: What is the rule?, but rather: How do we make our decisions to act? It is therefore not *having* a code of ethics based on a specific concept of truth, and *following* that code that are important. What is important is *how a business responds* to ethical challenges in following or not following the rule, and how we *understand and describe* these challenges.

It is in this sense that Lyotard's *Report on Knowledge* provides an essential critique on the legitimacy of denotative statements, which, as truth statements, form the basis from which rules and codes (as prescriptive statements) are formulated. In addition, it invites a more critical look at the attempt to provide a linear set of rules from which to understand and control various, different and incommensurable social issues. Related to these issues are ethical issues, where the question that should guide decision-making should be: Is it just? When we look critically at ethics codes and rules that control employees' behaviour and guide the interaction of the organisation in its network of stakeholders, we can ask: Are they sensitive to multiple narratives or are they based on a single meta-narrative, namely to increase performance, effectiveness and profitability?; and Are they just? Similarly, when procedural justice is considered against substantive justice, the question can be asked whether the right to engage in multiple counter-narratives constitutes a fair system, or whether there is a stronger kind of "justice as fairness". In this regard, the stories that are told in and about organisations can point out the dominant narratives, as well as the emergent, small stories that could provide another, different perspective on the same event. These stories (dominant as well as small stories) could provide a significant, localised view on reality including a sense of how fair or unfair people regard an organisation to be in its treatment of stakeholders. This thread is picked up in the next chapter, where storytelling and narrative, as well as considering ethics through the lens of storytelling, are explored in terms of theories of organisational culture.

With Cilliers's warning fresh in our minds that our knowledge is defined locally and our understanding of the system is provisional, and we therefore have to remain "modest"[138] in all our claims for truth, fairness, or justice, it is necessary to turn to Derrida to gain an understanding of the dilemmas and aporias that lead to undecidability. These dilemmas and

require different rules, or different ways of seeing and doing than those we are accustomed to. This thread is continued in the discussion of Derrida's notion of deconstruction.

[138] Cilliers, "Complexity, Deconstruction and Relativism", 257 - 259.

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aporias constitute the range of situations of varying clarity when decisions have to be made. Derrida provides a view on how meaning is created within context rather than through a central logic or structure that *a priori* defines the relationship between the concept and its manifestation in language, experience or action.

4. Cilliers and Derrida: Meaning, complexity and deconstruction: The provisionality of meaning

"There is nothing outside the context/There is no outside text."[139] With these statements, Derrida denies the "metaphysics of presence", which is his critique against the insistence of Western tradition to look for external or logocentric determination of meaning.

Derrida is influenced by Saussure's theory of language in terms of how a concept (the signified) and its related sign (the material component of a sign, the signifier) can never be separated from each other. Instead, they derive their meaning through the differences from other words and their meanings (for instance, the concept of "cat" is not "dog"), and traces of every other sign in the system of the language (for instance, **c**at is not **b**at, **m**at or **r**at).[140] He differs from Saussure, however, in terms of Saussure's bend towards structuralism, which Derrida, as he said himself, never considered as an option to describe meaning. In this regard, Dooley and Kavanagh quote Derrida where he states that deconstruction was a move to challenge structuralism: "...deconstruction was a putting into question of the authority of linguistics, of logocentrism. And this, accordingly, was a protest against the 'linguistic turn', which under the name of structuralism was already well on its way...".[141] The big difference between Derrida and Saussure, Cilliers points out, is that Saussure considers the system of language as a stable system consisting of signs, the concepts they describe and their difference from other signs and concepts, while Derrida considers language an open system, and meaning to develop within a specific context.[142]

With his concept of deconstruction, Derrida therefore challenges the reinstatement of logocentrism or phonocentrism, concepts that derive from the early Greek philosophers who privileged voice over writing. In their terms, voice or speech afforded a purer connection between the thought and the word, as misunderstandings could be clarified *in situ* and the true meaning conveyed.[143]

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[139] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, (John Hopkins University Press, United States. Corrected edition, 1997), 159.
[140] Dooley and Kavanagh, *The Philosophy of Derrida*, 33.
[141] Ibid, 154 n.10, quoted from Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, Giacoma Donis (trans.) (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 76.
[142] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 43.
[143] Dooley and Kavanagh, *The Philosophy of Derrida*, 23.

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Although Derrida claims not to like hierarchies, he admits that it is impossible to step out of the hierarchy of meaning in order to find the "other" meanings. My reading of deconstruction is therefore that, it is not an attempt to destroy order,[144] or is merely an antagonistic force of "irruption that disorganises the entire inherited order",[145] as Royle describes it, but rather an attempt to use the "force of the non-centre" as a means to search for the "other" of language. This is the main thrust of

Derrida's critique of logocentrism.[146] However, by considering the "force of the non-centre" Derrida does not negate the concept of the centre. On the contrary, he is very aware of the centre as the structure that bounds our understanding. In this regard, he talks about the "aporetic supplement"[147] that refers to the "contradictions we face when trying to justify the pureness of an origin".[148]

The aporia lies therein that every rule or standard, as things appear to be from within the system of meaning, can only be defined by its application, as a supplement.[149] As Rasche points

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Reinstating teleology of memory refers to the classic argument that speech is preferable to writing. It is argued that writing runs the risk of being misinterpreted, while the spoken word can be clarified, and therefore conveys the true meaning of the speaker. Plato and Socrates considered speech as the "medium of identity, completion and adjustment; writing [as] the medium of difference, incompletion and dis-adjustment". In this phonocentric description, living speech is related to living memory as a person's internal capacity to remember, while writing is external to memory and considered to be "lifeless" marks, "unable to answer for itself, ... and subjected to the vicissitudes and arbitrary whims of whoever encounters it."

[144] Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, 22.
Royle emphasises the disruptive aspect of deconstruction, pointing out that deconstruction could metaphorically be likened to a "de-sedimentation" of meaning, or more disruptively, as an earthquake that could show up initially as a small crack in the firmament and become a "force of "irruption that disorganizes the entire inherited order".

In a society in which the entire inherited order had been disorganised, and what was believed to be true and stable had been disrupted from within its core values, this interpretation is relevant. The same applies to an organisation whose brand identity, its reputation and core values are disrupted by actions that show how a crack in the firmament of its rules and codes can cause a deep and unbridgeable rift. The question, though, is whether "disorganization of the entire inherited order" is the only way to look at deconstruction, or whether it denotes an aporia of contradictory statements that could be equally true, denying an easy solution. Secondly, it might perhaps be exactly in ignoring the internal contradictions present in every rule or human construct that the rift between the stated rules and the related actions become too large and meaning collapses. The interpretation of deconstruction as disruption or disorganisation therefore seems to point to an extreme position where a social or organisational system is on the brink of "pathalogical behaviour" (Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism,* 119).

[145] Royle, Ibid.
[146] Derrida, "Deconstruction and the Other", 105 – 26.
[147] Jacques Derrida, *Aporias: Dying – Awaiting (One Another at) the "Limits of truth"* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 67, as quoted in Rasche, "Corporate Responsibility Standards", 274.
[148] Rasche, "Corporate Responsibility Standards, 275 – 276.
[149] Painter-Morland and Ten Bos, *Business Ethics and Continental Philosophy*, 331.
With his theory of deconstruction, Derrida uses aporias to explain difficult philosophical concepts that describe situations where one cannot make a decision. The term "undecidability" is used to describe these situations, concepts, or language in general, where it impossible to determine the real meaning. "Aporia" is derived from the Greek *a poros*, which means "no passage or opening".

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out, deconstruction points to being aware of the internal contradictions and tensions that are already taking place in our thinking about applying a rule, or defining a meaning, before we have acted.[150] The structure of language, or of a rule or a standard, is therefore not central to meaning, as "nomination is important, but is constantly caught up in a process that it does not control."[151] Dooley and Kavanagh explain that "the meaning of a word is not determined by its own 'internal essence' or identity; its meaning is always the effect of a differential play of traces."[152] *Différance* therefore presents the "systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other."[153]

Despite the differences inherent to words and concepts, and despite the possibility that meanings might be deferred temporally, it is possible to understand one another, and to convince one another of a standpoint, because: (1) we communicate within a specific context, and (2) meaning is transferred from one context to another through the concept of iteration, the repetition of words, concepts, sentences or ideas over time and place. The alternative would be that every utterance or statement would be unique, and therefore not understandable outside the context in which it was originally created.[154]

Iteration, however, does not mean that any statement or concept can be re-iterated exactly the same as before, as the context might be different, and other meanings might be attached to the concept. Therefore Derrida uses the concept of "traces", which are like the burnt-out cinders,[155] the ashes of previous meanings that remain as a residue of the original meaning, as well as other iterations of the meaning. These residues of the original meaning are always present as memory traces that influence our interpretations. Practically it means that a rule, or a meaning, is interpreted or applied anew every time it is applied in a new context. Although the rule preserves some of its original meaning to make it possible to be recognised and understood, its meaning changes according to the situation in which it is applied. Iteration therefore points to divergent positions that are simultaneously valid, namely: meaning is the same and different,[156] it is partial and incomplete,[157] but never indeterminate,[158] and is bound by a specific context of time and history, but the context is never saturated.[159]

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[150] Rasche, "Corporate Responsibility Standards", 275 – 276.
[151] Derrida, "Living On", 88.
[152] Dooley and Kavanagh. *The Philosophy of Derrida* 34.
[153] Derrida, *Positions*, 27.
[154] Dooley and Kavanagh. *The Philosophy of Derrida*, 38 – 39.
[155] Ibid, 34.
[156] Rasche, "Corporate Responsibility Standards", 274.
[157] Dooley and Kavanagh. *The Philosophy of Derrida*, 26.
[158] Ibid, 56.
[159] Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, 66.

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From this description, it is apparent that Derrida calls for a sensitive approach to our historical constructions, not a disruptive or destructive one, while we open ourselves for an exploration of things we don't know about ourselves and our relationships, as well as for the unknown future complete with all its risks and promises.

In order to make meaningful decisions, we therefore have to interpret the rules or structures that govern our lives, and create order based on the particular context in which we are. When complexity is read in the vein of deconstruction, this newly created order is never stable or constant, and often in an agonistic, aporetic relationship. In this regard, deconstruction therefore means to admit that one is part of the systems of meaning that one seeks to challenge, while at the same time, attempts to "traverse beyond the system". [160]

The mere awareness of the aporia presented by deconstruction and reflection on the differences in meaning do not help us to act, however. In typical life or business situations, we cannot spend all our time on reflection on the difficulties in making decisions. The question is how do we know how to act if we cannot depend on a norm or rule, or follow it as is, and when meaning continues to be deferred? According to Rasche, this need for swift action but not knowing what the right decision is, presents another aporia: we have to reflect in order to not blindly follow rules, but at the same time, we need to act in uncertainty. Can we ever be certain of making the right decision?

According to Derrida, this aporia lies at the root of ethical decision-making. Being undecided implies that a decision has to be made in unsure circumstances. The aporia characterised by "undecidability" therefore points to the indeterminateness of meaning while there remains the "serious and urgent requirement to make a decision in uncertainty".[161] As Rasche points out, undecidability should not be understood as an inability to act, or the neutralisation of the need for decisions, but it refers to our responsibility to do something when we don't exactly know what to do.[162] Every decision causes the decision-maker to feel responsible for all possible outcomes related to the decision. It is in this sense that taking responsibility for our decisions and actions in uncertain circumstances provides the possibility for ethics, as it compels us to take responsibility and being accountable for our actions.[163]

When we take responsibility for our decisions and our actions, we also admit that we are engaged in a form of violence through our obligation to select and include certain phenomena

[160] Woermann, "A Complex Ethics", 134 - 136.
[161] Rasche, "Corporate Responsibility Standards", 277.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, 6.

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or interpretations of reality and exclude others.[164] This realisation that there might be other interpretations of reality than ours, or other possibilities for different actions, hovers like a spectre over every decision we make to act in one way and not in another, or make the choice for one thing and not another. This "ghost of undecidability" is always a sombre presence acting as a reminder of the other possibilities we have not considered. It is in this realisation that we have to act, and that one of the traits of action is that we have to decide (in contrast to thinking and reflecting about action), that Cilliers's reminder to be humble in our knowledge claims comes to mind. It may even be that we may be sensitive to other possibilities exactly because we are beings who have to decide all of the time, as we are acting in one way and not another. In this lies the key to becoming aware of our limitations and of our accountability towards one another for each of our interpretations and actions in the world.

Derrida's creative use of language to describe the abundance, as well as the elusiveness, of meaning serves as an example of a complex system at work. In order to grasp this, however, it would be necessary to be as patient as Derrida when he described a text, as Royle suggests, and to employ a certain slowness,[165] as Cilliers suggests: We have to develop a tolerance for different meanings to evolve through the many iterations of the system, even though we need to act swiftly at times. Entwined in this knowledge lies our ethical awareness, responsiveness and accountability towards one another. As Richardson *et al* write, "We cannot shift the responsibility for the decision on to something else… we *know* that all our choices to some extent incorporate a step in the dark, and therefore we cannot but be responsible for them… An awareness of the contingency and provisionality of things is far better than a false sense of security."[166]

4.1 Preparation, reflection and decentralisation in practice

Being prepared and reflecting on different options offer us the possibility to allow different perspectives, perceptions and experiences to evolve and mature into knowledge.[167] This process happens continuously and involves a constant grappling with uncertainties. Being prepared means starting at a certain point and looking forward into the uncertainties of the future. The starting point is right here, where we are: gathering information, reflecting on the structure in which we work, making decisions and acting on them, while we are uncertain about what we don't know and where we might go wrong. Ethically, the question with which we grapple is that

[164] Dooley and Kavanagh, *The Philosophy of Derrida*, 100.
[165] Cilliers, "On the Importance of a Certain Slowness", 241 – 250.
"Slowness" in the way I understand Cilliers's use of the term, does not mean deference of action, but rather an acknowledgement of the changing nature of meaning as the context changes. In other words, we act reflectively, even though we know that meaning is never complete and is continuously moving just outside our reach.
[166] Richardson, Cilliers and Lissack, "Complexity Science: A 'Grey' Science", 34.
[167] Cilliers, "Complexity, Deconstruction and Relativism", 260.

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we are never sure whether our decisions are just or right. This, Cilliers points out, is how making modest claims for knowledge becomes "an invitation to continue the process of generating understanding".[168] It is by being modest about our knowledge claims, and by acknowledging "difference" and "otherness" as inherent values of the social system that ethical relationships can develop. Expecting "the other" to enter into the relationship at any time oblige us to make our decisions and take our actions cautiously.

When we relate this to the attempt to understand ourselves and our relationships with others in terms of building ethical organisations, it is clear that preparation and reflection on how we make decisions can only happen in interaction with others. The interactions between a group of people who can speak of different experiences and tell different stories about those experiences can help us to open up our ability to become more sensitive to other meanings than the ones we hold. Without that openness, our interpretations of reality can become one-sided and rigid. However, even in our attempt to invite others into our networks of relationships, we must remember that "the other" can never be fully represented, and that we continue to read reality through our own contexts and are influenced by the memories that remain as traces in every new reading of a situation.

When we therefore return to Cilliers's question at the beginning of this chapter, namely, "Can regulated behaviour be considered ethical at all?", the response from a poststructuralist perspective has to be "No". We have to answer in the negative because regulated models and codes (if they were to be applied in the extreme) do not consider the complex relationships that develop amongst individuals and others (including institutions, regulatory boards, the environment, groups, etc.). As Cilliers says, they are merely a calculation of whether the rule has been followed or not. In this regard, they are not concerned with "otherness" and "difference" as values in themselves.[169]

Ethics and moral responsibility is for Cilliers "just another formulation of the principle: you cannot escape the agonistics of the system."[170] Citing Bauman, Cilliers points out that postmodern thought allows us to be emancipated from modernism's structures, freeing us, so to speak, to behave ethically. This freedom provides us, paradoxically, with the capability to make moral choices and take responsibility for the future effects of our choices, while, at the same time, it deprives us of universal guidelines.[171] To behave ethically, according to Cilliers, is not about following rules blindly, but to follow them responsibly, even though it might require us to break them under specific circumstances. This is where ethics codes, which are designed

[168] Ibid.
[169] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 139.
[170] Ibid, 138.
[171] Ibid.

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with the purpose to guarantee predictable ethical responses, fall short, and, in Painter-Morland's words, where, "precisely in [their] search for clarification and predictability ... some important aspects of moral responsiveness are lost" .[172] When ethics codes are described from the business's perspective and are designed to protect the business's interests, they fail to respect "otherness" and "difference" as inherent values of the relationship and thus in the requirements for justness. It is in this regard that otherness and difference can be acknowledged and respected when the conditions are created for different stories to emerge, be told and be listened to. These can contribute to a more responsive as well as a responsible way of acting in the face of uncertainty.

What, then, constitutes "ethics" in complex situations? Complexity thinking, when it is seen through the lens of poststructuralist theories, describes the necessity for individuals and organisations to generate knowledge through their participation in local relationships, and to gain a better understanding of their world through these networks of relationships. Cilliers, for instance, speaks of altruistic interactions as interactions that ensure a system's continuation, and selfish interactions as interactions that lead to entropy, the diminishing of or the breakdown in relationships. Ethics, in this sense, is then a relational activity that takes place between "nodes" in the system. These nodes can be human or non-human entities, such as environments, animals, concepts or ideas that can influence relationships. Some of these entities may have human qualities that can include self-serving agendas and ulterior motives, as well as the capability to respond to the demands and requirements of other human or non-human entities.

The question of ethical decision-making to sustain relationships inevitably leads to questions about individual agency and accountability. It also points towards a moral or virtuous element underlying ethical decisions. In the next section, the question will be asked what it is that allows a human being to be aware of him/herself and his/her aspirations, and be able to question him/herself and amend his or her actions, and at the same time be aware of others and their requirements. Cilliers argues that this question could be answered by taking the complexity theory route and see identity, ethical agency and accountability as emergent properties of the self-organising system.

It will be necessary to take another detour through Derrida's notion of the Other and how undecidedness can lead to accountability towards others in the network, before the study turns to Foucault, whose emphasis is on the subject's inherent potential to become ethical. It is important however to keep in mind Cilliers's description of self-organised criticality[173] in

[172] Painter-Morland, "Questioning Corporate Codes of Ethics", 269.
[173] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 96

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understanding that self-organisation does not necessarily lead to the emergence of accountability or ethical responsiveness: Some systems can over-regulate an individual's behaviour and therefore undermine ethical responsiveness, while, at the other extreme, some can become unstable and chaotic, which affects accountability. Ethically, a system that is balanced between the extremities can be both stable enough to allow accountability, and adaptive enough to be responsive to ethical challenges. It is in this regard that the aporia of undecidability seems to be sensitive to the notion of self-organised criticality. In terms of this study, it is therefore important to understand that the ethical subject, who is capable of making ethical decisions, takes responsibility for those decisions, and is accountable towards others who are affected by the effects of those decisions, because s/he acts in a network of relationships.

An ethical practice includes the negotiation and interacting in a social order, where the individual is at the same time the target and the vehicle of power.[174] This relates to the working of a connectionist system where the system's continuation depends on power relations, and being critically involved in the interactions of the system.

Self-criticality and Foucault's analysis of the care of the self will be examined to draw out the similarities between the complexity view of the self and identity as emergent properties of the connectionist system. This will provide an understanding of how Foucault sees the development of the individual identity. To close the circle and bring the self-reflective individual back into the fold of a community where the subject's relationships and experiences in the community help to form his identity, the study turns to MacIntyre to provide the link. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

4.2 Towards a view on the formation of ethical agency and accountability through the relationship between the self and the Other

Cilliers reads the ethical element in complexity through poststructuralist theory, and refers especially to Derrida, whose theory about deconstruction allows for the acknowledgement of difference, and through his reading of Levinas, to a relationship with the Other.

The introduction of the Other into complexity thinking brings a moral dimension into the understanding of "altruistic" and "selfish" relationships that form in the open network. In this regard, altruistic relationships would necessarily be strengthened by ethical behaviour, which, in terms of relational networks, imply: considering the Other as an important participant. Selfish relationships, conversely, would be centred in the nominal subject.[175] However, pure altruism

[174] Foucault, "Two Lectures", 98.
[175] Hofmeyr, "The Meta-physics of Foucault's Ethics," 117.

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is problematised through Derrida's discussion of the aporia of hospitability, and in the impossibility of giving an unconditional gift. For ethics, and specifically in understanding the agony of making ethical decisions in uncertain conditions while one has the obligation to act, the aporia of hospitality is relevant. In addition, the aporia related to the circular economy implied by the giving of the gift and receiving something in return points to the need for self-reflection. What follows is a short description of what is meant by these two aporias.

Dooley and Kavanagh maintain that, "For Derrida, ethics *is* hospitability",[176] because ethics is about inviting the other into a relationship, as well as a "willingness and desire to welcome the other into your home", so to speak.[177] However, as Derrida points out, and this is where the core problem in the aporia lies, there is always the two opposing forces that pull in different directions: On the one hand, the desire to be hospitable and welcome the other unconditionally is strong, but at the same time, the awareness of one's responsibility to be cautious about whom you invite into your house, as well as to create some conditions for the stay, is equally strong. The host in this description holds the power to invite the guest to make use of his hospitality; the invitation is therefore never unconditional. The undecidable position of the ethical subject is therefore between his/her impossible desire to be unconditional and to open him/herself to the risks and uncertainties related to being unconditional, and the responsibility he/she has in taking up the role of the negotiator in negotiating the risks in terms of the specific situation. In this way the act of hospitality comes with specific conditions.

This negotiation process is, as Dooley and Kavanagh point out, an act of mourning, mourning the loss of the ideal of unconditional hospitality.[178] This act of mourning is the aporia of undecidability where the opposite sides of "conditional" and "unconditional" both have to be present, in order to be hospitable. As they point out, "a hospitality that only calculates with the conditional will be predictable and self-serving; a hospitality that only calculates with the unconditional would be empty and useless."[179] Based on the understanding of this aporia it is apparent that pure altruism is impossible, and at the same time irresponsible. Similarly, the aporia of the impossibility of giving an unconditional gift implies that a gift can only be given unconditionally if there is no expectation on the side of the giver or an obligation on the side of the receiver to reciprocate. Even without expecting anything in return, the act of giving puts the

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Hofmeyr explains Levinas's viewpoint on the relationships between Self and Other as follows, "... the subject only truly comes into being – in any meaningful sense – as ethical subject, that is, after the Other has 'converted' me *from* myself *to* face my infinite responsibility towards others" (Hofmeyr's emphasis).

[176] Dooley and Kavanagh, *The Philosophy of Derrida*, 110.

[177] Ibid.

Hospitality derives from the Latin *hospes*, which in turn derives from *hostis*. As Dooley and Kavanagh explain, "hospitality literally means the power or capability to host the other. The host has the power to welcome the other while remaining master of his home."

[178] Dooley and Kavanagh, *The Philosophy of Derrida*, 112.

[179] Ibid.

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receiver in a position of feeling obliged to return the favour, even if it is just in the mere fact that the recipient acknowledges the gift as a gift. The aporia, which is related to the impossibility of giving an unconditional gift, draws the act of giving and receiving into the economy of exchange.[180] In this regard, the aporia of the unconditional gift has relevance to the ethical questions related to an organisation or individuals in an organisation's intention for "doing the right thing", with regards to internal as well as external stakeholders. It also has relevance for questions about corporate social responsibility and organisations' purposes with doing good in the communities they serve or exploit. We can therefore ask: What do we expect in return for our acts of corporate responsibility? Can we be considered ethical if we comply with rules or standards without questioning our intentions, or when we look at our intentions and behaviours where they cannot be or are not measured?

On the basis of Derrida's project of deconstruction, Lyotard's statement that, "A self does not amount to much but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before"[181] can be read with new eyes. In addition to looking at the subject as ethically insignificant, or non-ethical, another reading becomes possible: When the subject is considered as the nominal force, it limits our ability to understand differences, and therefore our ability to build meaningful relationships.

However, if the aporia of unconditional hospitality is undermined, and the subject is placed in the position of unconditional altruism, the self is put in a vulnerable and powerless position between his/her obligation under the force of the Other's demands, as well as his/her desire to meet this obligation towards the other, while neglecting his/her responsibility towards him/herself or his/her own. For this reason, the aporia related to the double bind of hospitality is what ethics is about. When the aporia of the impossibility of the gift is brought into this relationship, it leads us to reflect critically on many of our own and our organisations' acts of generosity. In this regard, we can ask ourselves whether we are giving with the expectation of receiving more in return. We can also ask what the necessary conditions are that we put in place before we invite the Other into our relationships? These lead to questions such as: Do we consider the Other as another self, who is also subjected to the aporias of hospitality and the gift? To which extent do we allow other possibilities of meaning to enter into our negotiation space? How do we become ethical agents in our negotiations with the Other? For an answer on these questions, the study turns to Foucault.

Foucault looks at ethical relationship from the subject's point, and describes how the individual has inherent potential to become an ethical self, first by making use of his/her capability to

[180] Ibid.
[181] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition,* 15, cited by Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 115.

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engage in power relationships and second, by taking responsibility for his/her own ethical formation.

The next section will unpack how Foucault's analysis of the constant interplay between power and knowledge and the discourse that flows out of these relationships enable individuals to consider their own subjectivity within these relationships, and in this way, create an ethical environment. When Foucault's analysis of how the ethical subject comes to be is read through a complexity lens, and specifically, a critical complexity lens, some similarities are apparent.

Similar to Cilliers's description of how humans interact in connectionist systems, the individual who is (by virtue of being human) engaged in these power struggles, is never the nucleus of the activity, but a node or participant in the network of relationships. Where Cilliers describes these power relationships in terms of "the agonistics of the system", which causes a healthy system to expand and contract in a perpetual state of disequilibrium, Foucault describes the subject's participation in power struggles as a "freedom" to actively and critically engage with and within the constraints of the structures in which we live. Power and knowledge are not abstract concepts that exist external to the human subject, but become evident in the relationships, actions and decisions of humans. In terms of ethics, Cilliers supports Derrida's notion that one becomes an ethical subject by being aware of the undecidability of ethical problems, of which the relationship between the self and the other is one. Foucault, however, provides a closer look at the self, who has to care for him/herself in order to care for the Other. The "relationship of the self to itself and the relationship to others" are described through the term, "governmentality", which, Foucault maintains, is the "very stuff of ethics".[182]

5. Foucault: Power/Knowledge, ethical agency and the conditions for ethics

Foucault defines power by describing what it is *not,* to show its relational character. According to Foucault, power is neither a commodity that belongs to anybody, that can be lost, found, given away or shared, nor a quality that resides in any body.[183] It is also never localised, and it is not a tool or an action that maintains or reproduces economic relationships. Power is, according to Foucault, an emergent property of the interactions in the system. He describes it as "a relation of force", "something which circulates, or ... which only functions in the form of a chain," and "employed and exercised through a net-like organisation".[184]

Power, according to Foucault, can never be neutral, as it is produced by knowledge and becomes visible when it is exercised as practices, techniques or procedures.[185] Power should not

[182] Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom", 300.
[183] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol 1: Will to Knowledge*, 94.
[184] Foucault, "Two Lectures", 98-99.
[185] Townley, "Foucault, Power/Knowledge", 520.

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be considered to be a negative or repressive force, but rather as a productive network which runs through the whole social body ...".[186] In this regard Townley[187] quotes Foucault in saying, " ... [power] produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production." [188]

Knowledge, the twin in this interlinked relationship, is not neutral either. Knowledge, in Foucault's terms, is a discipline – a branch of knowledge as well as a system of correction and control. [189] Townley describes it as discipline being applied: "It delineates an analytical space and in constituting an arena of knowledge, provides the basis for action and intervention – the operation of power".[190] In this sense, procedures for research, investigation, training or any intervention can be seen as techniques of power. In other words, they are procedures to create bodies of information that can be controlled because of the way that they are demarcated. Foucault makes it clear that power cannot be employed without knowledge, while, at the same time, knowledge cannot produce anything but power.[191]

Both power and knowledge manifest in and through discourse. In other words, we create meaning through and in our discourses, and frame our reality accordingly; the discourse provides us with the vocabulary to create systems and processes. It also allows us to distinguish between groups of things according to the classifications and norms that we create within the specific discourse. It is within these power relationships that manifest as discourses that we create control mechanisms, which Foucault labels "systems of normalisation". In *The Order of Things,* Foucault explains that the way in which things are ordered is a way of exerting power over knowledge and creating truth: "... truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power ... Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. (Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is the types of discourse which it accepts)."[192]

When we look at organisational values, cultures, ethics, codes, rules and policies as ways of creating order, all of them can be seen as normalising devices that exert subtle pressure on individuals to conform to organisational attitudes and unwritten rules of behaviour.[193] In this regard, they can be considered as a regime of truth in which power is exerted over knowledge, and tacit knowledge embedded in values. As a company culture can subtly define the way

[186] Foucault, "Truth and Power", 119.
[187] Townley, "Foucault, Power/Knowledge," 521.
[188] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 194.
[189] Townley, "Foucault,Power/Knowledge," 521.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Foucault, "Prison Talk", 52.
[192] Foucault, "Truth and Power", 131.
[193] Kornberger and Brown, "Ethics' as a discursive resource", 497 – 518; and Stansbury and Barry. "Ethics Programs and the Ethics of Control", 239—261.

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people think about things, all the decisions that are made in a business could therefore be affected by these implicit pressures and frames of reference.[194]

However, In Foucault's productive theory of power, these manifestations of ambient power both limit and empower people's ability to act ethically. The challenge therefore is to create discursive frameworks that would allow the development of empowering ethical practices within these potentially normalising practices. This would mean acknowledging the capability of the individual to make moral choices, as well as his/her freedom to take part in these practices and produce him/herself as an ethical subject. As Foucault points out, "The key to the personal poetic attitude of a philosopher is not to be sought in his ideas, as if it could be deduced from them, but rather in his philosophy-as-life, in his philosophical life, his ethos." [195]

5.1 Ethics as a practice, freedom, systems of normalisation and governmentality

In *Politics and Ethics: An Interview*, Foucault emphasises that he sees ethics as a practice, not in terms of applying ideas ("historical and theoretical analyses of power relations, institutions and knowledge") but rather to question them and put them to the test.[196] He is not concerned with disagreement as such, but is concerned with a questioning attitude, or an awareness of historical influences on the way we understand our reality, the power interests of various individuals (including the subjective self) in the network, conceptual frameworks and institutional practices. In other words, he is interested in the subject's freedom to question and act within these power relationships.

According to Foucault, being practically engaged in these power relationships through questioning, searching for meaning, agreeing or disagreeing, the subject develops a moral sensibility – and this is the freedom that provides the condition for ethics. In his words, "I do not conclude from this that one may say just anything within the order of theory, but, on the contrary, that a demanding, prudent, experimental attitude is necessary; at every moment, step by step, one must confront what one is thinking and saying with what one is doing, with what one is."[197]

Freedom, in Foucaultian terms, is not unrestricted, but is located and constituted in the contextual limitations of the power/knowledge relationship.[198] In this sense, the subject is neither a rule in him/herself nor a passive recipient of repressive power actions exerted upon him/her by others, but is actively engaged in the establishment of his/her own identity as an ethical subject through his/her relationships.

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[194] Painter-Morland, *Business Ethics as Practice*, 117.
[195] Foucault, "Politics and Ethics", 374.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibarra-Colado *et al*, "The Ethics of Managerial Subjectivity", 47.

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In contrast, governed ethical practices and their regulatory bodies resemble, to an extent, Foucault's elaboration on Bentham's Panopticon as an institutional system of normalisation. For Foucault, a system of normalisation involves the creation of categories, regulations, appraisals, corrective measures and hierarchies that become the norm against which individual behaviour is measured and controlled. Individuals are at the same time subjected to the rules laid down by others and regulated by their own conscience and knowledge of the system.[199] Knowledge of the system places limitations on what can be discussed and questioned within specific contexts, as well as enables or restricts behaviour according to the prevailing power relationships. In this way, Foucault's emphasis on the individual's obligation to participate in power relations takes ethics out of the realm of systemised norms and makes it a political act, if not relational in the sense of a complex ethics. For an individual to develop a moral identity, however, he/she needs to become self-critical.

Foucault created the term "governmentality" to explain the process that refers to our attempt to maintain our sense of freedom while we navigate the various power relationships of which we are part, thus creating the conditions for ethical behaviour.[200] This process, in Foucault's words, is "the relationship of the self to itself in its articulation with relation to others" .[201] Foucault is saying that the process of governmentality includes a whole range of practices that makes it possible for individuals (in their freedom to act) to deal with one another. In his words, "Those who try to control, determine, and limit the freedom of others are themselves free individuals who have at their disposal certain instruments they can use to govern others. Thus the basis for all this is freedom ...".[202]

The concept of freedom to participate in power relationships relates to Foucault's description of a "critical ontology of the self".

5.2 A critical ontology of the self

Foucault's "critical ontology of the self" describes self-reflection as an attitude or ethos where the subject continuously scrutinises, and willingly allows his/her views, beliefs, values and agendas to be scrutinised and criticised in his attempt to be free. In this way, it becomes possible to become aware of and critique our own limitations and, simultaneously, analyse the limits that are imposed on us historically. This allows us to experiment with the possibility of transcending these limits, and becoming ethical subjects with a moral identity.[203] For Foucault, it

[199] Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, 21.
[200] Painter-Morland and Ten Bos, *Business Ethics and Continental Philosophy*, 341.
[201] Foucault, "Subjectivity and Truth, 87-92.
[202] Foucault, "The Ethics as a Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom", 300.
[203] Foucault, "Truth and Method I", 50.

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is an essential part of our lives and should not be considered merely as a technique or an occasional exercise. As a life-long pursuit, it becomes not only a way of "unlearning" bad practices or seeing others' opinions of us in perspective, but it prepares us (like an athlete or a soldier prepares him/herself for the battle[204]) to participate in a life-long struggle against external impositions upon us. Finally, but not less important, the care of the self can be therapeutic through practices such as writing and journalling.[205]

The relationship one has with oneself is therefore an ethical relationship, one that determines how an individual will conduct him or herself as a moral subject. This relationship has four aspects, which answer to the questions:[206] (1) Which part of myself is concerned with moral conduct?; (2) In which way am I subjected or morally obliged to another?; (3) How can I change to become a moral subject?, and (4) To which kind of being do I aspire when I behave morally? In Foucault's terms, taking care of oneself in this way becomes a practice for life.[207]

5.3 Caring for the self to care for the Other

Crane, Knights and Starkey make the point that the subject that confronts those in power with difficult truths does not care for him/herself alone, but also for others.[208] In this way, taking care of oneself involves a dialogue, in which the individual is free to question, to be unconvinced, to require more information, or to point out inconsistencies in an argument, while the other in this relationship has the freedom to respond. Foucault compares this relationship to a game that consists of questions and answers that is at once pleasant and difficult. Like a real game, the game of dialogue is played by the rules, with "each of the two partners [taking] pains to use only the rights given him by the other and by the accepted form of the dialogue."[209]

Foucault insists that dialogue is essential, because, in his words, "a whole morality is at stake, the morality that concerns the search for the truth and the relation to the other." [210] Seen in this light, his reference to attending to oneself as a function of struggle does not mean to be continuously in conflict with others or entering into polemics with an adversary, but one in which the other is considered another self in search for the truth. In this regard, "the other" is different from Levinas's notion of the nominal "Other", and "the self" in Foucault's view is not

[204] Foucault gives two metaphors as an example, that of the athletic contest in which the wrestler must dispose of his opponents and continue training when he is not fighting, and that of warfare, in which the mind has to be prepared in a similar way as an army that must always be ready for any attack.
[205] Foucault, "The Hermeneutics of the Subject", 96 - 97.
[206] Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics", 340 - 372.
[207] Ibid.
[208] Crane, Knights and Starkey, "The Conditions of our Freedom", 309.
[209] Foucault, "Polemics, Politics, and Problemizations", 381-382.
[210] Ibid, 381.

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merely a respondent to the demands of "the other", but rather one that acknowledges the self in the other and the other in the self.[211]

Foucault does not prescribe specific techniques to develop a self-critical attitude, but points to various technologies of self, whose purpose is the production of self, self-governing and the governing of the behaviours of others. Ibarra-Colado *et al* put it that these technologies of self "allow the emergence of particular types of self".[212] In Foucault's words, these technologies "link together truth and the subject".[213] Ethical conduct in Foucault's terms is "the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection".[214] However, we can never be entirely sure that our conduct is ethical. Foucault's description of "freedom informed by reflection"[215] requires from us to continuously harbour the suspicion that our conduct is morally flawed. As Willmott points out, "Actions are ethical only when full personal responsibility is taken for them",[216] including those that conform to the requirements of ethical codes. This would require self-scrutiny and the weighing up of various obligations and responsibilities, including individual, and organisational and professional responsibilities and commitments.

The alternative, conformity to institutional values, is therefore not ethical, as the subject refuses to exercise the freedom, which is part of being human, and "abrogate [his/her] ethical responsibility" to others, the institution, codes, or superiors. This can lead to a greater vulnerability as, in Willmott's words, "one depends on transient values and norms to affirm an inherently precarious sense of 'self-certainty'." [217] Willmott points out that this dependency on others for ethical direction would not only point to a loss of the subject's ability to be ethical, but invariably also to the loss of self. As regards business ethics, a dependency on codes and rules, and a too strong culture of obedience can lead to the loss of ethics. When this happens, business ethics is a contradiction in terms.

Ethics, in Foucault's terms cannot be taken for granted, but remains a constant struggle in which various influences are at work to enable or inhibit the subject's capability for self-scrutiny. Inhibiting factors include business ethics codes or rules where the subject's ability to self-reflect

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[211] It would be problematic to consider the relationship between self and other as a relationship of equality, in which the self is stylised to an equal degree to all others, however. The power/knowledge relationship cannot be taken out of the equation when speaking about considering the other as another self, or the self as another, because all relationships contain an element of selection, preference, or hierarchy. For example, some very unequal relationships, such as fascist or paternalistic relationships can be maintained with a great deal of generosity extended to the subordinate position. In such relationships, power over the other is validated by the care for the other.

[212] Ibarra-Colado *et al*, "The Ethics of Managerial Subjectivity", 47.

[213] Foucault, "About the Beginnings of The Hermeneutics of the Self", 102.

[214] Foucault, *Ethics: Essential Works*, 284.

[215] Ibid.

[216] Willmott, "Organizational Culture", 84.

[217] Ibid.

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mirrors governing techniques that restrict the subject to monitor him/herself and ensure conformity to the rule. Taking care of the self by actively questioning oneself in relationship to these practices is the only possible ethical stance that can be taken. Although freedom is a condition for ethics in Foucault's terms, it requires courage and a mature understanding of oneself in relation to/with others, as well as a sense of purpose in order to exercise that freedom.

6. Concluding remarks

In the beginning of this chapter, the question was asked whether ethical decision-making is possible in rule-based environments. Through a brief look at Cilliers's perspective on complexity theory's relational character, as well as an interpretation of how the caring of the self (Foucault) implies a relationship with the self as well as with others, it was shown on a practical level that a deterministic approach to decision-making limits the decision-making capabilities of individuals. Through Painter-Morland,[218] Werhane and Freeman,[219] and Kjonstad and Willmott,[220] it was shown that, when codes and rules are drawn up purely to comply with legal or regulatory requirements, compliance is considered as a reporting requirement only and does not stimulate questioning, dissent, discussion or moral discretion. Ethics, then, gets an inhibiting character, rather than inviting critical participation and adaptation to change. It was shown that, at a structural level, standard practices such as codes and policies follow a linear logic which does not allow them to adapt promptly to changes and challenges in the system. The argument was not that rules and codes have no place within business, however. Instead, it was pointed out that business rules, operational standards and policies are crucial elements that provide the structure and congruence that enable an organisation to compete fairly in a business environment, but that, when these rules are followed without discretion, due to various factors that influence behaviours in the business, "business ethics" is indeed oxymoronic[221] and the business displays something akin to a split personality.

The problem of a split personality seems to be two-fold: in the first place, it manifests in the distinction between "business" on the one hand, and "ethics" on the other, as if they are two separate components of business with different purposes and strategies. Secondly, it seems to lie in people's unawareness of the effect of tacit knowledge, such as values and a company culture, that subtly define the way people think about things. Where ethical decision-making is not integrated throughout the operations of the business, the "real purpose of business" as well as tacit cultural and values/value considerations influencing the business environment will weigh more than any individual moral inclinations people might have. All the decisions that are

[218] Painter-Morland, "Agency in Corporations", 18 – 24.
[219] Werhane and Freeman, "Business Ethics: The State of the Art", 2.
[220] Kjonstad and Willmott, "Business Ethics: Restrictive or Empowering?", 445 – 464.
[221] Nash, "Intensive Care for Everyone's Least Favourite Oxymoron", 277 – 290.

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made in a business are therefore affected by these implicit pressures and frames of reference,[222] more the reason for ethics to be contextualised.[223]

However, even though I argue for an attitude of relationality to be induced in a business in order to strengthen ethical relationships, a practical consideration is that "following" is at the least as important as "having discretion" and "taking responsibility". When thinking of the power structures within organisations, combined with the implicit pressures and frames of reference that affect attitudes, many employees would rather do what others do, or comply with rules that can be followed comfortably, than question the normal state of events. Would training, awareness programmes or any produced events to enhance ethical responsiveness make a difference to a reality where it is easier not to be responsive to ethical challenges?

From a Foucaultian viewpoint, no individual is ever powerless in systems of normalisation and, from a Derridean perspective, the ethical subject can never escape taking responsibility for his or her actions. Ethics, including business or organisational ethics, from Foucault's perspective, can therefore never be separated from the individual's aspiration to become an ethical subject, who responds to emergent values. In this regard, the ethical subject can also never be separated from the other's demand to be acknowledged as another self. Engaging with counter-narratives could provide such a response, which also allows the individual to consider his/her own response to following or not following rules.

Complexity theory points to ethics as a practice in which the network is considered the discursive space where knowledge is created, shared, validated (even though it is continuously challenged and adjusted), changed and used. When poststructuralist theories are related to complexity theory, on how knowledge is created in agonistic systems through the dynamic power relationships amongst various individuals (including employees, clients, shareholders, suppliers, the media, et cetera), it is apparent that we can lose perspective of the implications of our decisions, especially when we don't ask the right questions.

The types of questions we ask in business and social life will provide us with the answers on which we act. If we don't ask critical questions about the normative framework within which we do business, our decisions and actions might lose sight of ethical considerations, as we will make these decisions under the influence of undercurrents that are difficult to discern. The questions we ask, and the discourses we enter into are therefore important in starting the discussion about ethical relationships, responsiveness and subjectivity. In this regard, the stories people tell and experiences they share are important ways to allow the Self to step into the shoes of

[222] Painter-Morland, *Business Ethics as Practice,* 117.
[223] Woermann, "A Complex Ethics", 81.

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the Other. It allows oneself to see the Other as another Self, and oneself as the other through the eyes of another individual, without the constraints exercised through institutionalised rules.

Engaging in storytelling allows us to rephrase our questions from *where* the power is situated in relationships and *who* has the power, to ask *how* power is exercised through the various techniques, practices and procedures that give it its effect.[224] Likewise, the question, how to comply with the rules and corporate norms, in order to maintain the equilibrium in the organisation (and in the process possibly be incentivised by personal gain, or be coerced by peer pressure), could be changed to: how to maintain the various relationships that interact with and within the system (and be accountable for our decisions and actions). In addition, instead of asking: Who is the expert?, we could ask: Who else, in the network of relationships, can join the conversation and contribute to the generation of a wider variety of knowledge and meaning?; and, instead of asking, Can it be done?; or Is the cost justified?; or: What are the odds that something would happen?, we could ask critical questions, such as: What are the unwritten rules that dictate the terms in which success and respect could be earned by employees?[225] When this happens, we invite conversation and enter into a critical discourse that could make it possible for a relational ethics to develop.

However, it would be useful to remember Cilliers's warning that, when we participate in the agonistics of the system, it should be with the awareness that we can only know in part (our knowledge is localised) and that various other interpretations are possible. Because we can never be sure that our decisions and actions are just, we have to assume renewed responsibility for our decision every time it is made. In this sense, complexity thinking shows us how accountability and ethics take on relational and responsive qualities. Heterogeneous knowledge and the problem of interpretation presented by différance and undecidability are not issues that point to a relativistic view of knowledge or to cynicism about the conditions of knowledge, but rather present opportunities for individuals and business to continue the ethics conversation in an ever-enlarging network or community of practice. In this regard, storytelling may be able to accommodate more of the agonistic nature of complex systems while still playing an orientating role, without suffering from the deterministic implications of central structures like codes and rules. The possibility of stories and storytelling to create meaning will be explored in the next chapter.

[224] Townley, "Foucault, Power/Knowledge", 520.
[225] Painter-Morland, "Business Ethics as a Practice", 122.

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Chapter 2: Assumption 2: Philosophical analysis of "storytelling" as a sense-making capability

The Naked Truth

Truth, naked and cold, knocked on people's doors and asked to be let in to their homes. When they saw his nakedness, they shied away in shame and horror, and shut their doors upon him. His nakedness frightened people. Parable found him, sitting alone, shivering from the cold, and very hungry. She took pity on Truth and took him home. She sat him down by the warmth of the fire, fed him and dressed him in the rich garb of story. When Truth, clothed in story, went out again and knocked on people's doors, they were happy to see him and welcomed him to warm himself at their fires.[226]

In the previous chapter, it was argued that ethical decision-making and accountability in complex systems are relational, rather than purely based on reason and the universality of certain moral codes. It was shown on a practical level that a deterministic approach to decision-making limits the decision-making capabilities of individuals. At a structural level, standard practices such as codes and policies follow a linear logic, which does not allow them to adapt promptly to changes and challenges in the system. It was pointed out that a one-sided view of knowledge and knowledge creation could lead to the dismissal of tacit knowledge that subtly define the way people think about things, and therefore affect all decisions made in a business.[227]

When we understand business as a complex environment, it means that we acknowledge the fact that we can only know in part, and can only have localised knowledge. It also means that we understand that knowledge is created in the relationships between people, and by implication, that ethics reside in relationships and in the way individuals respond to emergent issues. Complexity theory is sensitive to the idea that the ethical subject is continuously formed through his/her interactions in the system. In this regard, ethics becomes a practice in which the network is considered the discursive space where knowledge is created, shared, validated (even though it is continuously challenged and adjusted), changed and used. As we make sense of our situation within a specific context, it points to the need to be aware of the possibility of other interpretations and have to assume a renewed responsibility for our actions and decisions, every time we make them. In this regard, complexity theory is sensitive to the relational and responsive character of ethics and accountability.

[226] Based on a Jewish teaching tale: *The Naked Truth.*
[227] Painter-Morland, *Business Ethics as Practice,* 117.

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The focus in this chapter is on the implicit and tacit knowledges that influence the forming of the culture of a business. I point out that storytelling, as a sense-making capability shared by humans, may be able to accommodate more of the agonistic nature of complex systems while still playing an orientating role, without suffering from the deterministic implications of central structures like codes and rules.

This chapter is based on the second assumption of this dissertation, namely that, stories and narrative provide us with the means to make sense of complex situations, and understand ourselves and our relationship with others. They also contribute to our ability to develop a better sense of what the appropriate behaviour would be in ethically challenging, unexpected or complex situations. Entrenched in this assumption are the understandings that (1) storytelling is never a neutral activity but an essential human quality[228] that enables humans to reduce the unknowable complexity of the world required for their survival; (2) that it is more than a sense-making instrument used for one's survival, as, from an Aristotelian framework as MacIntyre uses, storytelling allows us to relate to others and our environment in a way that brings pleasure and creates a sense of "the good life"; and (3) no statement, principle or structure can ever be wholly objective or fundamentally true, as the models we create of the world are constructed within specific contexts[229] and based on a specific knowledge we have of the world. This knowledge can be understood through narratives that are constituted as a "plurality of smaller stories that function well within the particular contexts where they apply". [230]

This chapter provides a brief overview of ethical agency, responsiveness to others, as well as accountability, from the viewpoint of Alisdair MacIntyre. In the first section the following questions are explored: Who are we as ethical agents? What does it mean to be in an ethically responsive relationship with others? What does accountability mean in practical terms? This section draws on MacIntyre's concern with the re-establishment of the virtuous character that has the capacity for judgement and practical wisdom. MacIntyre's emphasis on the embeddedness of the individual in the stories of his/her community as well as the notion of a narrative unity of a life provides the link with the individual's ability to reflect on his/her own purposes, attitudes and continuous development as an ethical subject, as Foucault describes it.

The second part of the chapter provides a brief look at the discourse around organisational culture, storytelling and narrative in organisational literature. The question in this section considers how knowledge is created through the stories and narratives that are continuously and co-operatively created in organisations. The suggestion is made that a narrative approach to organisational ethics and organisational ethics research (considering ethical agency as a part

[228] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2, 216.
[229] Ibid, 221.
[230] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 4, 114.

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of the complex relationships that constitute organisational culture) can provide insights about power relationships, as well as individual agency and the shifting relationships that make up organisational culture. However, drawing on Martin's problematisation of culture studies, I also point out in this section that organisational culture, defined as "that which cultural members share", causes a problem in organisational studies, and disagreement amongst researchers: It is not clear exactly what is shared and what should be excluded from the concept of culture, or how it compares to definitions of organisational identity, image or climate.[231] The question I ask in this regard is, in which way organisational stories can either enable or repress individual responsiveness to ethical issues.

The third section of the chapter brings together storytelling and complexity, looking specifically at the implications for ethics when we acknowledge that organisational interactions are inherently complex. By understanding how the history of the system is reflected in our stories and how dominant narratives are in constant interaction with current, living stories and tentative, unformed-as-yet antenarratives, it becomes clear that storytelling can provide a deeper understanding of emergent ethical issues in an organisation. However, it requires an open-minded approach to acknowledge the provisionality of our own positions. This section also looks at how dominant narratives that exist as different nodes (or storied spaces) in the network can cause conflict, and when these narratives become hegemonic narratives, how the power imbalance can result in an ethical myopia in individuals.

This chapter concludes by pointing out that the key to accountability and ethical relationships can be found in the responsiveness of human beings in their relationships to other.

1. MacIntyre: A perspective on ethical agency from a responsive and relational perspective

Who am I? Who do you consider me to be? How do I understand myself as a moral subject and an ethical agent? These questions that essentially refer to a self concept that integrates identity, reputation, and responsibility for, as well as accountability towards, others, are explained by MacIntyre, who links a person's identity with the entirety of his/her practices during the course of a life. Not only are these practices entwined with the individual's purpose, passions, intentions and motives as the "author" of his/her life, but they are also scrutinised and judged by others with whom the individual shares a spatial and temporal setting.

MacIntyre points to three essential characteristics related to responsiveness and accountability: (1) understanding and presenting oneself as an individual with an identity other than the identities presented in specific roles and work positions; (2) understanding and acknowledging

[231] Martin, *Organizational Culture: Mapping the Terrain*.

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oneself as a "practically rational individual" who is entitled to making critical judgements; and (3) acknowledging and accepting one's accountability as a practical, critical individual.[232] In his words, "one cannot be a moral agent without understanding oneself as a moral agent at the level of one's everyday practice... and ... one cannot exercise the powers of a moral agent, unless one is able to understand oneself as justifiably held responsible in virtue of one's ability to exercise these powers."[233]

In organisational settings, the core distinction against which an individual's sense of responsibility and accountability can be judged lies in the difference between, or the constancy in, the individual's enactment of: "who I believe I am as an individual" and "who I believe I am as a role player", and "how I enact those beliefs in my everyday practices". The concepts of "entirety of one's actions", "consistency" and "credibility" will be unpacked and brought in relationship with "responsibility" and "accountability".

MacIntyre explains that an individual's actions throughout his/her life can be seen as a unity that is consistent and credible, spanning an entire historical and chronological lifetime. By implication, the individual, as the author of his/her own life, is responsible for his or her choices and conduct in the past, present and future, as well as in the different roles which he/she has to act throughout a lifetime.[234] This unity of a life (also described as "a narrative beginning to middle to end"[235]), can only be understood through the accounts given by the individual as well as others about his/her everyday practices. In this way, consistency in one's actions and behaviours as an individual is an important virtue of the ethical agent who constitutes a unity of character which makes him/her more than the sum of the different roles in which he/she acts.

As important as consistency is the virtue of credibility. The words, "I am forever whatever I have been at any time for others – and I may at any time be called upon to answer for it – no matter how changed I may be now",[236] points to a continuous interplay between the individual being the subject and owner of his/her own destiny, and, at the same time, being the subject (or object) of others' scrutiny and judgement. This judgement can only be made when the unity of a person's life and practices are read against the values and practices, or the accepted social standards or norms, of the social order of which he or she is a member.

Identity, from a value-based perspective, is formed while trying to find one's own place and significance in the unity of communal life. What is important for the individual is his/her self-

[232] MacIntyre, "Social Structures", 315 – 316.
[233] Ibid, 314.
[234] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 217.
[235] Ibid, 205.
[236] Ibid, 217.

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concept about who he/she is as a human being outside of, or alongside, the expectations related to each of the roles in which he/she participates. It is in this sense that MacIntyre points out that the key question is not to ask *of what I am the author*, but rather to ask *of which stories I form a part*.[237] To understand our own identity therefore requires that we understand the difference between the roles we play as individuals in different contexts, and the roles played by actors who cannot control the characters they portray.

Returning to the question at the beginning of this section, *Who am I?,* a possible response based on an individual's concept of his/her own identity could be, *I am who I am (who I believe to be) in relationship with others*. Another response could be that, I *am who I am in response to the values and practices of the social context in which I find myself*.

The first response implies that an individual can be held responsible for maintaining those relationships as well as be accountable to the people with whom one is in relationship. The second response implies, firstly, that an individual's practices will be judged according to the expectations of others in the relational network, and secondly, that an individual has to defend his/her responses in terms of who he/she believes him/herself to be as an ethical agent. By implication, this also means that an individual has to exercise his/her capacity to reflect and question who he/she is in relation to the social values against which his/her actions would be judged. Furthermore, if we understand agency as an emergent property of a complex system, it is important to acknowledge the fact that corrupted agency can also emerge from role responsibility. In this regard, context is an important factor in the emergence of agency.

It is in response to the individual's capacity for critical questioning that MacIntyre's second requirement for accountability becomes important, namely that the individual has to acknowledge his/her capacity and right to be a practically reasonable individual. This rationality should, however, not be considered the same as the rationality proposed by Kant, which is based on rational protocols based on two premises: (1) if the rules or morality are rational, they must be the same for all rational beings, and (2) if they are binding on all rational beings, the question is not whether rational people are capable of carrying out, but whether they have the will to carry them out. Furthermore, MacIntyre's perspective on the practically reasonable individual is also quite different from the poststructuralist viewpoint.

The important difference MacIntyre wants to emphasise is that Kant's practical rational agent is an independent individual who is autonomous in his/her decision-making as regards following or not following universally binding, rational moral principles independent on circumstances or

[237] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 216

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conditions.[238] In contrast, MacIntyre's practical, reasonable individual is always embedded in relationships, and has the right to question the state of his/her social and cultural order, based on his/her capacities for moral agency as a "normal human being"[239] who is influenced and guided by his/her historical and temporal setting.

Another implication of the capability to reflect on the interactions of which we are part, as well as to question the state of the current order, is that we, as individuals, are mutually responsible for the creation of the social order in which we participate. In this sense, MacIntyre points to the notion of a "correlative" [240] accountability that is an aspect of one's narrative selfhood. He describes it as an "interlocking set of narratives" in which the individual is not accountable alone, but can "put others to the question" .[241] In MacIntyre's words, "I am part of their story as they are part of mine". [242] If we are part of one another's stories, we are mutually responsible for our moral and ethical behaviours, and are therefore also responsible for pointing out ethical issues of a questionable character. It implies, however, that the capability to do this comes from one's participation in social relationships. As MacIntyre puts it, the capacity to make reflective judgements emerge from "a systematic dialogue with others and [these judgements] are subject to critical scrutiny by others".[243]

This capacity has a historical character, in the sense that the capability to reflect on oneself and others is built over many years, starting in childhood, often through listening to stories. MacIntyre considers stories to be an important part of learning how to become ethically or morally sensible. These stories can include personal accounts as well as folklore, myths or legends. As MacIntyre says, "Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth."[244] Through these stories, in which different roles are evident, we learn how to understand the world. In MacIntyre's words:

> *"We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters – roles into which we have been drafted – and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed. It is through hearing stories about wicked stepmothers, lost children, ... [et cetera]... that children learn or mislearn both what a child and a parent is, what the cast of characters*

[238] Ibid, 44 – 45.
[239] MacIntyre, "Social Structures", 314.
[240] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 218.
[241] MacIntyre, Ibid.
[242] MacIntyre, Ibid.
[243] MacIntyre, "Social Structures", 321.
[244] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 216.

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> *may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. ...Hence there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources. Mythology, in its original sense, is at the heart of things."* [245]

Accountability, for MacIntyre, is more than giving an account about one's actions to a critical other, but extends to the point where one has to persuade those who do not agree, in addition to responding to those who are critical of one's practices. [246] It is by thinking about oneself in relation to conflicting values that one can develop a sense of accountability. He points out, however, that this thinking is not to be considered a theoretical exercise, but is about being practically responsive to these differences in values. This brings about internal conflict and requires courage to act credibly in the face of resistance from others. [247] MacIntyre refers to Anderson's insight[248] that "it is through conflict, and sometimes only through conflict that we learn what our ends and purposes are". [249]

When this tension is considered from a complexity viewpoint, it points to a system in disequilibrium, in other words, a system in which multiple interactions take place, coming in conflict, causing changes and getting changed themselves, in the process. In similar terms, a human being who questions the status quo has to defend him/herself and persuade, or be persuaded by, others to enter into the agonistics of the system. Without this tension, ethical deliberation is not possible, as both MacIntyre from a virtue ethics and Cilliers from a complexity perspective point out, even though they may come to this conclusion for different reasons.

This co-dependency and correlative accountability for our social order could be interpreted as the individual's innate need for community, implying a certain vulnerability we display towards others, and the expectancy that others will also respond in a way that contributes to the communal good. In an ideal situation, all the stories in a community are interwoven to form a bigger narrative discourse permeating the entire community and consisting of a good measure of divergent perspectives. This would involve asking for, questioning of, agreeing and

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[245] Ibid.
[246] MacIntyre," Social Structures", 316.
[247] Ibid, 318.
[248] "On Anderson's interpretation of him, Heraclitus taught that a thing's permanence, its stability, as well as its growth and development, had their source in the counter-poising of opposite tendencies, not in the subordination of every force within it to a single objective. This, according to Anderson, is as true of the human mind and of human society as it is of the candle-flame." In: J.A. Passmore, "Anderson and Twentieth-Century Philosophy", introductory essay in *Studies in Empirical Philosophy* by John Anderson, (c) The University of Sydney Library, http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/anderson.
[249] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 164.

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disagreeing, and the giving of accounts of our practices to one another.[250] However, this does not always happen, and discrepancies between one's own ethical and moral convictions and the requirements or perceived requirements of the social environment are displayed in various ways where individuals act in one way in certain circumstances and in another, at other times.

According to MacIntyre, these problems can arise from several possible situations. For instance, when a person has not conceived of him/herself as someone with an identity outside his/her social roles or has not accepted his/her responsibility to question the accepted way of doing things in a specific environment, it can cause moral and ethical myopia.

When courage and discernment are lacking, an individual's capacity for ethical responsiveness is implicated. In addition, when social power structures place a burden on an individual to act in ways that compromise his/her individual integrity, an individual's responsibilities and sense of accountability in terms of his/her social and individual roles are compromised. In this sense, "being forever whatever I have been at any time for others" can either become the burden placed by others on the individual to respond in a way that is commonly accepted (and so, possibly compromise one's own values), or the stance taken by the individual to remain credible in terms of the entirety of his/her practices. In other words, being embedded in relationships is not always a good thing, ethically speaking, as a dominant narrative could undermine the validity of counter-narratives, especially in oppressive or exploitative political, social or organisational situations.

One must also keep in mind that questioning everything, including the accepted order and one's role responsibilities, is also not necessarily ethically good. For instance, agents could adjust their understanding of their role responsibilities to suit the demands of their personal narrative. In this regard, questioning would be applied innovatively and with selfish intent, especially if there is not a strong communal moral code or counter-narratives that demand accountability. What the "right" amount of unity and conflict is would depend on the specific historical situation. As MacIntyre points out, behaviours cannot be characterised separately of the individual's intentions, and intentions cannot be determined outside the contexts "which make those intentions intelligible both to agents themselves and to others".[251] The question one has to ask in this regard, based on MacIntyre's argument, is: to which extent is a person's actions in concordance with his or her reputation? As MacIntyre writes: "...we need to know both what certain of his beliefs are and which of them are causally effective; ...[therefore]... we need to

[250] Ibid, 218.
[251] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 206.

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know whether certain contrary-to-fact hypothetical statements are true or false. And until we know this, we shall not know how to characterize correctly what the agent is doing." [252]

If behaviour cannot be read prior to or outside an individual's intention, beliefs and settings,[253] it leads to what MacIntyre refers to as compartementalisation. The question we ask at the beginning of the next section is: Is an employee ethically responsible for his/her actions when an organisation's narratives are hegemonic in nature and its controls are of such a nature that he or she does not have a choice? The relationship between autonomy and/or ethical questioning and choice is at stake in this section. The question is how autonomy can be redefined if it is not to be understood in a Kantian way.

The section starts with a view on how moral language has become fragmented to the point where there is no common basis from which to discuss moral disagreements, before it moves to compartementalisation as the problem of the "divided self" and the "insulated self" in which the tension needed for reflection, ethical questioning, deliberation and being responsive is suppressed. [254]

1.1 The fragmentation of moral language, compartementalisation, the divided and insulated self, and the loss of constancy

MacIntyre argues that the concept of morality has lost integrity. He points out that, the moral language we use, and the appearance of morality are still part of contemporary society, but the moral language has been fragmented and partly destroyed. [255] Examples of this fragmentation can be seen in the way people disagree about issues but do not have any common premises on which they base their disagreements; the moral concepts at stake are of an "interminable character" and the self is divided. How this happened, MacIntyre argues, can be seen in the long, mostly forgotten history of transformation of the concepts of morality and the self: people continue to speak about concepts as if they have the same theoretical roots, but as he points out, they don't understand what these concepts meant in the past, and how they were changed over time. The problem we face in contemporary times, MacIntyre asserts, is that we are treating the moral philosophers of the past as if they all agreed on these concepts and are "contributors to a single debate with a relatively unvarying subject-matter, ... [as if they are]... contemporaries both of ourselves and of each other". [256] Because we do not consider the milieu in which moral statements were made in the past, we assume that the moral statements we make today refer to the same principles, but, as MacIntyre asserts, we are wrong.

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[252] Ibid, 207.
[253] Ibid, 208.
[254] MacIntyre, "Social Structures", 325.
[255] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 4.
[256] Ibid, 11.

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MacIntyre asserts that if we revisit the historical roots of our moral statements and beliefs and follow the transformation of these concepts over the ages, we will be able to make some adjustments in the way we work with these concepts, in order to build the ethical and moral sensibilities that are necessary to live together in ethical and morally responsive communities. Taking us back to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics he points out that Aristotle distinguished between human nature in its raw, untutored state and human nature when it realises its purpose, or telos. Realising one's purpose could only happen through a process of transformation, based on the instruction of practical reasoning and experience. In other words, the concept of "man" had as part of its central meaning the ideal of being a human that, through his (or her) practices, would achieve his (her) purpose in life. The point of Aristotelian ethics, according to MacIntyre, is to enable man to move from a present, unrefined state to his (her) true end.

The first changes that were introduced to the Aristotelian concept of ethics complicated the concept of morality but did not have a big influence on how morality was practised in everyday life. These first changes came about in early mediaeval times when a framework of theist beliefs was used to interpret the concept of morality, and the concept of "sin" was introduced in the place of "error". However, MacIntyre points out that, by the late mediaeval era, drastic changes have been introduced, which interfered with the logic of Aristotle's framework: Aristotle's basic principles for ethics, which presupposes some "account of potentiality and act, some account of the essence of man as a rational being, and some account of the human telos"[257] was changed to include a different kind of reason. This was a radically reduced rationality that was bounded to be merely calculative in nature; in MacIntyre's words, "it can assess truths of fact and mathematical relationship but nothing more. In the realm of practice therefore it can speak only of means. About ends it must be silent." [258] In other words, the definition of "reason" changed from a human faculty that could supply a "genuine understanding of man's true ends",[259] to a watered down version that only had relevance as the logical-analytical cognitive abilities of a human, as true reason in the Aristotelian sense "had been destroyed by the fall of man". [260] Coupled with this, the concepts of telos and practices lost their internal value. This was the beginning of the project of Enlightenment and the period of modernism.

The project of the Enlightenment, as MacIntyre explains it, was to discover a rational justification for morality. [261] It was intended to construct "valid arguments which [would] move from premises concerning human nature as they [understood] it to be to conclusions about the

[257] Ibid, 54.
[258] Ibid.
[259] Ibid, 53.
[260] Ibid, 54.
[261] Ibid, 36 – 50.

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authority of moral rules and precepts." [262] MacIntyre points out that, because the leading Western philosophers, such as Kierkegaard, Kant, Hume, Diderot and Smith, came from similar Christian backgrounds, much of their beliefs were similar and influenced their concept of moral rules and principles, as well as their concept of human nature. This differed from the Aristotelian ethics, whose point was to enable man to move from a present state to his (her) true end. With the abandonment of the notion of a telos, MacIntyre points out, the moral scheme has become disjointed: on the one hand some content or rules for morality has remained however without their teleological context, while on the other hand, there is a certain perspective of the untutored human nature. Enlightenment emphasised the autonomy of man to make rational decisions and aimed to find the universally true principles that would guide these decisions, but as MacIntyre points out, these injunctions would be likely to be disobeyed, as there is no teleological justification for them. In this regard, the project of Enlightenment was doomed to failure and the time was ripe for a new project of truth to be introduced.

Emotivism came about as a reaction against the project of Enlightenment when moral statements lost their status and the language statements that expressed them lost their meaning. In this regard, MacIntyre points out that moral statements become "forms of expression for an emotivist self, which lacking the guidance of the context in which they were originally at home has lost its linguistic as well as its practical way in the world. [263] It is in this confusing world of many moralities and even more meanings, where we are currently attempting to build ethical work and social environments.

MacIntyre distinguishes three kinds of moral arguments to illustrate this point, namely: (1) those deriving from the philosophy of science, which are based on logically valid arguments in which conclusions follow from premises, but the rival premises are equally valid as they are based on different normative or evaluative concepts; (2) those that presuppose the existence of impersonal criteria or objective standards, which, when combined with the first type of moral argument can result in "unargued disagreements" based on a clash of "antagonistic wills"; and related to the first and second types of moral arguments, (3) those that contain fragments of various philosophical roots, "an unharmonious melange of ill-assorted fragments". [264] Because there is no milieu, or a common purpose, from which to evaluate these norms and values, actions are insulated from criticism. Part of the problem of the fragmentation of moral language, MacIntyre asserts, is because of the influence of the doctrine of emotivism that is at the root of a variety of our concepts and modes of behaviour, and not only the moral debates and judgements. According to the philosophical theory underlying emotivism, moral judgments

[262] Ibid, 54.
[263] Ibid, 60.
[264] Ibid, 10.

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are considered to be individual expressions of preferences, attitudes or feelings, and the transformation of the feelings and attitudes of others, in order to reach a specific objective. In this regard, people, as well as concepts of morality, are always means to reach an end, but never ends in their own right. [265]

As means to an end, people become characters in the roles they play at work and at home and the definition of "man" does not entail any more the many roles that were unified to describe manhood, as in Aristotelian times. As MacIntyre asserts, a character displays the character traits imposed on him from the outside, from the way others regard the character, and use it to understand and evaluate themselves. [266] Furthermore, it represents a cultural and moral ideal; in this regard, the case role and personality must be fused. [267] He points to three typical character roles of our current environment, including The Rich Aesthete, who uses different means and commodities to achieve his/her ends of pleasure and happiness, The Therapist, whose purpose is to effectively re-channel a client's negative energy into directed energy by using specific techniques, and The Bureaucratic Manager, whose obligation is to achieve previously defined business goals. The Manager's character role is of relevance for this dissertation.

According to MacIntyre, The Manager's sole responsibility lies in aligning subordinates' motives, behaviours and energies towards achieving previously defined objectives. Similar to The Therapist, The Manager is concerned with techniques to improve effectiveness, "in transforming raw material into final products, unskilled labor into skilled labor, investment into profit". [268] As MacIntyre points out about the character role of the manager, "the manager treats ends as given, as outside his scope". [269] He is only concerned with technique. Through his caricature of The Manager, MacIntyre criticises the ideals of business which are realised through vision and mission statements and strategies through which individuals in the role of The Manager steer a business to achieve its ends. The idea of "business ethics" is therefore also not regarded of highly by MacIntyre as, based on previously designed rules, codes and standards, business ethics could be one of business's strategies to achieve its business goals.

What does this mean in terms of the state of moral agency? MacIntyre describes the emotivist self as unattached to any particular moral attitude except for their non-teleological attitudes. Judgements can be made without inherent criteria and everything may be criticised from whichever standpoint the self adopts. Moral agency from this perspective involves the ideal to

[265] Ibid, 22.
[266] Ibid, 29.
[267] Ibid.
[268] Ibid, 30.
[269] Ibid.

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stand back from any situation as well as from one's personal characteristics or convictions, to offer judgement from a universal and abstract perspective that is totally detached from all social particularity.[270] In other words, the ideal situation would be for every individual to detach him or herself from the various roles he or she plays in various situations and pass objective judgements. MacIntyre describes this condition as compartementalisation.

Compartementalisation is described as a condition where each sphere of social activity has an own role structure governed by its own, specific norms relatively independent from other spheres. Humans, whose lives are not integrated, move between those spheres of activity, replacing their practical reasoning of one role for another. In other words, their viewpoint and activities change as their roles change and they can only adopt one specific attitude when the others are excluded temporarily; "the self is now thought of as criterionless".[271] For example, "putting on the manager's hat" in some circumstances might lead to different actions or decisions than when an individual had put on, for instance, the parent's hat. In this way, swopping hats, so to say, means that we can reach consensus in certain aspects, which might be in conflict with values in other aspects of our lives, or even in the different roles we play in business. The question is what does this detachment from our various selves in our different roles do to our integrity as ethical agents?

Context or milieu becomes important aspects for the development of moral agency. MacIntyre points out that within a specific context, we can understand ourselves as individuals who have identities that are separate from the social roles we take on, and the responsibilities derived from those roles.[272] This is particularly evident in the business world where several examples of insulation exist. MacIntyre gives an example of the role enactment of a certain "J" who lived in an "unusually well-defined" social order, where role responsibilities were clearly demarcated and any questioning was disallowed. When "J" was confronted many years later about his participation in war atrocities, his account was that he was not supposed to know or question the state of affairs. J argued that he did his work responsibly and dutifully. The question MacIntyre asks is whether J is responsible.[273] We can ask the same question about business executives who hide behind their duty roles when confronted with unethical business decisions.

MacIntyre argues that the individual him/herself remains responsible for dividing him or herself; no matter how much pressure is exerted on him/her; by turning down the opportunity to

[270] Ibid, 32.
[271] Ibid, 32.
[272] MacIntyre has a different position than complexity theorists who would insist that these identities can only be understood from *within* the systems of which one is a part, and that we cannot step out of the system or our roles to take a distanced look at ourselves.
[273] MacIntyre, "Social Structures", 312.

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question certain events or actions, the individual makes an active decision. As he points out, an individual cannot divorce himself totally from his various roles, and "dissolve himself entirely into distinctive roles."[274] The questions of how one should act in a specific role and by what standards one should judge what is best are questions that every person should ask in a duty role. Resisting this impulse, MacIntyre asserts, means that one restricts one's own capability for practical rational reasoning artificially. [275]

The notion of co-responsibility comes in here again. MacIntyre points out that the divided self is complicit in bringing about this state. In other words, not to be critical is a choice taken by the individual who is the author of his own life, in agreement with the social order of which he/she is part, a social order which he/she co-creates, either by participation or by making the choice "to go with the flow". Making the choice not to be critical means that one curbs one's ability to reason, think and know. Aligning one's own practices with the prescribed standards, or lack of standards, without questioning them, means that one actively excludes the possibility for the deliberation about conflicting values, and therefore, also, for ethical deliberation. Similar to Foucault, MacIntyre points out is that nobody is powerless, and by acting as a victim of circumstances, one not only gives away one's ability to influence, but also implicates one's credibility as an ethical subject.

However, this is not to say that it is easy to take a stand against unethical behaviours in one's environment. It is important to remember that we are embedded in communal values that influence our perspectives on what is right and wrong. In such a way, character, or identity, is to a great extent due to the social environment that can reinforce or undermine virtuous conduct. Solomon, for instance, refers to the example of clergymen who act in accordance to the expectation of other clergy in their environment while criminals act in accordance to the expectations of their peers, who are criminals. Character does not have much to do with these actions. Solomon argues that, to establish ethical conduct in organisations, "sound ethical policies and rigorous ethical enforcement" are needed, coupled with the ideal that it would be possible to resist temptation or rise up against pressures and unethical policies. [276] As MacIntyre writes, "We cannot ... characterise behavior independently of intentions, and we cannot characterise intentions independently of the settings which make those intentions intelligible both to agents themselves and to others." [277]

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[274] Ibid, 326.
[275] Ibid.
[276] Robert C. Solomon, "Are we victims of circumstances? Hegel and Jean-Paul Sartre on corporate responsibility and bad faith" in Mollie Painter-Morland and Patricia Werhane (Eds.), *Cutting-edge issues in business ethics*, (United Kingdom: Springer, 2008), 9 – 19.
[277] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 206.

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Organisations are organised around the activities of individuals who interact in a set of social relationships to achieve an organisation's strategic goals and vision. If an organisation's goals exclude the ideal of building ethical relationships with all stakeholders, it would use people as resources and a means to an external end. Its culture and dominant stories would then be aimed at management and control, persuasion and motivation to achieve those goals without much thought given to ethical issues.[278] However, this is not to say that human relationships cannot serve organisational goals. Teamwork, for instance, could provide team members the opportunity to achieve organisational goals as well as their personal purposes. In this regard, MacIntyre points out that it is through the practices of individuals, the unity of all of a person's activities based on his/her purposes, which are intertwined, that the practices of an organisation can be judged. What is meant by practices and how they relate to ethics and storytelling in developing a moral tradition will be unpacked below.

1.2 Can business ethics be a practice?

MacIntyre describes a practice as a relational and cooperative activity which is coherent, complex, and historically and socially established, in which the purpose of that activity is achieved according to standards that define the activity. In this way, achieving excellence in a practice contributes to a systematic improvement in the practice.[279] Related to practices are virtues, which MacIntyre argues, develop logically through three stages, namely: (1) a background account of practices; (2) an account of the narrative order of a human life, and (3) an account of what constitutes a moral tradition. Every practice, in MacIntyre's view, is based on the values or virtues that define the relationship we share with others in terms of commonly held purposes, standards and pursued internal outcomes. According to this definition, a practice would entail something like a game such as chess or football, or farming, music, art or architecture, where the point of the practice would be to realise a purpose internal to the practice, which cannot be achieved by any other means than through participating in the practice itself. Importantly, these internal outcomes can only be specified in terms of the practice itself or by means of examples from the practice. This means that only those with experience of the practice can be considered good judges of the internal goods.[280] In this regard, MacIntyre points out that, practices involve "standards of excellence, obedience to rules[281] as well as achievement of goods" *internal* to the practice.[282]

When MacIntyre's concept of a practice, and the internal motivation that drives a practice, is related to organisational value systems and codes of ethics, it is apparent that often ethics is not

[278] Ibid, 22.
[279] Ibid, 187.
[280] Ibid, 188.
[281] Within practices, the rules are related to the internal goods of the game. This is why, in MacIntyre's view, business can never qualify as being a practice: business's rules are related to external, material goods.
[282] Ibid, 190.

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practised as an internal motivation for excellence and the "good for the whole community"[283], but seen as an external goal to be achieved in isolation from the other activities of the organisation. This is because, institutions, in MacIntyre's view, are not practices, but essentially concerned with the achievement of "external goods", or, in other terms, material goods such as money, status or power. As such, he points out that institutions can *sustain* practices, but being externally focussed on acquiring material goods, they are in constant conflict with the internal ideals of a practice. In MacIntyre's words, "... the ideals and the creativity of the practice are always vulnerable to the acquisitiveness of the institution, ... [and] the cooperative care for the common goods of the practice is always vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institution." [284] For MacIntyre, the integrity of an institution's practices is causally related to the embeddedness of the virtues in the activities of the individuals (or at least, some of the individuals) in an institution. Similarly, he points out, the practice of vices is evident in corrupt institutions. [285] Can organisations then be considered as moral agents, and judged as being ethical or unethical? This question points to the debate in business ethics where the question is asked whether the organisation, which is considered a legal agent, can also be considered a moral agent. [286] In this regard, one could adopt French's argument that it is because of an organisation's decision-structures and organisational practices that it can be made accountable as a legal person as well as a moral person[287] and in such a way it would be possible to judge organisations by their practices.

MacIntyre points to the values of justice, courage, truthfulness and trust as the saving grace for organisational practices: justice in terms of being transparent and allowing our practices to be scrutinised and judged by other practitioners, courage, in terms of our capability of risking our own good on behalf of others, by questioning the standard norms and defending our ethical convictions (if we don't show courage, our concern and care for others can be questioned), and trust and truthfulness as the defining factors of our relationships. When there is no truthfulness, according to MacIntyre, trust is put at risk.[288] The question we could therefore ask of a business

[283] Ibid, 191.
[284] Ibid, 194.
[285] Ibid, 195.
[286] Alexei Marcoux, "Business Ethics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2008 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/ethics-business/>.
[287] Ibid.
[288] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 192 - 193.
MacIntyre argues that, as we share the standards and purposes characteristic of practices, we define our relationships by references to standards of truthfulness, trust, justice and courage. These standards are, in MacIntyre's words, "genuine excellences, ...virtues in the light of which we have to characterize ourselves and others, whatever our private moral standpoint or our society's particular code may be." This does not mean to say that everybody should have the same understanding of how these virtues are applied. MacIntyre acknowledges that different societies have different codes of truthfulness, justice and courage. The point he wants to make is that practices can "flourish" in societies where these virtues are the norms against which relationships are defined, in whichever way these virtues are applied. In contrast, he points out that where these virtues are not valued, practices don't flourish, even though "institutions and technical skills serving unified purposes might continue to flourish."

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from MacIntyre's perspective is not whether there are ethics guidelines and measures in place, but whether its relationships are defined by justice, courage and truthfulness. We could also ask whether ethics is a practice that is permeated throughout all business relationships and not a programme or set of principles that do not have any other relevance but as a tool to achieve a compliancy certification. What is important for this dissertation, however, is the understanding that individuals are mutually accountable for their interactions with others, and individually accountable for their own practices. In other words, employees have to be able to account for their actions in discussions and/or debate with other employees as well as to stakeholders outside the company.

Considering whether business ethics can be a practice, MacIntyre makes it clear that the integrity of the practice depends on how the virtues are exercised "in sustaining the institutional forms which are the social bearers of the practice". [289] In other words, a practitioner has to accept the authority of the standards of the particular practice, and accept the judgement made by experienced practitioners regarding his or her performance assessed against the conventions and traditions of the communal practice. In MacIntyre's words, "It is thus the achievement, and *a fortiori* the authority, of a tradition which I then confront and from which I have to learn." [290] What this means in terms of ethics as a practice, is that (1) personal attitudes, beliefs, preferences and tastes are subject to the standards and rules of a particular practice, (2) it is not merely about technical skill but about "transformation and enrichment" of those relevant goods and ends for the entire practitioner community,[291] (3) a practitioner can only improve by being practically involved in the practice and by being evaluated by other practitioners, and (4) if individuals' moral identity can be formed and transformed through their practices and others' assessment of these practices, it follows that a community can also reflect together on their practices. An individual can therefore be held accountable for the nature and form of his/her practices as well as for the consequence of practicing them.

Storytelling, when it is seen as a practice, as well as part of the practices of individuals, can be considered as a way of establishing and reinforcing the values that form part of the organisational ethos. In this way, every individual in a network of relationships is a participant who contributes to the ethos of an organisation, whatever its values are. When we therefore look at storytelling through the lens MacIntyre offers us, it can be used, and often abused, as a technique utilised for external goods such as reputation-building or marketing purposes. In this regard, it can also be utilised subliminally, or supraliminally, as an instrument of manipulation and control. However, as part of our inherent ability to create the contexts through which we

[289] Ibid, 195.
[290] Ibid, 194.
[291] Ibid, 193.

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can build bridges of understanding amongst different people, and establish meaningful environments, it can be practised with an internal goal of creating and reinforcing the internal values of justice, courage, truthfulness and trust in all its relationships with stakeholders.

Establishing a culture of ethics in an organisation, however, is not a simple process. In the next section, the question is asked, what constitutes the culture of an organisation and what does "mutually accepted values" mean in terms of organisational culture? The focus in section 2 turns to understanding cultural ambiguities from a researcher's perspective.

2. Organisational culture, storytelling and narrative

In an attempt to apply MacIntyre's concept of identity, relationships and cooperative endeavours to the concept of organisational culture, the inclination is to liken organisations to close-knit, homogeneous communities, in which a certain way of living, doing and understanding of how-things-are-done develop over time.

However, in MacIntyre's terms, an organisation, when it is seen as an entity or institution, is not in itself capable of ethical practices. Its sense of a moral unity would depend on the agreements, conflicts and differences amongst individuals, as well as each individual's acknowledgement of his/her own responsibility and accountability towards others. Finding this moral unity is more complex than it seems. A possible problem that was alluded to earlier is that, "mutually accepted values" might actually point to insulation. It might point to a reluctance to see further than what is necessary to do one's job, even though one's personal values might be in conflict with the norms adopted by the organisation. Furthermore, the concept of "mutually accepted values" might not acknowledge differences between people or groups of people in an organisation.

When we therefore turn to organisational and culture research theory, it is apparent that the concepts of "mutually accepted values" or "organisational culture" are not as simple as they seem at first sight and that, even in the definition of culture, researchers disagree. [292] In this regard, analysing the concept of culture more carefully might point to more multiplicities and ambiguities in what is considered to be the concept of "shared culture" than what is noticeable on the surface. Martin points out, for instance, that different views of culture might point to ideational and material aspects of organisational life that influence the perception of an organisation's culture. Ideational aspects refer to subjective interpretations of meaning related to values, symbols, customs, traditions, habits, norms, et cetera, while material aspects of organisational life refer to material manifestations that point to the well-being of the organisation and its employees. Examples might include differences in office furnishings,

[292] Martin, *Organizational Culture*, 56.

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parking bays or crockery amongst the various ranks in the business, the way company policies are enacted and enforced at different levels, huge differences in salary scales, what happens during coffee breaks, the different in-jokes or stories amongst various groups in a business, how people dress, or how they behave at staff functions, or to noise or dirt in a workshop. In this regard, discrepancies and differences might provide an understanding of conflicts in the organisation.[293]

Organisational researchers analyse these similarities and differences in various ways, based on the view they take about what culture is. Martin, for instance, defines three theoretical views of cultures in organisations, namely: (1) the integration perspective, (2) the differentiation perspective, and (3) the fragmentation perspective. She then provides a fourth perspective, which she calls the "three-perspective theory of culture". Each of the first three theoretical perspectives provides a single view on culture, while the "three-perspective theory" aims to look at a company's culture from all three perspectives simultaneously. These four views of what culture comprises are described briefly below:[294]

The integration approach focuses on consistency and consensual interpretations of cultural phenomena. Studies looking for consensual interpretations paint the organisational picture as a "big monolith that looks the same from all possible angles". [295]

The differentiation perspective of culture takes an opposite view from the integration approach: it seeks to find differences in interpretations of cultural manifestations, such as discrepancies between the stated values or policies and the actual behaviours of management and staff. According to this perspective, consensus can only exist in subcultures, which may exist harmoniously, independently from each other or in conflict with each other. Studies looking for differences will paint the picture of organisational subcultures in terms of "islands of clarity in a sea of ambiguity". [296]

The fragmentation perspective, in turn, considers all relationships among cultural manifestations as ambiguous. Culture is therefore considered to be ambiguous, while consensus is considered to be transient and issue specific. According to Martin, cooperation and consensus amongst staff are sporadic and event-based. In this regard, studies based on the fragmentation

[293] Ibid, 56 – 61.
[294] Ibid, 93 - 168.
[295] Ibid, 94.
[296] Ibid.

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perspective paint a picture of the organisation's subcultures as a group of light bulbs that would be switched on irregularly and without any observable pattern. [297]

Each of these perspectives provide an exclusive view of culture, but never a comprehensive view of the different types of interactions that are all present in an organisation at different times and in different relationships. Therefore, Martin argues for a three-perspective-view of culture. According to this view, culture can be defined as: "... consisting of in-depth, subjective interpretations of a wide range of cultural manifestations ... both ideational and material." [298]

As Martin points out, the three-perspective-theory is a generalist approach rather than a specialist approach to culture studies, and attempts to provide a view on the various interpretations of the organisation's culture that are made simultaneously and in contradiction to each other. The three-perspective view attempts to acknowledge these opposing forces and overcome each of the single view theories' blind spots. As Martin says, "the three-perspective-theory offers a wider range of insights than is available from any single viewpoint." [299]

This description of different perspectives on culture that can exist simultaneously implies that culture is inherently complex, consisting of multiple subcultures that are sometimes in accordance and at other times resisting each other. What makes this more complex is that a further distinction can be made between subcultures and hierarchical ambiguity: According to Willmott, subcultures are formed by factors such as affiliations, background, gender, interests, experiences and so forth, and can be described according to a certain identity or codes of behaviours. However, added to these differences are hierarchical ambiguities, which refer to different measures of conduct for different positions in the hierarchy of the business. An example is, for instance, when behaviour that is restricted (or even censured or punished) at a junior level is tolerated (or even expected, applauded and rewarded) at a senior level. Again, the distinction is not clearly delineated, as all managers will not share the same beliefs about what is deemed acceptable or unacceptable behaviour. This causes tensions in the relational network and, in the character of complex systems, a perpetual disequilibrium in the system.[300] As Willmott says, "Compliance with corporate norms may seem to be voluntary but it is generally inspired, supported, and incentivised by symbolic considerations (e.g. status and esteem) as well as material dependence (e.g. income from employment) and, not least, by the thinly veiled coercion of peer pressure". [301]

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[297] Ibid.
[298] Ibid, 120.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Willmott, "Organizational Culture", 61 – 95.
[301] Ibid, 65.

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From Willmott's definition, it is apparent that organisational culture is much more complex than what is commonly believed, and necessitates, as Martin suggests, a redefinition of our concepts of culture and organisational culture. It furthermore necessitates a better understanding of how stories are, now, more than ever before, relevant in understanding the shifting relationships in the web of organisational relationships, and how acknowledging these stories can allow the voice of those who are less powerful or marginalised to be heard. [302]

2.1 Reframing our concept of "organisation" and cultural boundaries, and how we can understand ethics as a practice through stories

"Organisation" is commonly considered as a collective noun denoting a neatly packaged entity in which clearly defined purposes, intentions, structures, systems and processes work like clockwork. It is in this sense that precisely packaged systems and processes promise long-lasting effectiveness, on condition that individuals be conditioned (trained, oriented, broken in, customised) to the organisational culture, and controlled accordingly. MacIntyre's description of the emotivist goal for effectiveness, for instance, points to the character role of The Manager as having the sole purpose to direct employees' activities to the strategic goals of an organisation. In this view, the purpose of the formal and informal practices, as well as the managed cultural manifestations in the organisation would be to provide a framework in which effectiveness and productivity are the driving forces. [303] A questioning attitude, or questions about ethics in everyday actions, might be frowned upon. In this regard, culture could become a functional aspect of the organisation, and ethics could be considered an aspect or division of this functional framework and therefore subject to management, conditioning and control. In this definition of "organisation" the notion of business ethics is implicated.

When ethics is considered to be of the functional framework and therefore subject to control measures, meaning that individuals' ability to question those controls are limited, the concept of ethics finds itself on shaky ground, and business ethics becomes a contradiction in terms. [304] The question that can be asked in this regard is, can we be competitive in business and be ethical in all our actions as well? Being accountable for one's actions to others implies taking responsibility for those relationships. It also implies the ability and the willingness to recount those actions without rationalising them, and not necessarily only in response to the criticism of others. As Foucault states, "As governed, we have a perfect right to ask questions about the truth." [305]

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[302] Martin, *Organizational Culture*, 9.
[303] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 77.
[304] Nash, "Intensive Care for Everyone's Least Favourite Oxymoron", 277 – 290.
[305] Foucault, "An Aeshetics of Existence", 52.

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Martin however points out that the boundaries of culture and cultural manifestations are becoming blurred, and so are our concepts of culture and organisation. She quotes Ozick who describes culture metaphorically as a kaleidoscope that "rattles and spins ... and no one can predict how this will shake itself out",[306] pointing out that our traditional understanding of the boundaries that make up a culture is turned upside down, but that most organisation culture studies still consider cultures and organisations as if they were "clearly lineated tiles in a mosaic, isolated from each other, frozen in time, with clearly defined boundaries". [307]

We therefore have to reframe our understanding of "organisation" and "culture" as having a fixed, nominal character, and rather consider them as being part of a complex web of relationships that are organised and re-organised in certain ways to achieve certain purposes. At the same time, we have to see "organisation" and "culture" less as characteristics or fixed domains and more as dynamic forces that are influenced by various and changing interactions. In this sense, the verb "to organise" or the continuous action of "organising" seem to be more appropriate, and "culture" seems to point to certain salient aspects of an organisation or group that draw some people together at a certain time and in a certain (virtual) space, much in the same way as attractors work in complexity theory.[308]

Martin describes the complexity of the interactions that produce organisational culture as a "nexus [or a "collectivity"[309]] in which a variety of internal and external influences come together",[310] and where the boundaries of the different subcultures that form within the collective of the organisation are "produced" by participants. The reinforcement of certain boundaries and the undermining or weakening of others contribute to the complexity of organisational studies.

When it is understood that the interrelationships that constitute the organisation as a collective form part of a complex web of relationships in the world, it becomes easier to understand that a dominant culture is a collection of many smaller cultural manifestations that are produced with respect to different and changing demands made on the management of an organisation. These demands are made by various stakeholders, including shareholders, local as well as various global government and nongovernmental bodies, employees, communities or pressure groups. At the same time, these cultural influences, together with personal histories, attributes, capabilities, aspirations and beliefs, have an impact on how participants in this culture think about things and respond to them. Given the fact that a dominant culture may make taking

[306] Martin, *Organizational Culture*, 315.
[307] Ibid, 317.
[308] Weick. *Sense-making in Organizations*, 87.
[309] Martin, *Organizational Culture*, 162.
[310] Ibid, 165, 166.

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different perspectives unlikely or difficult, this complexity could aid the kind of questioning MacIntyre insists upon, namely, to ask: what are the stories I am part of; what are the stories we are part of; what is our inner purpose driving our decisions and actions?

This brings us to the question about personal accountability and ethics. From the description above, it is apparent that the interaction between a dominant culture and an individual agent, especially one from another culture or subculture, is complex. It is also clear that there are many tacit influences that subtly define the way people think about things and how they make their decisions. In this regard, it holds that we can never be sure that we know everything that is necessary to make ethical decisions, and can also not be sure that we know all the implicit and tacit influences on our decision-making capability.

One way of coping with our limitations in understanding the complexity of the world in which we live and act, is to tell stories. The stories told about these relations and actions, and the stories and symbolic manifestations that influence these actions, can provide a view on the ethos of the collective organisation over a certain time period and in a certain context. In this way, anecdotes and stories about things that happened, as well as how things are done in the organisation, can point out how ethical relationships are maintained, strengthened or severed, as well as how different understandings of the world can lead to conflicts.

What is important from this section is to understand that the contrasts and conflicts between tacit and implicit symbolic representations can point out power relationships and tensions in the various interactions and provide us with a "clue" as regards the ethical nature of these relationships. It however remains a limited view, and can never provide a complete understanding of the multiple interactions, changing relationships, intentions or purposes of all participants or the multiple meanings related to these interactions. In this sense, stories, as the framework through which we make sense of these interactions, are complex in themselves, as even the stories and the context in which they are told are always subject to change.

Organisational stories are often an attempt to integrate the plurality of alternative stories into, what Salzer-Morling (as referred to by Rhodes) calls "managerial monologues designed to enhance contro".[311] It is therefore important to understand how to distinguish between symbolic representations that are imposed on individuals as corporate values, processes or practices that are generated in the "managed spaces",[312] and symbolic representations that emerge in response to, in support of or contradicting the managed cultural manifestations, and

[311] Rhodes, *Writing Organization*, 24.
[312] Gabriel, *Myths, Stories, and Organizations.*

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happen in, what Gabriel terms "the unmanaged organization".[313] Through these symbolic actions individuals and groups find pleasure and meaning. As Gabriel says, "... the unmanaged organization [is] the dimension of organizational life where fantasies and emotions can find expressions in often irrational symbolic constructions. Emotional truths, half-truths, and wishful fantasies inhabit this domain, which evades or sidesteps organizational controls ...".[314]

Based on Gabriel's description above, the question we have to ask ourselves is whether our attempts at understanding relationships are focussed on the requirements of the organisation as an entity, or whether we focus on what it means to be a human being who participates in these relationships, or whether it is perhaps a bit of both. It is in this sense that the stories individuals tell bring us back to the critical question about ethical relationships in business and whether we, as individuals who forge relationships, are being responsive towards one another in an ethical manner. By acknowledging the inherent complexity of these relationships, we have to acknowledge our limited ability to understand all the complexities in which we are involved, and at the same time, realise our indebtedness towards one another: as humans we can never escape or compromise our infinite responsibility towards one another as well as all other unknown and future Others.[315]

3. Storytelling as complex/storytelling complexity/storytelling ethics

MacIntyre brings two important aspects of storytelling to light: in the first place, he considers stories as innately human and relational. In the second, he shows that the unity of a person's identity is reflected through the unity of his/her account of a life or activities.

The first consideration about storytelling is important for us to understand how we can be held accountable for our actions to others who question us, and how we can hold them accountable for theirs in turn. It is also an important way for people to engage with others and enter into relationships. We tell others about our days and lives, and we show others how to do things by telling them about our experiences. We also tell stories to children and adults to describe different relationships or to give guidance in making a difficult decision, and we tell stories to entertain ourselves and others. The problem with the second consideration is that it considers narratives/stories as always following the same structure and always having a specific purpose and a plot. Gabriel, Czarniawska and other folklorists consider purpose, plot and chronological order as a prerequisite for a narrative to be considered as a story.

However, when we look at what Gabriel, as well as Willmott, described as organisational culture, it is apparent that all narratives do not follow the same structures, and some of them

[313] Ibid, 25.
[314] Ibid.
[315] Bevan and Werhane, "Stakeholder theory", 53.

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might be anecdotal in character, or even a vaguely formulated thought. These stories define our interactions. In other words, in complex systems such as organisations, the cause-effect relationships that create a linear plot, with a definite beginning, middle and end, are often lost. Therefore, when we restrict our understanding of storytelling to consider every story as a narrative unity, we limit our understanding of how storytelling can offer us a way to engage better with one another and as a result, become more accountable for our interactions and for the futures we create through our stories.

General complexity theory offers us another view on storytelling, one that does not pretend to remove the ethical challenges we have, but at least point out that ethical relationships start with acknowledging others' stories and interpretations of their experiences, which might differ from ours. Being more open to other types of stories allows us the opportunity to recount differently, to challenge, to question, and to break through dominating organisational narratives, while we respect the otherness of others and acknowledge our connectedness with them as others in our relational networks. In this regard, Cilliers's description of the implications that complex systems have for our claims on knowledge can provide a framework through which to reconsider our interpretation of what we consider to be culture. It can also help us to come to a different understanding of what it means to be accountable as an ethical agent. Cilliers describes these implications as follows:

(1) The more structure displayed by a system, the more functionality can be built into it, while too little structure would cause random behaviour, and too many constraints will limit the system's capacity for complex behaviour.
(2) As our descriptions of a system can only take into account certain aspects of the system, the knowledge gained by any description is always relative to the perspective from which the description was made; and
(3) In describing the emergent behaviour (macro-behaviour) of a system, it is impossible to take into account all micro-activities that lead to these behaviours.[316]

When the first implication is related to what we understand about organisational narratives and their linear structure, as well as the symbolic representations created in the managed spaces of the organisation, it becomes clear how values, codes, narratives or symbols provide structure, but can become hegemonic narratives that do not allow questioning or contradiction. In this regard, they attempt to constrain emergent behaviours. The second and third implications point out how our perspective on an issue influences our interpretation. It shows how it is impossible to collect or understand all emergent stories that are created in response to those narratives

[316] Cilliers,"Complexity, Deconstruction and Relativism", 258.

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and are influenced by various factors, which are often not clearly expressed or known. We therefore attempt to do the impossible when we try to understand the stories, experiences, ideas or attitudes from any other perspective than our own.

Ethically, hegemonic narratives have the implication that we ignore the voice or demand of the Other in our concern for the functional well-being of the organisation. This shows a tangency with MacIntyre's description of compartementalisation and insulation, where being insulated from possible conflicts in values, an individual does not have to make ethical choices. At another level, it points to MacIntyre's description of emotivism, where "The Manager" is sketched as a character "who treats ends as a given, as outside his scope; his concern is with technique, with effectiveness in transforming raw materials into final products...".[317] This archetypal view of "The Manager" points to external goals of production which does not allow the individual to engage in ethical or moral debate in fear of being charged with insubordination. The Manager's stance contrasts with the kind of practice focussed on an internal good, as reflected through MacIntyre's description of a narrative unity of a life in which the purpose of an ethical/moral agent's practices is internally directed, rather than externally directed.

Paradoxically, the question emerges whether fragmentation should be considered the enemy or aid of ethical questioning. On the one hand, a fragmented life can destroy the kind of unity necessary for a coherent moral language that could produce ethical questioning, while on the other, a too strong, insular organisational narrative also makes questioning impossible. In this regard various voices talking from their own insular perspective could aid the development of ethical awareness that different stories and interpretations exist. Complexity may therefore provide part of the answer, as the system does not disintegrate because of dissent or difference, but can still accommodate diversity and change.

As it became apparent through the observations of both Gabriel and Willmott referenced earlier in this section, emergent stories and symbolic representations, such as jokes, graffiti or metaphors, hint at the other stories and perspectives that are not heard or acknowledged in the managed organisational spaces. In this way, the voice of the Other (or at least some others) demand to be heard despite more dominant voices that take precedence. In terms of understanding the stories of an organisation, it points to different, albeit still limited and incomplete, views on the power struggles, inconsistencies and ethical irregularities in the organisation as a complex system. The question that continues to propel us further in investigating ways to become ethically more sensitive is, how do we enter into responsive relationships with others? How do we take accountability for our encounter with others despite

[317] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 31.

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the implicit and tacit influences that present themselves, sometimes as hegemonic narratives and sometimes as narrative fragments, and all contributing to the interactions of the social system?

Cilliers, Baskin and Bøje provide us with three analogies with which to work: (1) we create frameworks to make sense of our experiences (Cilliers), (2) stories are like filters that collect certain experiences to make them more explicit (Baskin), and (3) the interaction between structured narratives and emergent stories can be described as a complex dance (Bøje). These three analogies offer ways to maintain ethical questioning without compromising narrative unity required for moral deliberation.

3.1 Narrative frameworks and filters

Cilliers uses the analogy of a framework to describe how we, as human agents, frame certain experiences in our attempt to reduce the complexity of interactions with which we have to deal. The problem we experience is that it is impossible to consider all interactions in complex systems, while we have no choice but to make decisions and act within this complexity. What is important about this analogy is that Cilliers argues that, as agents, we are responsible for what we include and exclude from the framework, as well as for the decisions we make, based on the knowledge we derive from our previous and current framed experiences. Frameworks contextualise our perceptions at a certain time. What is important to know in this regard, according to Cilliers, is that our view and the meaning we create are provisional,[318] and our decisions therefore limited, irreducible and contextualised. [319]

Baskin, in turn, provides more insight into how this selection process works. He uses the term "storied spaces" to explain how the stories we tell about our experiences shape our environments or context, and also become the drivers for certain human attractors[320] such as personality, culture, group dynamics or value systems. Using the analogy of a filter, he explains that humans are naturally inclined, through an unconscious psychological process, to reduce the complexity of the many interacting processes to which we are exposed. In this way we filter out certain contradicting facts that don't correspond with our perceptions. Our filters therefore provide us with some clarity and the ability to relate to others and take action, even though there is much more that we do not know of or understand.

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[318] P. Cilliers, "Complexity, Deconstruction and Relativism", 259.
[319] Ibid.
[320] Ken Baskin, My Story Story. http://peaceaware.com/storytellingorganization/socratic_participants_files/socratic_Baskin.htm, accessed on 25/4/2013.

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In this regard, Baskin points out that we create dominant stories by enacting those stories. These stories become more dominant when they are reinforced by others' reactions, over time. In this way we form our ingrained beliefs about ourselves and others, as well as our knowledge about the world and how things should or should not be. Because they have a history and have been reinforced through our interactions with others, they are difficult to sway. [321] Dominant narratives, together with the discourses in which we live, can therefore help us cope with complexity, but are also instrumental in creating ethical issues in the way we deal with one another.

In this description of dominant narratives, some resemblance can be seen with MacIntyre's concept of a "unity of a life", as well as with the Aristotelian story structure he, as well as folklorists such as Gabriel and Czarniawska, propose as properly structured stories containing a beginning, middle and end. Such stories have a plot, characters and perspectives from which the stories are told, and are told as a certain genre or type of story. In organisational folklore, for instance, an organisational story can take the form of the Hero's Journey,[322] the plot structure of many classic myths, in which the archetypal hero/heroine is compelled at some time in his/her life's journey to take on a quest with a bigger purpose, despite his/her initial apprehension. In his/her possession are gifts or attributes often given to him/her by someone who is wise and knowing. These gifts or attributes enable the hero/heroine to face various challenges along the way. These challenges become more intense until, at last, the hero/heroine has to make a choice between his/her physical well-being and his/her honour or moral obligation in finishing the quest. In a brave attempt to overcome the last obstacle, which necessitates a deeper, often spiritual journey, the hero/heroine passes the final test. Having won the ultimate prize, he/she may take it back to transform the world.

However, the opposite of the Hero's Journey, namely the tragedy, is also possible in business narratives, as Rhodes, Pullen and Clegg[323] point out with their discussion of an organisation's use of the plot of the inevitability of an organisation's fall to disgrace. In such a case, the tragic coming to a fall is inevitable, as the character's life choices, combined with forces that cannot be controlled, lead him/her to a disgraceful end. In the same vein, personal accounts of the individuals' own organisational journey could take on the form of a success story, one of fear, rejection or humiliation, one of achievement, personal development or failure. In addition, the account of the story and characterisation of participants can differ, depending on who tells the story, to whom it is told, as well as when, where, and for what reason it is told.

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[321] Baskin, "Storied Space as the Complex World of Experience," 81 – 97.
[322] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.
[323] Rhodes, Pullen and Clegg, "'If I Should Fall from Grace...'", 535 – 551.

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Given the fact that organisational cultures are typically not unitary, this description of dominant narratives implies that many different stories can be told about the same events, but from different perspectives and with different purposes and outcomes. Ultimately, however, all these stories are backward-looking: they tell about a past that started at a certain point, developed through various stages and ended at a certain point. What happened before, simultaneously around and after the story is not part of the story.

Bøje,[324] however, brings another perspective to storytelling: with his description of "living stories" and "antenarratives" he points to storytelling as "living", a material,[325] social condition in which people "learned not only storytelling but story-deciphering in story-listening, as well as storytelling-participation to co-create storytelling." [326] This type of storytelling, he asserts, provides a way to deal with the polyphonic[327], fragmented stories that are part of complex organisations. In his view, this approach to storytelling lifts the crisis of narrative methodology in modernism as regards "what to do with non-linear, almost living storytelling that is fragmented, polyphonic... and collectively produced."[328]

Living stories, according to Bøje are ontological. In his words, "Living stories are not whole, often without beginning or end, and just unfolding in the middle. There is always a web of more and more living stories"[329] and the stories themselves become the agents for transformation; the interrelationships or community between people, become the story. In this regard, Bøje points to living story as having "material agency".[330] As the stories of various individuals unfold through the lives and actions of people, community is formed and new meaning emerges.

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[324] David Bøje's work on quantum storytelling has been influenced by the theories and philosophies of Heidegger, Walter Benjamin, Michael Bakhtin and Hannah Arendt, as well as Native American studies.
[325] Sanders, "Merleau-Ponty, Gibson and the materiality of meaning", 287 – 30.
Crossley, *The Social Body: Habit, identity and desire,* 4 – 7.

Sanders, with reference to Merleau-Ponty and Gibson, suggests that the materiality of meaning consists in the fact that meaning is not merely attributed to neutral things or sense data, but that significance is already found in the world in our most primitive encounters. What is encountered or perceived as an "affordance" (Gibson) is something in the world and highlights its meaning for a specific organism.

In a similar vein, Crossley refers to Merleau-Ponty's embodied conception of agency, namely that our agency develops when we incorporate social structures, such as language, in the form of habits in our lives. At the same time, actions (for instance, speech) give life to those structures and allow them to be reproduced.

[326] Bøje, "What is Living story?"
[327] "Polyphonic" means "many voices [or discourses] that constitute organizations". Bøje borrows the term "polyphonic" from Bakhtin to describe the complex interaction between narrative, living story and antenarrative.
[328] Bøje, Narrative Methods of Organizational & Communication Research, 1.
[329] Bøje, "What is Living story?"
[330] Ibid.

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Bøje's perspective shows a tangency with Merleau-Ponty's metaphoric description of the words in a book, which he says are like a fire that sparks thoughts in a reader's mind, while the reader's prior knowledge, thoughts and insight feed that fire.[331] Merleau-Ponty rejects the idea that language is purely representational, but that, even though it can represent something, it is more than a representation and carries meaning beyond the context in which it is used. As Hass describes it, language is a "phenomenology of living perception" and "an expressive cognition" in which there is a distinction between (1) expressive, creative, spontaneous thinking and (2) already acquired, sedimented thinking. These types of thinking are in a "strange dynamic" where the acquired, sedimented thinking is representational, but obscures the expressive process. When this is related to Bøje's description of living story, it points to the distinction between sedimented narratives and living story or antenarrative. In this regard, Bøje points to storytelling as being "an essential part of the material and non-material realms of one's reality."[332]

Practically, living story looks at and tells about the current processes that are taking place in the interrelationships between people in organisations and the way different material things are organised in an organisation to foresee future actions. Importantly, these current processes and stories are built upon previous processes and events. In this sense, living stories are multiple "accounts of our activities and experiences in the living storied spaces"[333] about different experiences that happened, and are happening, in different times and places.[334] In this way, the many different stories that are part of the web of our past and current relationships influence our behaviours, actions, habits, beliefs, interpretations of events, et cetera, and as such, create the current, living story that is not only happening now, but is influencing our future. Bøje speaks about "disclosability of the future"[335] as a revealing of the future through the processes that happen during the living story. It is however important to keep in mind that, events, and the stories about events, are built upon previous events, as "events and developments do not

[331] Hass, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy*, 171 – 172.
Merleau Ponty describes the power of expression as a creative, productive cognitive power that is an extension of our embodiment and perceptive powers. In his terms, the "speaking word" uncovers the expressive life of language, and a book becomes more that the words it contains: it becomes part of the reader's life, influencing the reader's thoughts, but also finding its meaning through the reader's own prior experiences. In a poetic passage he describes how the word on the page "catches like fire". Whereas the reader might begin to read a book idly, once the words have caught fire, the reader's "thoughts are ablaze" and the "fire feeds off everything [the reader has] ever read". (Lawrence Hass, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008, 171 – 172.)
[332] Bøje, What is Living story?
[333] Bøje and Baskin, *Dance to the Music of Story*, 3.
[334] Hass, *Merleau-ponty's Philosophy*, 172.
Merleau-Ponty considers the power of expression as something that is central to all aspects of our lives, from mathematics, science and art to language. He calls it "the speaking word", an outgrowth of our living embodiment and perception.
[335] Bøje, "Quantum Storytelling: Blacksmithing Art".

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pass away into nowhere; because the sediment within the human body as habits [become] the ground for the events and developments of the future."[336]

Related to the concept of living story, Bøje describes "antenarrative"[337] as having two meanings:
(1) As an adverb it is used in the "still fluid" terms of "what could have happened".[338] In other words, ante precedes the narrative, "before narrative cohesion and plot are added".[339] (2) As a noun, antenarrative points to speculation, a bet placed on how the future will pan out.

Antenarrative stories are unconstructed and fragmented. They cannot be captured by retrospective sense-making, but "displace closure". In this regard, Bøje points to Weick's description of retrospective sense-making as "a type of sense-making in which many different meanings have to be synthesized, because many different projects are under way at the time reflection takes place".[340] Weick's point is that more sense-making does not provide plot or cohesion, but displaces closure,[341] or as Bøje's puts it, "Antenarrative is never final; it is improper."[342]

Bøje distinguishes between four dimensions in which antenarrative works, namely:
(1) Before narrative supplements, frames and imposes plot, purpose and structure onto story;
(2) In acknowledging the speculative, ambiguous nature of story as regards what is happening in the flow of experience, and answering the question, "What is going on here?";
(3) In directing our attention to the flow of lived experience of the storytelling life. This happens in contrast to narrative that analyses the coherent story that is created after the experience. Although antenarrative is fragmented, emergent and not linear, Bøje makes it clear that there are implicit rules, namely who can tell the story, to whom, and how organisational members tell the story. In this regard, antenarrative can be described as collected memory, before it is reified into consensual narrative.
(4) In the flow of experience like in the play Tamara, where audience members are fragmented, and chase characters from room to room, co-creating the stories that interest them most. This type of antenarrative is distributed and historically contextualised. In other words, the meaning

[336] Crossley, "The Social Body: Habit, identity and desire", 5.
[337] Bøje, *Narrative Methods*, 3
Antenarrative is not the same as anti-narrative, which denies overall meaning or plot, and displays "fragmentation, discontinuities, partial and temporary understandings, and the lack of fixed meanings while equally claiming to mimic or evoke the nature of the past world as experienced."
[338] Baskin, "Storied Space as the Complex World of Experience", 81.
[339] Bøje, *Narrative Methods*, 2.
[340] Ibid, 3.
[341] Ibid.
[342] Ibid.

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of events depends upon the setting, the sequence of events or stories and the "transformation of characters in the wandering discourses".[343]

A storied space, in Baskin's terms, contains all three types of stories (dominant narratives, living story and antenarrative), which each influences the others and gets influenced in turn. Bøje *et al* suggests the metaphor of a dance to describe the continuous interaction between the consistency of the "proper" narratives that give direction and purpose, and the ambiguities and inconsistencies of living stories and antenarratives. By inviting these inputs from various storied spaces inside and outside an organisation, issues can be brought to light, discussed and questioned, changing perceptions and ways of doing as time goes on. In Bøje's words, "storytelling complexity [is] ... stories [that] dance through our organization more dynamically, as the interplay of narrative order, living story emergence and antenarrative shaping the future.[344]

What Bøje brought to the understanding of stories, storytelling, narrative and organisational culture is that all three types of accounts have a place in the mix of storytelling and narrative. Some stories will become the dominant stories in the storied space, but we always have the ante, the before-the-story account as well as the bet, the possibility for another plot to develop, and another ending. Furthermore, through the metaphor of stories that dance through the organisation, a paradox that emerges through MacIntyre's insistence upon a narrative unity is solved, as a narrative unity can easily become insular and dominating, and in such a way, undermine ethical sensibilities and questioning. What is important for our development of moral responsiveness is that there should be a balance between unity and space for questioning, as well as for the possibility to find the turning point to change direction when an organisation's stories are pulling it into a downward spiral.

The dialogical nature of storytelling (in other words the conflicts between dominant stories and antenarrative, and the marginalising of stories that do not fit our frameworks) necessitates from us as ethical agents a self-critical and reflexive attitude. Coupled with this is the requirement that we are aware of our own subjective interpretations, as well as of the power relationships that are always present when we frame our world by the stories we choose to tell, and by the experiences and influences we choose to filter out.

If we understand, in Derrida's terms, that each story is, at once, more and less than itself, and we open ourselves to other meanings that are still hidden, storytelling can help us to

[343] Ibid, 4.
[344] Bøje, "Complexity theory and the dance of storytelling in organizations", 39.

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acknowledge our own limitations and at least attempt to take into account the demands of the Other, which hover, like Derrida's ghost of undecidability, over our interpretations, decisions and actions.[345]

This would require from us a willingness to be open to the unofficial and emergent stories that develop when people interact and enter into conversation,[346] an acknowledgement that conflict and disagreement are necessary for us to become ethical agents, and humility to acknowledge we don't know the whole story. This would also require from us the willingness to listen, hear and act on other opinions. It would also require courage to stand up for what we believe is right and to persuade others to follow suit, or alternatively, be otherwise convinced by others. As Baskin says, by being open to different voices, a new version of, or a different perspective on a dominant narrative has the potential to influence change.[347]

3.2 Considering some objections

Baskin's description of "filtering out inconvenient facts that go against the grain of our established norms" seems to challenge the assumption made in the beginning of this chapter: Instead of creating more meaningful relationships in which it would be possible to be responsive to the needs of others, it seems to point towards a greater reduction and selfishness in the way we create our models of the world. Considering Bevan and Werhane's comment that "knowledge or understanding is too often reduced to something that only makes sense to 'me'," even though we are faced "in every moment" with infinite experiences[348] the question comes to mind whether our limited (and limiting) understanding of the world allows us to be ethically and morally responsive towards the Other (in the way Levinas describes our "irreducible responsibility towards the Other").[349] This presents a challenge: how do we redefine agency while we acknowledge and keep in mind that the self lies at the intersection of relational narratives, which include our own web of living stories.

Ethically, this is challenging, because we need the guidance of dominant narratives that are co-created in our narrative spaces, but the more we believe in their truth, or the more successful they enable us to become, the more we embrace them as our knowledge of the world. In this way we can block out the antenarrative in living stories or the contradicting realities those stories reflect.[350] This is an ethical dilemma indeed, which is reflected in the interactions and relations in and with regards to organisations. When dominant narratives exist alongside one another in subcultures or different hierarchies, it might point to what MacIntyre means with his

[345] Dooley and Kavanagh, *The Philosophy of Derrida*, 100.
[346] Bøje and Baskin, "When Storytelling Dances with Complexity", 29.
[347] Baskin, "Storied Space as the Complex world of Experience", 85 – 86.
[348] Bevan and Werhane, "Stakeholder Theory", 52.
[349] Ibid.
[350] Baskin, "Storied Space as the Complex World of Experience," 90.

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terms, compartmentalisation and fragmentation.[351] Baskin, for example, shows how nursing staff in a specific hospital had one dominant story about their responsibilities and accountability towards their patients and were annoyed by the implementation of customer service policies. Administrative staff, however, thought it brought better standards of control into the process.[352] This is an example of the fragmentation of organisational cultures and how our inability to speak from the same purposes could undermine ethical questioning.

What we can learn from Cilliers, however, is that one should keep in mind that those different storied spaces as the discourses that appear as narrative patterns do not exist in separation from the network. Different discourses are clusters in a network that interact with others, and local narratives only make sense in relation to their contrasts and differences to surrounding narratives. In this view, discourses constitute patterns of activity over a large group of individuals who exchange local information. Individuals are therefore part of various discourses in a network, but at the same time also compete for resources in the network. It is in this non-linearity of complex relationships that self-organisation takes place.[353] The competition for resources (which, in Baskin's example could be related to different values or a power struggle) could lead to conflict, which should not necessarily be seen as paralogy, but rather as a continuous interplay between dominant narratives, living stories and antenarratives.

Ideally, the possibility of different narratives existing alongside one another should open us for influences, but often our spaces are too closed to acknowledge other possible meanings or interpretations that enter our space. It is then, when the dominant stories become hegemonic and other voices are either disregarded or drowned by the legitimising narrative, as Kornberger *et al* and Rhodes *et al* describe in the following two examples.

Kornberger *et al* refer to the Challenger disaster where an engineer's attempt to warn about structural problems was overridden by management's insistence on the launch taking place as scheduled, with disastrous results. The dominant stories in this case seem to have been driven by financial considerations and status.[354] As Kornberger *et al* point out, "Management excluded the engineers from the decision-making process, simultaneously excluding critical voices representing potential problems." [355]

[351] MacIntyre, "Social Structures", 325.
[352] Baskin, "Storied Space as the Complex World of Experience", 88 – 96.
[353] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 116.
[354] Lyotard calls this type of narrative the "performative narrative" and MacIntyre refers to it as "insulation", one of the effects of compartementalisation.
[355] Kornberger, Clegg and Carter, "Rethinking the Polyphonic Organization", 25.

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In another example, Rhodes *et al* use the "fall from grace" plot to explain how the presence of a strong legitimising narrative can limit the capacity for ethical deliberation. They describe a situation where employees remained loyal to an organisation through various stages of restructuring, to their own detriment. In this example certain acts of the organisation were normalised through strong plots and a strategic spread of the normalising narrative, namely the inevitable fall from grace plot of Greek tragedy,[356] resulting in a kind of ethical numbness. In this case, Rhodes *et al* found that, although the opportunity existed for antenarratives to emerge as counter stories to challenge the dominant narrative, even these emergent stories supported the inevitability of management decisions. They remark, "where there is inevitability, there can be no responsibility as agency is ascribed to fate rather than to persons expected to be masters of whatever fate threw to them." [357]

In cases such as described in these practical examples, dominant narratives are restrictive as they close the discursive space, instead of opening it for further discussion and questioning or debate. "Such narratives," Kornberger *et al* argue, "provide the matrix for normal organizational talk, action and decision making [and] are potentially counterproductive and dysfunctional, to the extent that they enact and reinforce a certain image of an organization that can influence it almost subliminally, beyond the threshold of the organizational members' awareness." [358]

It is in the light of this argument that a comment made by Czarniawska about the importance of the storyteller deciding on the plot in order to determine the meaning of the story[359] comes as a warning that the plot we, as storytelling agents, provide for our stories, can become the hegemonic narrative that limits our understanding of the stories of others, and therefore blinds us for the other's needs, or become the manipulative narrative that legitimises the change. Similarly, Bøje and Jørgensen borrow from Derrida the term "violent instruments of torture" [360] to describe hegemonic narratives which demand to be considered true. Positioned as the only true account of a situation, they do not allow the space for an ethics discourse to take place as they do not invite questioning or other interpretations of the situation to be considered. In contrast, Bøje's idea of antenarrative analysis as acknowledging the many historical roots and

[356] Rhodes, Pullen and Clegg, "'If I should Fall from Grace..." 535 – 551.
[357] Ibid, 543.
[358] Kornberger, Clegg and Carter, "Rethinking the Polyphonic Organization", 25.
[359] Czarniawska, A Narrative Approach.
Czarniawska's point is that researchers collect and interpret texts produced in their field work, but in the process produce texts in their research records. It is the "inscription that finalizes research" (Preface, vii). This "inscription" provides chronology and plot to a list of facts, which allows the reader to add causality (or perhaps meaning).
[360] Bøje and Jørgensen, "Deconstructing the Narrative Story Duality".

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many possible outcomes of the living stories that emerge through the interactions between people provides a platform for ethical questioning. In such a way, antenarratives, as living stories, disrupt the modernist hegemony and can become supportive of ethical questioning *if* we allow our storied spaces to become more open for other possibilities.

3.3 Opening up storied spaces: Recounting as accountability

In essence, storytelling is an act of recounting what has happened, a framing of our stories in a certain way, and an invitation for discussion. Stories can also be our way of expressing needs and requirements, sometimes by telling a story and sometimes through an antenarrative story fragment that hints at a possibility for a story. Storytelling activity happens as a normal activity in the living spaces, the discourses in which we participate as human beings. It is through these moments when stories are told and activities recounted that relationships are built or broken. Through these stories individuals show who they are as human beings, credible, unbelievable, or hard to fathom. The question is whether we should consider stories as necessarily ethically good. As with anything else humans are capable of, storytelling, a key aspect of our existence, can be used to the benefit of ourselves and others, or to our or their detriment. Stories can be enlightening, empowering, inspiring, or manipulative, sly, untrue, or rationalisation of violence or unjustness. In this regard, the stories we tell should never be seen as neutral, or necessarily good, but always as powerful bodies of influence.

MacIntyre's criteria for ethical and moral agency remind us of the necessity to acknowledge and accept our own capability of acting as moral and ethical agents. This includes our capacity to step into the storied spaces of multiple, interrelated stories, and to reflect critically on our own purposes, intentions and activities. It also includes the responsibility to consider ourselves as practical rational individuals who are capable of and allowed to make judgements and "be justifiably held responsible" for making ourselves aware of certain facts and their possible consequences, or of deliberately not taking into consideration certain knowledge we have, based on our role responsibilities.[361] Importantly, these practices of a human being are embedded in the social spaces in which he or she participates. This means that our capability for being ethical can only take place in these storied spaces, where we have a voice, and which we co-create through our actions.

Creating a healthy social order in an organisation is important in maintaining ethical relationships, both because of the historical character of our stories that brings a sense of belonging and structure into the relationships, and because of the necessity to interact with one another and learn from experience. In this regard, Crossley maintains that societal structures and schemata such as language "can only exist when they are embodied in the actions of other

[361] MacIntyre, "Social Structures", 313.

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agents who pre-exist the individual".[362] This circular reference is important because, as Crossley points out, humans transform themselves by incorporating the patterns and principles of actions they experience in the world around them".[363] Through this self-reinforcing loop, they absorb new knowledge, expand their competence and learn in relationship with others, as well as from prior experience. For ethics, it has the implication that we can learn and acknowledge our own capability to be ethical and can create storied spaces that are open to the voices of others. In this way it should be possible for an individual to maintain a balance between that, which he/she values based on historical, or dominant stories, and being sensitive to others' experiences and interpretations of reality.

MacIntyre maintains in this regard that the practical rational individual has the opportunity to question and participate, or else, to turn a blind eye to unethical practices.[364] Through Bøje, this opportunity can be related to the ante, a bet on the unfolding of the future. In this sense, the individual is constantly facing an aporia in the stories in which he or she participates, looking at the past to create any of many possible futures through the story that is told.

For a business to maintain a healthy and living ethical environment, it would be important to include employees in participative practices such as defining organisational purposes and priorities, collaborative decision-making, team-building and cross-cultural learning.[365] If this does not happen, and employees' capability for critical self-reflection is impaired by organisational pressures and expectations, their authenticity as morally responsive individuals is impaired as well.[366] Baskin and Bøje show through the notions of interlinking storied spaces and storytelling complexity that people learn to open their storied spaces through participation in the dynamic network of interactive relationships. This enables the dissemination of new ideas, as well as the possibility for new relationships to develop.[367]

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[362] Crossley, ""The Social Body: Habit, Identity and Desire", 5.
[363] Ibid.
[364] MacIntyre, "Social Structures", 311 – 329.
[365] Pragmatism and phenomenology are two theories that provide a useful process consisting of (1) a description of everyday practices that can be accounted for in stories and (2) the continuous testing of the normal practices. By exploring new perspectives on these stories and creating the possibility of different futures, individuals attempt to respond to the tests, either to legitimate the current order or a new order, or to justify a compromise. Each of the responses to the tests has to be justified. This combination of phenomenology and pragmatism provides a practical solution to the problem presented by choice, as reflection and self-criticality are often enforced by others' critical questions rather than something that happens spontaneously. This thread will be picked up again in the next chapter when the concepts of pattern entrainment and transformation, and naturalistic decision-making are brought into relationship with the development of ethical sensibilities through a process of sense-making.

[366] Painter-Morland, "Redefining Accountability", 43.
[367] Ibid.

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Participation in a network of relationships also creates the boundaries within which certain norms, as well as duty roles can develop. In this regard, an assumption of accountability could be related to the function of the duty, for instance, a CEO or manager in an organisation, a cabinet minister, a nurse or a school teacher fulfils a certain duty role which carries with it the assumption of accountability. However, duty, in the sense of fulfilling certain pre-established tasks and taking on certain responsibilities, is not a sufficient criterion for accountability. MacIntyre makes this clear in his description of the "character role" of "The Manager"[368] as well as in his theorising of the case of "a certain J".[369]

From the preceding discussion, it is apparent that accountability entails more than fulfilling one's duty. When we look at accountability from a self-organising perspective, we can assume that, accountability is something that develops as a result of building relationships, of becoming "accountable towards others or in terms of some shared sense of normative propriety."[370] As an example: an organisation is not compelled by duty to provide safe transport for its call centre agents who have to travel long distances early in the morning, over weekends or late in the evenings when public transport to their townships is not available. However, an incident that happened to one of the employees might be a springboard for employees to raise their fears or concerns. It could also be a springboard for management to look at their accountability from a new perspective: one that emerges from relationships with staff rather than one that is built purely on duty. In such a case, management might make an arrangement with an informal public transport business such as a taxi service to be available to staff whose shifts end late at night.

This hypothetical example shows that broadening our understanding of what it means to be accountable implies that we have to recognise the importance of the relational context in which responsibilities and a different kind of accountability develop, as well as the wider relational context in which an organisation is embedded. In other words, the relational constraint that emerges implies a different sort of "duty" than simplistic role-responsibilities: one that acknowledges the circumstances, expectations or perceptions of others in the broader network of relationships. Most importantly, it points to the necessity to avoid insular narratives, either unitary or competing ones, and the capacity of the individual to bring different narratives in conversation with one another. These points seem to be crucial for us to live as ethically aware individuals who participate in a network of many interrelated stories.

[368] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 31.
[369] MacIntyre," Social Structures", 311 – 329.
[370] Painter-Morland, "Redefining Accountability, 39.

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4. Concluding remarks

Although stories and narratives can never be ethically neutral but are framed subjectively, the arguments in this chapter have shown that stories provide a normative framework through which we can discover what it means to be ethically sensible individuals who are in continuous interaction with others.

This chapter has also shown that our knowledge and understanding will always be incomplete and subjective, due to the complex dynamic nature of human relationships. We therefore have to be adjustable and open to others' experiences and interpretations of events. Our narratives or stories cannot provide us with clear and unambiguous directions about how to act; they can only help us reduce complexity to the extent that we can make certain connections that enable us to make sense of our place and responsibility, as well as our accountability towards others. Because we can never make purely objective and final claims of the world, "we have to make choices, and thus we cannot escape the normative or ethical domain."[371] However, opening our storied spaces for multiple other voices can help to enlarge our ability to understand and be responsive to the needs and requirements of others, even when their experiences or understanding of the world is drastically different from ours. In organisations, the opening of our storied spaces for others can include the various internal and external stakeholders of the organisation, people whose lives are affected directly or indirectly by the organisation's operations, activities and purposes in the social and natural environment shared by all of us. The key to accountability and ethical relationships are thus found in the responsiveness of human beings in their relationships to other.

[371] Cilliers, "Complexity, Deconstruction and Relativism", 259.

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Chapter 3 Assumption 3: Strengthening ethical relationships through sense-making

What a bird should look like

Nasrudin found a weary falcon sitting one day on his window-sill. He had never seen a bird of this kind before.

"You poor thing," he said. "How ever were you allowed to get into this state?"

He clipped the falcon's talons and cut its beak straight, and trimmed its feathers.

"Now you look more like a bird," said Nasrudin. [372]

The argument that has been developed throughout this dissertation is brought together in this chapter, in a practical look at what happens when we, as agents who interact with many other material agents or elements in our environments[373], make sense of the complex ethical environments in which we interact, and through our interactions, continuously co-create. In this regard, the assumption on which this chapter is built is that, it would be possible to reinforce behaviours and narrative patterns that strengthen ethical relationships, or intervene to influence perceptions, attitudes and behaviours that pose a risk to the ethical environment. This, I argue, can be done through a process of sense-making[374] in which the telling of various

[372] Idries Shah, *The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasrudin*, 65.

[373] De Villiers and Paul Cilliers, "Narrating the Self", 34 – 53.

[374] Sense-making as used by cognitive psychologist Karl Weick describes an "interorganizational evolution[ary] process" that helps us to establish "the story" behind situations. Otherwise stated, "sensemaking is the construction of something that becomes sensible". (Weick, *Sensemaking in Organizations*.)

The terms, sense-making, pattern-recognition, entrainment and sense-giving are interconnected elements in the sense-making process and inherently part of the human being's mental capabilities as a narrative self. The act of sense-making refers to the way we *perceive* phenomena, as well as our own *actions*, and frame them in a way that is meaningful to ourselves. Through our use of language, both spoken and written, we can generalise our experiences and interact with others. In this sense, I argue in this dissertation that it would be possible to influence ethical relationships by means of our ability to recognise patterns, learn through pattern-entrainment and narrate our interpretation of events through the stories we tell, through our discussions, agreements as well as disagreements, through writing, as well as through other visual and auditory means.

This ability to reduce the complexity we perceive into chunks of information that can be ordered and given an account of is not only our means of survival against many competitors, but through our narrative ability, also our means of interaction with others. In addition, our sense-making ability provides us with an inner sense of value and purpose. In other words, we create meaning from emergent patterns in our environment by the associations we form and articulate and in such a way, influence relationships, actions and events through individual or relational power. In this regard, sense-making, like storytelling, is a normative and ethical act.

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types of stories can be leveraged as a means to understand relationships in an organisation better, and also as a natural capability of humans to influence others. The dilemma described in this chapter is that the complex self, whose sense of identity emerges through a personal and cultural history and shows internal consistency in his/her behaviour, changes in response to environmental pressures. In this way, sense-making in itself presents us with an aporia: it is backward-looking to past experiences, histories, values, beliefs and cultural influences that provide us with the conceptual and cognitive frameworks to order new information. It is also forward-looking, adapting our frameworks to absorb new information and applying heuristics rather than rules to emergent issues. The agent's ability to observe patterns, learn through repetition of patterns and influence others has implications for our understanding about ethics and accountability, as ethical sensibilities and accountability to others are also emergent properties of the system. This implies that reality, as we observe and know it, is co-created with others in a network of relationships, and meaning attached to ideas, perceptions, situations and events is negotiated in the network.

Practically, sense-making, which is a process of recognising patterns and giving sense to situations, shows a leniency towards MacIntyre's process of enculturation into a community, but also to a poststructuralist perspective of agency, meaning and knowledge that are locally produced and understood. In this regard, it is possible to say that even though humans' lives and life stories might follow a certain trajectory, change is always present as a possibility, an ante to the narrative, yet never totally separated from its historical roots.

What is important, though, is that through making sense of reality we can only reduce the complexity for ourselves; we can never claim to make a model of, or know, the entirety of a complex system.

The term "sensemaking/sense-making" is spelled differently in scholarly literature and may be associated with different perspectives in sense-making, for instance in the work of Brenda Dervin who uses the term "sense-making" (with a hyphen) to refer to the cognitive or physical "sense" used by an individual to bridge gaps in his or her knowledge. Although the constructivist origins of the term are similar, Dervin's focus is on the individual sense-maker's methods and range of processes used for sense-making, while Weick's perspective on "sensemaking" involves the process in which individual agents work together to make sense of a complex situation. (Dervin and Nilan, "Information Needs and Uses", 3–33.)

Snowden's use of the term sense-making refers to narrative sense-making that is aimed at finding "How ... we make sense of the world so we can act in it." This term refers to a process that will supply "sufficient" knowledge that would enable a person to make a "contextually appropriate decision". (From http://cognitive-edge.com/blog/entry/3840/what-is-sense-making/ sourced 10/01/2014 10:26 pm).

Kurtz refers to "narrative sense-making" as the sharing of "stories or story elements in such a way that patterns emerge that provide insights about a specific topic." (Cynthia Kurtz, "The Wisdom of Clouds", sourced from: http://www.cfkurtz.com/ on 10/01/2014 10:00 pm.)

For the sake of consistency I use the hyphenated form of the term.

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Based on the argument held in the previous chapters, this chapter points to the need for individuals who participate in relational networks to be, or to become, aware of their own and others' narrative patterns; how they perceive, think about and describe the world, before they would be able to strengthen some of these patterns or weaken others to create ethically sensible environments. It is also argued that, through interactions with others, and the feedback received on one's actions from others, an individual, as well as the many interactive agents in an organisation, can become ethically sensible, building a relational network that is responsive to emergent ethical issues.

The first part of the chapter looks at how the "autonomous" agent is inherently egocentric and can only become ethically inclined through a responsive, reflective and reflexive process, namely through self-organisation. In this section, I bring narrative identity, as it emerges through interactions and feedback loops in the system in relationship with the concept of sense-making from a cognitive psychology perspective, provided by Weick. This is done in an attempt (1) to understand how consciousness and identity construction are interlinked as part of the sense-making process; (2) to understand and describe the inherent tension that exists between (a) individual ability and inclination to frame our understanding of the world through the memory patterns we use in a normative sense and (b) our attempts to be or become ethical agents who are mutually accountable for and to one another for the environments we co-create; and (3) to point out how the notion of self-organising complex systems allows us to lift the tension between our concept of agency and mutual accountability through interaction and collaboration with various others.

Understanding how knowledge and meaning are created through our ability to make sense of recurring patterns is important to understand the limitations as well as the possibilities complexity theory has for ethics. The paradox of knowledge, which is at the same time robust and flexible, provides a perspective on how new information can change individual as well as group thinking patterns over time. This is an important consideration for ethics programmes, which are aimed at the transformation of entrained thinking patterns in an organisation. This description of the epistemological basis of sense-making provides the link with the Cynefin Framework and Sensemaker Suite™. The second part of the chapter analyses the Cynefin Framework and Sensemaker Suite™ philosophically, based on the perspectives held and the insights derived in this dissertation.

1. De Villiers, Cilliers and Weick: The emergent self as part of a self-organising system and the implications for accountability

De Villiers and Cilliers describe the self as a material entity, which is an aspect of human consciousness, and an emergent property of the brain. Collected information is distributed and

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processed throughout the brain and filtered into a narrative stream that continues to create, strengthen or weaken our concept of self. This happens, however, not as a "single stream of consciousness" that develops a "grand self" which, as an objective, removed-from-the-world self can oversee and act on the goings on in the world, but rather as multiple streams of influence whose influence on the development of the self differ. Yet our concept of self is relatively coherent[375] even though it can change. Dennett, as referenced by De Villiers and Cilliers, explains this aporia in the concept of a distributed self, which is at the same time a coherent self, as a "culmination of a web of words and deeds".[376]

Traversing through the theories of Foucault, Derrida, and MacIntyre in this dissertation, it is clear that context and structure are widely considered to be important elements in the development of agency. This is also the case in complexity terms, as De Villiers and Cilliers indicate when they write, the "material self develops and adapts in a specific structure within a specific context." [377] This means that the genetic tendency of the brain for self-construction, learning and adaptation seems to be but one element in a confluence of systemic influences that contribute to the forming of the self.

By implication, it means that a different mix of influences on an individual might have a different sense of self as a result, but according to De Villiers and Cilliers, the actualisation of the many possibilities from which the self emerges become irreversible.[378] In this sense, the self has a history, is situated in a specific context, and has an internal structure, that is, the self has an identity that shapes its perception of reality. This has the following implications: (1) if we know who we are, we would have an idea of what we think and why we think so; (2) we would also be able to say how our ideas differ from the motivations, purposes or ideas of others. In other words, we create frameworks through which we observe, interpret and act in the world based on who we consider ourselves to be. (3) Because we have this ability for observation, self-reflection and a sense of discernment, we can assess, categorise, judge and label others in our relationships, take a stance, and influence relationships.

In this regard, complexity theory's perspective on the development of agency also shows a tangency with Foucault's concepts of Power/Knowledge. [379] One could describe the creation of self as an emergent product of power and knowledge, which is in a competing relationship with other selves who are both similar and different to us. Knowledge and self are paradoxically both

[375] De Villiers and Cilliers, "Narrating the Self", 34 - 53.
[376] Ibid.
[377] De Villiers and Cilliers, "Narrating the Self", 49.
[378] Ibid.
[379] Foucault, "Two Lectures", 98-99.

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recurrent and emergent in our attempt to contribute to the development of ethically and morally sensible business and social environments.[380]

When the characteristics and development of the complex agent and MacIntyre's moral subject, who both develop in a network of relationships, are compared, there seems to be a difference in the purposes of the aspiring moral agent and the complex agent: the moral agent aspires to becoming virtuous and moral through his/her integrated practices, while the complex agent becomes ethically aware through the feedback received from others in the relational network. The difference between the moral communal system described by MacIntyre and the complex system seems to be in the description of the scope and purpose of the system: MacIntyre's, a system with an integrated view of its inner purpose, and the complex system, "determined by the purpose of the description of the system [and] ... often influenced by the purpose of the observer".[381] The ethically sensible complex system's purpose seems to be a coming together of various perspectives, with the complex agent acting in oblivion of the variety of the many interactions in the entire system. As Cilliers points out, the agent is essentially "ignorant of the behaviour of the system as a whole; [responding] only to information that is available to [him/her] locally."[382] In contrast, MacIntyre's moral subject is embedded in local, closed relationships through which his/her moral development is closely related to his/her practices that are aimed at fulfilling a shared purpose.

A closed system as described by MacIntyre cannot cope with the fragmentation and inherent changes that characterise the current business environment. For this reason, complexity theory provides a way to cope with the complexities related to business, but not without many internal conflicts. However, these conflicts are necessary for the system to continue to transform. An understanding of how self-organising systems work in practice allows us the possibility to deal with ethical issues in a responsive manner, taking into consideration the problems as well as the possibilities related to sense-making and pattern-entrainment.

1.1 Problems and possibilities related to sense-making and pattern-entrainment

The ability to create sense and order by recognising and describing patterns of behaviour is helpful for us to situate ourselves coherently in the world. Without that coherence we would be overwhelmed and unable to make decisions, to act or to create the structures that provide consistency in our personal lives, organisations or communities. However, an unwavering sense of self can restrict our ability to observe and interpret things we do not understand. It can also inhibit our ability to adapt, and can blind us to the needs and requirements of other agents who

[380] De Villiers and Cilliers, "Narrating the Self", 34 - 53.
[381] Cilliers, *Postmodernism and Complexity*, 4.
[382] Ibid.

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are not like us. At the extreme, it can cause a sense of entitlement to our own beliefs, purposes and knowledge, where our internal belief patterns are reinforced by the support we get from others who are like us and think in a similar way to us. Such reinforcement would allow us to rationalise why we are right and others are wrong, while we build small mental strongholds to protect ourselves, our beliefs and what we treasure from the different influences in our environment, some of which we are aware and others of which we are oblivious.

Although the complex agent is not necessarily egocentric, as agency, with its ethical/unethical qualities emerges from the interactions between power and knowledge in the system, Weick points out that we have a natural inclination to become entrained in our thinking. This is an ethical dilemma that is relevant when we look at the emergence of agency and the building of relationships within organisations or communities, because pattern entrainment can influence the interactions between power and knowledge not only at an individual level, but also in groups.

In this regard, Weick provides three case studies that point to the ethical dilemma presented by sense-making through pattern-entrainment and pattern-recognition.[383] In all three cases he points out how the destabilisation of our sense of self can become the impetus for us to see ourselves and the ingrained patterns and norms we have developed over time with new eyes, and through the perspective of others within our social environments.[384]

In the first example, our ability to be ethical and just is problematised through an example of how jurors in the American jury system rationalise their decisions by making the facts fit their individual or collective picture of the world.

In the second case study, it is shown how a strong sense of identity can affect a group's perception of their work so that they become less critical or responsive to emergent issues on the one hand, and entrenched in group think on the other. It further points to strong organisational narratives, as well as powerful individuals in a group who can direct the flow and purpose of conversation, and can reduce the potentially positive outcomes of critical conversations.

The third case study points to how an agent can become aware of entrained thinking by suddenly noticing patterns never considered before. The problem in this case is that identity,

[383] Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld, "Organizing and the Process of Sense-making", 416.
[384] Crossley, *The Social Body: Habit, Identity and Desire,* 6.
Crossley's specific theory of reflexivity suggests that the capacity to "turn back upon and inspect ourselves" is attainable because we incorporate the perspectives of others into our habitus, or as he calls it, "an intersubjective theory". According to Crossley, we can only become "objects for ourselves insofar as we are objects for others". Moreover, he points out that this self-awareness is possible only because of the sharing of a "general social framework and collective representation."

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expert knowledge as well as an individual's status as an expert can influence perception of discrepancies, as well as willingness to point out ethical inconsistencies.

The following section will provide a more detailed description of Weick's theory about the ethical dilemma presented by sense-making, and how the destabilising of the self can provide the impetus for the development of ethical sensibilities.

Example 1: Fitting the facts to support the verdict

In a case study about the American jury process[385] it was found that jurors first *decided* on a remedy or outcome for the case, and only then *selected* the facts of the case to justify their proposed outcome. In other words, the facts were made to fit the verdict.[386] Furthermore, it was found that jurors rationalised both the positive features of their chosen alternative and the negative features of the alternative that was not chosen[387] when they experienced "cognitive dissonance". As Weick points out, the individuals in the jury realised their reality by making their patterns fit their idea of what reality should be.[388]

Sense-making in this regard means "to talk about reality as an ongoing accomplishment that takes form when people make retrospective sense of the situations in which they find themselves and their creations." [389] In other words, instead of reflecting on themselves in relation to others, on how decisions are made, or who benefits/loses from those decisions, Weick points to a self-reflexive quality in the process of sense-making. This has implications for our sense of morality as well as our ethical sensibilities: when we impose our beliefs on the world, we continue to *see* only what we *know* and *feel* comfortable with. [390]

Many examples exist in personal and organisational life where this dilemma is playing itself out routinely. These are, for instance, situations where individual or strong group beliefs about race, culture, gender, background or age influence perceptions and decisions as regards the capabilities of people who belong to a different sub-culture from those in power. Our acts of sense-making also seem to be more habitual than deliberate. In effect, our ability to create order for ourselves becomes a way of normalising our world in which we first ask: "what is happening here?" and "what should I do?" and then state, "this is how things are done here". When considered from this perspective, sense-making, as our ability to create patterns through which we interpret and articulate our perceptions, seems to be more restrictive and reductive in

[385] Ibid, 10.
[386] Ibid.
[387] Ibid.
[388] Ibid, 14.
[389] Ibid, 15.
[390] Ibid, 416.

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nature than open for the detection of the emergent properties of the system. By simplifying the complexity instead of dealing with the inherent uncertainty, ambiguity and changeability of complex systems, we reduce the complexity for ourselves, even though the interactions in the system remain complex and beyond our cognition.[391] This poses a challenge to us as ethics practitioners, business managers, influencers or individuals to move beyond our limitations, either in the natural course of events, or by deliberately asking the questions and entering the conversations that will broaden our perspectives instead of restricting them.

Example 2: When identity caused ethical myopia

A paediatric cardiac surgery research programme in England continued for almost 14 years without researchers being aware that their mortality rate was twice that of other, similar centres. Upon investigation, it was found that the mindset of the surgeons prevented them from facing reality as others saw it. They "wish[ed] away their poor results" based on their limited understanding of their purpose and identity as "people learning complex surgical procedures in the context of unusually challenging cases" .[392]

The flaw at the root of these researchers' actions, according to Weick and Sutcliffe, was that their concept of identity was self-centred: they believed themselves to be researchers learning complex surgical procedures, but they did not collect data or interact with other practitioners. In addition, their sense of research purpose, as well as their intent and the process of their research were egocentric and flawed.[393] Coupled with being egocentric, they were also uncritical with regards to their own role and identity as medical researchers, as well as regarding their responsibility towards their patients, until they were called to account for their actions.

In this example, the lack of self-awareness, cognisance of historical information, recurrence/reflexivity and interaction with others point towards limited consciousness[394] based on the restricted cognitive and behavioural patterns that were formed and entrained through many years of exclusivity. In addition, it points to a self-centred and self-serving purpose in their work, as their intent was to "learn complex procedures" rather than to consider their patients, and the outcomes and effects of their experiments on the patients' well-being. The question is why did they not think about their patients?

Heylighen, Cilliers and Gershenson explain that agents in complex adaptive systems naturally choose actions that will help them achieve their goals in ignorance of other agents or the

[391] Woermann, "What is Complexity Theory?"
[392] Weick *et al*, "Organizing and the Process of Sense-making", 416.
[393] Ibid.
[394] De Villiers and Cilliers, "Narrating the Self", 35.
De Villiers and Cilliers refer to consciousness ("that which makes us human") as a "capacity for reflection and especially self-reflection, and (apparently) willed action", an awareness of the self as an agent, and the ability to "understand and amend one's way of being".

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entirety of the system. In addition, they are oblivious of the long-term effects of their actions. In these terms it means that agents (individuals, organisations, as well as other bodies) have internal and independent goals or interests that bring them in constant competition for resources against others and therefore in conflict with the goals or interest of other independent agents or organisms. As they write, "... the action that seems to most directly lead to A's goal, may hinder B in achieving its goal, and will therefore be actively resisted by B." [395]

Bringing the problem of "egocentrism" into perspective, Weick points out that, humans don't question the current state of events when they don't have to, as they live their lives habitually. We create cognitive frames or schemata,[396] guidelines that enable us to order and simplify our world, to create knowledge by making meaningful connections between a plethora of diverse and seemingly disjointed pieces of information through our use of language, by telling stories, and through imagined experiences. We don't need to consciously make sense of everything that is happening around us, in order to act coherently and consistently, as our knowledge and memories of past experiences, as well as the social and cultural habits of our societies guide us. In this regard sense-making and pattern-entrainment can be described as the capability to learn from experiences, in order to make assumptions about the characteristics of and relationships between objects so that we can act appropriately in situations we have not experienced before.

In complexity terms, the identity and reputation of individuals or organisations emerge through a self-organising process of the social, human or organisational system caused by the recurrent interactions in the system. [397] In this regard, self-organisation implies that agents adapt to changes in the environment, to the organisation, as well as to one another, while the organisation, as a system, also adapts to new influences. This process of mutual adaptation is a process through which learning takes place through trial and error and is not a quality embedded in the identity of a person, community or organisation. When certain patterns of action or behaviour are positively reinforced or rewarded by influential others in the network of relationships, for instance, by management in an organisation, or by peers, these patterns can be strengthened and can lead to more of the same type of interactions, whether they are positive or negative interactions. Similarly, negative feedback or reprisal could lead to inhibiting certain actions or behaviours. Both positive and negative feedback, as Cilliers points out, is essential for self-organisation. [398]

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[395] Heylighen, Cilliers and Gershenson, "Complexity and Philosophy" , 126.
[396] DiMaggio, "Culture and Cognition", 263 – 87.
Schemata is a term from the field of psychology that refers to both our representations of knowledge and the mechanisms that help us to simplify complexity. DiMaggio defines schemata as representations of knowledge and information-processing mechanisms.
[397] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 4.
[398] Ibid.

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What is important to remember though, is that inclusiveness can lead to the rewarding of selfish or altruistic purposes. Selfish purposes carry within themselves the seed for unethical entrained behaviours. Altruistic purposes and entrainment of altruistic actions, on the other hand, can contribute to the creation of an ethical culture in an organisation. In this regard, the rhetorical questions that should remain part of an organisation's conversation about ethics are: What do we reward in business? What is our purpose with recognition and reward programmes? How do we influence the identity, culture and ethical climate of our organisations through the way in which we reward and recognise, or reprimand and discipline employees?

Becoming responsive to the needs of others does not necessarily always happen when we are compelled by external pressures; instead, our sense of accountability can be triggered. In this regard, ethical agency can be introduced by the possibility of questioning the equilibrium of the organisational system, and ethical judgement and action can be practised, and through pattern entrainment, be introduced in the machinery of the organisation. In this way, it would be possible to consider accountability as an emergent pattern that becomes a recurrent feature of the system over time, based, however, on how these patterns are repeated, nurtured, rewarded and recognised in the system. To understand how pattern-entrainment relates to ethics-other-than-rule-following, it would be important to remember that the order, habits and rule-like behaviours that are created through the interactions in the system are local, and always influenced by the non-linear interactions, the feedback loops of self-reflection and reflexivity, between various elements in the system. Our entrained behaviours and the habits and rules we create to live in a world that makes sense to us are therefore always subject to judgement, questioning and change.

Case study 3: The battered child syndrome

Weick describes the long process of how the "battered child syndrome" got to be acknowledged, starting with an article published in 1946 in a radiology journal. In this article, the author, a paediatric radiologist named John Caffey, speculated about the causes of injuries to children, which could often only be seen on x-rays, and where there was no medical history of parents reporting these injuries. He pointed to two plausible causes, namely (1) it could possibly be due to parents not appreciating the seriousness of some injuries, or (2) it could possibly be due to "intentional ill treatment" by the parents.

By opening up the possibility of parents intentionally hurting their children, more practitioners started to see similar patterns, and more articles, in which a few new cases were reported, appeared between 1953 and 1957. However, "the medical profession remained unconcerned about this 'professional blind spot'".[399] It was only in 1961 that a panel discussion at the

[399] Weick, *Sensemaking in Organizations*, 4.

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American Academy of Pediatrics pointed to the accumulation of significant data, which was then published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* under the title "The Battered-Child Syndrome". Public reaction was prompt: Laws were made, and by 1967, 7 000 cases were reported, which climbed to 60 000 in 1972, and then escalated to 500 000 by 1976.

What does this case study mean in terms of our ability to change our perceptions? Weick points out that it was a radiologist's inquisitiveness that led to, at first, a relatively small change in the way certain patterns were perceived by other practitioners. Combined with improved medical technology that made the patterns clearer to see, however, it led to huge social changes regarding the right of children to be protected against intentional ill-treatment by parents, and the social obligation of governments and communities to provide that protection. The equilibrium of the medical profession (at a given time and place) was destabilised by the questioning attitude of an individual agent who perceived something out of the ordinary and made it known, and who was subsequently supported by other agents in the same or similar fields. However, the changes in society's mental framing of child abuse happened over a time frame of 15 years. Why did it take so long when the evidence was there to see?

This case showed that, as individuals, we can sometimes become aware of our entrained thinking and more responsive to the needs of others through a sudden jolt of recognition of other possible interpretations of a commonly held belief or norm. This moment could be described as a political moment, in which the power/knowledge relationships shift; the kind of moment Weick describes as something so implausible that we think, "It can't be, therefore it isn't"[400], before we start to observe more similar happenings that start to form a pattern. In this moment, we could become aware of other interacting elements in the system, which provide different meanings to things we have taken for granted. In this way we could enter the agonistics of the system by deliberately asking, "What if it is possible and we just don't know about it?" However, this movement is not effortless: it seems to relate to crossing deeply embedded boundaries between our thinking of relationships as following a certain order, to a sudden realisation that things are inherently more complex and unknowable than what they seemed to be.

Creating awareness does not necessarily lead to wide-spread interest, as a community of practitioners has local interests and not enough widespread social contact to construct sensibilities around issues. Furthermore, experts are often guilty of the fallacy of centrality, i.e., they do not believe in the occurrence of a phenomenon they don't know about and are therefore not curious to find out more about it. In some cases, resistance and antagonism are

[400] Ibid, 1.

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experienced against the new information.[401] If we are collectively biased in favour of what we are comfortable with, how do we bridge the chasm between being morally and ethically oblivious or resistant, and being ethically tuned in as regards our emergent realities?

This case study is of particular relevance to business ethics, as it often takes long for management to notice, or to acknowledge, recurring patterns of behaviour in organisations. How long does it take to ask a different question which would bring to light an antenarrative that is not embedded in the company policies or procedures?

The question of possibility we could ask as regards an organisation's daily operations is, what could happen in terms of ethics, if we imagined that there might be other possible reasons for what management considered insubordination, perceived lack of responsibility in the enacting of orders, or an individual's disengagement from other staff? In the same vein, we could ask what would happen if ethics policies or guidelines were questioned with regards to what they actually meant in different situations, who or what they protected, and who or what they excluded. From a practical business ethics perspective, it is not always possible to wait for a shocking event or sudden insight to open our eyes to other possibilities.

1.2 Sense-making, knowledge through pattern-entrainment, and the implication for business ethics

According to Cilliers, we should learn how to become more sensitive to complexity, as single principles provide inadequate descriptions. We should rather be sensitive to complex and self-organising interactions, and appreciate the play of patterns that perpetually transforms the system itself as well as the environment in which it operates. [402] It is when we acknowledge this perpetual insecurity, when we are not sure that our interpretations of events and relationships are right, that we will be able to enter into multiple relationships in which we continuously attempt to create ethically responsive environments by questioning, asking, talking, and arguing different perspectives, and especially, by listening to what is not said.

The implications for ethics are that, first, we have to deliberatively shift our thinking and think critically about ourselves, our comfortable truths and our local relationships, and second, that, we are willing and capable of broadening our networks. In other words, it means that we start to interact and to listen to many diverse people. In such a way, we can observe and respond to other patterns, learn in the process and broaden our perspectives and experiences. It is through the richness of our various experiences in relation with many others that our ability to use heuristics and intuition to make sense of emergent issues is honed. Through interaction with others, our sense of identity and autonomy is tempered so that we can enter into a relational

[401] Weick, *Sensemaking in Organizations, 3.*
[402] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism* , 107.

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network, responding to the moral perspectives, values and beliefs of others. However, this can only happen if we are mindful of our incapability to know and remain modest about our own knowledge claims, and sensitive to the differences between us. In addition, it can only happen when our organisational structures and processes provide the platform for conversations about things that matter, even if we know that these conversations will not provide us with complete answers.

In this regard, it is important to keep in mind that knowledge is neither purely objective, historically accumulated data that can be systemised to provide a clear and accurate view of the world, nor purely subjective and relative in the terms of the beholder. In addition, knowledge does not originate from a subject, which is "something prior to the network of knowledge", [403] but is created continuously in accordance with the development of the subject through its interactions within a context. The concept of knowledge is paradoxical: On the one hand, knowledge is "interpreted data"[404] based on an agent or several agents' previous experiences, and on the other it is continuously created through interactions at multiple levels of the system. It is historical and explicit, as well as emergent and implicit.

Practically, it means that, when people respond to situations, they do not respond directly to the actual situations, or to events happening in their environments, but to their own internal representation of events instead. [405] These internal representations lead to people acting differently to emergent issues. For instance, Weick points out that, in the event of information overload, they could react by ignoring some information or relying on routine checks. The more information is added and the more diverse and interdependent the elements are on one another, the more complexity is increased, and the more uncertain people become. As uncertainty is added through the increased turbulence in the system, the more people rely on heuristics (rules of thumb based on knowledge derived from experience) and intuition, as well as what is rewarded, recognised or frowned upon most often in organisations, to make sense of ethical dilemmas. [406] They could also rely purely on codified and standardised components of ethical judgement such as the rules implemented by an organisation to guide action, and in the process ignore emergent issues, or react to emergent issues emotively, based purely on the individual's existing moral and ethical sensibilities and notions, background, beliefs, values, culture and personal experiences. All of these add to the complexity of the situation and a decrease in the ability to respond appropriately.

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[403] Ibid.
[404] Cilliers,"Knowledge, Complexity, and Understanding", 9.
[405] Boisot and Cohen, "Shall I Compare Thee to an Organization?", 113 – 135.
[406] Weick, *Sensemaking in Organizations*, 87.

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1.3 A case for self-organisation

Organisational ethics from a complexity perspective can never be a neatly packaged programme with outcomes specified, and exercises leading to right or wrong answers. Building a morally and ethically sensitive and sensible community, society or organisation is a meticulous effort that incorporates a process of "refinement of individual perceptual skills through organisation-wide reflection on past experiences ... as well as the continuous effort to sustain a shared sense of what organizational rules mean in practice". [407] It remains a "messy" process because the system can never be disconnected from the knowledge that is continually generated and transformed. In this process of "co-determination", what is considered to be right and true may change, and vice versa, or as Cilliers writes, "What appears to be uncontroversial at one point may not remain so for long." [408]

From the description provided in this section, one could conclude that sense-making is grounded in our sense of self in relation to others. It is an ongoing activity, and retrospective in nature. It enables us to act, as well as to reflect, include and adapt. Sense-making is focussed on, as well as focussed by, extracted or collected cues from the environment. It is driven by plausibility rather than accuracy.

Knowledge evolves through time and space, and it is co-responsible for the present behaviour of agents, while in it being recursive, it also affects the future behaviour of agents. As it operates in "conditions far from equilibrium", [409] knowledge is created as the outflow of many diachronic processes that are continuously changing, interacting on existing frameworks, and creating new meanings that arise as emergent properties through the dynamic, non-linear and rich interactions of a large number of elements in the network of relationships. Small, recurrent and local changes can escalate until they create "tipping points" that can result in big systemic changes. The opposite is also possible, namely that single, big events might result in insignificant changes. In addition, small changes done at the right time can prevent big disasters from happening. It is in this regard that Cilliers points out that the system can only survive if there is a constant flow of energy. [410]

Boisot provides us with a metaphor to describe the continual transformation of context and knowledge as "recursive", "like rivers carving their way across a landscape and changing its geography, then being guided by the new topography." [411] This describes how we create the deep knowledge that allows us to act in our "possible worlds", while at the same time our

[407] Tsoukas, "Knowledge as Action; Organization as Theory: 110 - 111.
[408] Cilliers, "Knowledge, Complexity, and Understanding", 9.
[409] Cilliers, *Complexity and postmodernism*, 4.
[410] Ibid, 3 – 5.
[411] Boisot and Cohen, "Shall I Compare Thee to an Organization?", 118.

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experiences guide the actions that will allow us to respond to a "probable world" in order to survive and live in it. This happens even though our actions in this world, including the organisational world, are based "more on plausibility than on certainty."[412] In Boisot and Cohen's words, "Through this enactment of plausibilities an organization's capacities are shaped, hence also our conception of what it should or could be."[413]

Self-organising systems, which are inherently complex, require systemic leadership through which individuals in a network can be influenced, as well as enabled, to build a sense of trust and accountability through their mutual interactions. Systemic leadership in self-organising systems creates different and repeatable patterns of influence through which cohesion can be attained and shared focus maintained through regular interaction.[414] This does not mean that business ethics is presented in a neatly packaged programme with specified outcomes, but that it develops through the interactions between people who are not isolated, but work in a team, with a team's input, trust and support, and where leaders often emerge from the interactions in the group. As Weick describes in his analysis of the Mann Gulch disaster, when a leader is focussed on seeking a team's well-being, and they form a cohesive group, they will trust him or her enough to literally step into an intentionally set back fire to escape an oncoming inferno.[415]

Practically, it points to the need for courageous engagement by the leaders with all stakeholders of an organisation or community in co-creating the type of environment in which they want to live and work, even though it is, and will always remain, a difficult and messy process. In essence, it points to an attitude of caring enough for others to be courageous, and responsively accountable.

2. A description and philosophical analysis of Cynefin Framework and Sensemaker Suite™

In this section I describe the theoretical framework of Cynefin Framework as it is positioned as a multi-ontological and multi-epistemological framework that can be used to define, describe and classify different types of problems and decision-making moments in a complex business or social environment.

The Cynefin Framework is based on the assumption that the world is a complex system comprised of ordered systems, complex adaptive systems and chaotic systems that co-exist and can interact and influence, or transform, each other. The framework therefore distinguishes

[412] Ibid.
[413] Ibid.
[414] Knowles, "Self-Organizing Leadership, 112 – 127.
[415] Weick, "The Collapse of Sensemaking in Organizations", 628 – 652.

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between three ontologies,[416] namely: ordered systems, complex/un-ordered systems and chaotic systems. On the framework, ordered systems are further divided into simple/known order and complicated/knowable order.

The framework is used to differentiate between and describe phenomena with regards to their underlying order, in order to make appropriate decisions and take suitable actions for different types of situations. In addition, it can be used in an explorative manner, by crossing the boundaries between different Cynefin ontologies experimentally, and looking for different or emergent properties that could lead to innovative problem solving.

I unpack these differences briefly before looking at the ethical perspectives implied by the differentiation and separation of ordered systems and complex systems.

2.1 Ordered systems versus un-ordered systems: Cynefin methods and implications for ethics

The Cynefin Framework is presented in the form of a matrix, even though it should not be read as a typical two-by-two matrix where there is a least ideal or most ideal position on the matrix. In the Cynefin Framework, all the domains are equally relevant, and a continuous movement between the various domains is implied.

The vertical axis on the matrix distinguishes between two ontologies describing two main types of systems, namely: Ordered systems (simple and complicated order) and un-ordered systems. Un-ordered systems are further divided into complex systems and chaotic systems.[417] On the

[416] Snowden and Stanbridge, "The Landscape of Management, 140 - 148.

[417] Bishop "Chaos", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2009 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/chaos/>.)

A brief description of Chaotic Systems

The term "chaotic systems" refers to mathematical models as well as real-world systems in which unpredictability of a system can be represented as behaviours that show some order. This means that chaotic systems do not refer to random behaviours but to behaviours that can be mathematically determined. Chaotic systems can be described as a mathematical property of a non-linear dynamical system in which time is either continuous or a discrete variable. They are: (1) deterministic, (2) show sensitive dependence to initial conditions where a small change in the initial condition can lead to a significant different outcome, and (3) are ordered and follow a mathematically predictable pattern. The concepts of "attractors" and "strange attractors" are related to chaos theory. "Attractors" refer to the state of equilibrium in which the system eventually settles, and "strange attractors" refer to infinite iterations of similar structures of which none are exactly the same as others, or ever repeat themselves in identical ways. They have "infinite numbers of layers of repetitive structures [that] allow trajectories to remain within a bounded region of space by folding and intertwining with one another without ever intersecting or repeating themselves exactly". Through these iterations, certain behavioural patterns are created that can help with prediction of future events. Chaos theory contributed to explanations of natural or real-life behaviours such as epileptic seizures, heart fibrillation, neural processes, the weather, industrial control processes, forms of message encryption, social and political theory and human agency. Chaos theory and complexity theory both consider the shifting relationship between order and disorder as an important element of human relationships. According to chaos theory, order and disorder (disorder is defined as "unorder" in the Cynefin Framework) are always both present in a non-linear system. Order

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Cynefin Framework, the horisontal axis represents the epistemological basis of the framework, where knowledge-generating actions range from rule-based (in ordered systems) to heuristics based (in un-ordered systems) as depicted in the graphic below:

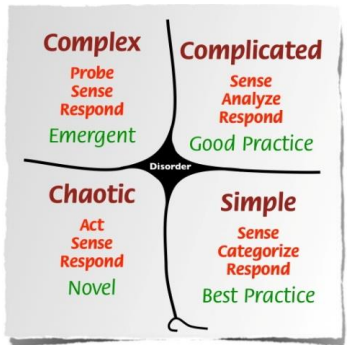

Figure 1: Domains of un-order and order in the Cynefin Framework[418]

The theory underlying Cynefin Framework methods points to different ways of making sense of relationships in the world. This means, for instance, that in a business environment, there are some ordered structures where it is fairly easy to see how a certain cause can have a certain effect, and there are relationships that are not ordered, such as undercurrents happening in the subcultures of the business, personalities, different values that are at conflict with one another, et cetera. The aim of a Cynefin Framework would be to find the coherence in relationships in order to contextualise and describe the situation so that appropriate decisions can be made.

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refers to necessity and determinism, disorder, to freedom and agency. According to chaos theory, these two aspects of human interaction are always working in tandem: Order provides structure, which shapes thought and action, but structure is created from chaos, and is historical and subject to change.

An understanding of the possibilities and limitations of chaos theory can offer insights into the study of ethics and ethical agency. Although chaos theory is not the subject of this dissertation, it is important to know that, from a chaos theory perspective, structures and rules can guide, but do not dominate over variety and uncertainty, which are important aspects of ethical and moral agency. In this regard, when structure dominates, ethical agency is impeded, and when too many overlapping variables are encountered and too much uncertainty is experienced, a system becomes chaotic and ethical agency is at peril. According to chaos theory, chaos does not imply that all relationships are lost and the system has collapsed in total disarray, but that new order can emerge from chaos. Also important is that chaos theory does not deny human agency, but rather points to individual agency.

Whereas structure provides guidance, variation, change and the element of surprise allow the individual to be responsive to the non-linearity of interactions. In this way, the "freedom" to act implies responsibility for these actions. (T.R. Young, The Red Feather Institute, 21 January 1997, sourced from: http://critcrim.org/redfeather/chaos/007humanagency.html on 30 November 2014.)

The interaction between complex systems and chaotic systems could provide interesting insights in the quest to understand the building of ethical cultures and subcultures of trust, and the breaking down of trust relationships. This, however, is not the subject of this dissertation.

[418] Dave Snowden, Cynefin framework with all five domains labelled.
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Domain of "simple" order

When relationships are perceived as ordered and unambiguous, relationships seem to be constant and we know what to expect. In such instances we can use "best practices" or respond in a fairly standard way to challenges. Not much thinking has to go into such responses after the problem has been identified. In Cynefin terms, the cognitive process used for sense-making is *sense-categorise-respond*.

Some of the examples Weick provided of high-reliability environments such as nuclear power plants or antenatal wards where strict rules and protocols are applied to maintain the stability of the system are applicable to the simple domain.[419] From a business ethics perspective this domain could be related to compliance-based ethical relationships, policies and codes of conduct. As the system's equilibrium is maintained by enforcing and following certain protocols, the question, "what's going on here?" could be answered with a description or a diagnosis, and invariably with the response: "this is how it is done here" or "this is the best way to do it". Further ethical questions such as "what should I do?" or "is this the right thing to do?" or, "who benefits and who loses?" do not arise. Simplistic decision-trees can possibly be used to categorise problems and choices based on risks, costs, results or probabilities. Decisions can be made easily as "directives are straight-forward, decisions can be easily delegated, and functions are automated". [420]

The Cynefin Framework domain of order allows for the description of ethics and governance structures as "the distribution of authority to make decisions and the systems of accountability for exercising that authority." [421] Although these structures required expert knowledge in creating them, the following of procedures should be straight-forward. The problem, as argued in this dissertation, comes in when these frameworks, including laws or compliance based ethical relationships or rule-based codes of conduct, are followed in an uncritical manner, or seen as non-negotiable, or as providing the answers to ethical dilemmas. The question asked early in this dissertation was whether ethics was possible when rules were followed, and the conclusion I drew through the theories of Cilliers (with reference to Morin, Lyotard and Derrida) and Foucault was that, codes of ethics are necessary for governing a business in an ethical way, but when the focus and demand is on rule-following, and these rules are followed uncritically, it holds implications for individuals and corporations' sense of accountability towards others. Simply put, it becomes easy (or easier for an individual in a subordinate position) to say, "I'm just following the rules", or "I did not make the rules, don't blame me," or "I'm just doing my job; I am not responsible for that area".

[419] Weick, "Organizational Culture as a Source of High Reliability", 112 – 127.
[420] Snowden and Boon. "A Leader's Framework", 1.
[421] Bridgman, "Performance, Conformance and Good Governance...", 156.

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When responsibilities and performance are measured and rewarded according to clearly defined key performance areas and related actions, it becomes easy to interpret the rules and comply with them without taking responsibility for one's actions or their outcomes; someone else, or the system, could be blamed if things go wrong. Similarly, an organisation, whose sense of responsibility and accountability to other stakeholders is linked to a tick-box compliance, is not focussed on the other as another (being) who is affected by its actions. This does not imply that employees should question every rule, or ignore standards. Instead it points to guarding against oversimplifying complex issues when rules are followed uncritically or people have become entrained in old patterns and act on habit, as Snowden and Boon point out.

According to Snowden and Boon, pattern-entrainment could lead to complacency, when people continue to do the things they have always done, and are unaware of changes in the context. They point out that complacency is the most common reason for seemingly simple systems to fail catastrophically.[422] They state, "...it is important to remember that best practice is, by definition, past practice. Difficulties arise... if staff members are discouraged from bucking the process even when it's not working anymore."[423]

The implication of these words for ethics is that we cannot merely follow our natural inclination to follow a process of *sense-categorise-respond* when dealing with ethics, as ethics does not fall within a simple domain where a rule can always provide the right answer for an ethical dilemma. However, simply NOT following rules is neither critical nor responsible, or even responsive to the situation. In this regard, Cilliers's point about following or not following a rule knowlingly and in response to the situation applies.[424]

A Cynefin process could potentially point out issues like an uncritical or a disinterested attitude towards ethical issues and own responsibility, unresponsiveness to change or a closed attitude towards other perspectives regarding ethical issues. Discussing these questions and the implications of making cause-effect connections between actions, behaviours and outcomes could lead to ethically responsive decisions in which the question could be asked: what would the best or right response be in this situation? In such a case a rule is not applied without thinking about it or exploring its effect on various people, in various situations.

Philosophically, however, the question is whether "order" as described by the Cynefin Framework is considered to be inherent to an ontological domain of order, as a natural, universal scientific process, or whether it is considered to be a human construct based on people's perceptions, experiences and practical knowledge.

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[422] Snowden and Boon, "A Leader's Framework", 3.
[423] Ibid.
[424] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 139.

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Domain of "complicated" order

In more complicated situations, when it is not easy to draw connections between things that happen and their causes, the Cynefin Framework process points to a structured, analytical thinking process for problem-solving. The process used for knowledge-creation includes a phase of analysis, instead of immediate categorisation. The sense-making phases are therefore: *sense-analyse-respond*. This refers to a logical-analytical process, in which the discovery of causal relationships is only restricted by our cognitive or computational (in)capabilities. [425] Instead of "best practices" which reside in a simple, rule-based domain of order, Snowden refers to "good practices", which rely on a careful, often a specialised consideration of all (or as many as possible) aspects of the problem, and agreement on the best way to act with regards to the situation. [426] These solutions can be applied, monitored and tested until the relationships become known, and the issue becomes normalised and mainstreamed in best practices. The process of sense-analyse-respond in the complicated domain points to expert knowledge that is necessary to make the connections between aspects of the problem and possible solutions.

Expert knowledge could be found in the intricacies of legal, accounting or governance matters where a long process of logical-analytical investigation of an ethical issue could lead to analysis and eventually to a response. In this regard, rules are binding, but the following or not following of a rule can still be debated with regards to specific circumstances, which add complexity to the process. The process of sense-analyse-respond that allows individuals in organisations to apply "good practices" points to interpretative rule-following or consideration of options, for instance, as in a Utilitarian approach to ethical issues, where "the morally right action is the action that produces the most good". [427] Decision-making, in this regard, requires "tolerance for ambiguity in key staff", [428] an acknowledgement of the context and the many interactions that can influence outcomes, as well as the involvement of multiple stakeholders in order to make judgements in uncertain situations. [429] Snowden's perspective with regards to decision-making based on the assumption that order is knowable is that it would be a mistake to "restrict the application of that expertise to single options, [and not to consider] nuances of behaviours." [430]

Some of the critical questions that can be asked in a situation where ethics seems to be directed by expert opinions include: (1) Who makes the rules? (2) How are they interpreted? or (3) Who decides what a "good practice" is and what not? and (5) What does "the most good for the most people" entail? Further questions can include: (6) To whose benefit or detriment are these

[425] Cilliers, *Thinking Complexity*, viii.
[426] Snowden and Boon, "A Leader's Framework", 2.
[427] Driver, "The History of Utilitarianism".
[428] Bridgman "Performance, Conformance and Good Governance...", 156
[429] Ibid.
[430] http://cognitive-edge.com/blog/entry/5882/rules-is-rules/

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interpretations of what a rule is, or the situation it applies to? (7) How are the complexities, related to the question whether to follow a rule or not, influenced by individual agency? Or vice versa, how are these complexities ignored or underestimated by the decision-maker? This question can be related to the case described by Weick about how jurors rationalise their decisions.[431] In addition, one could also ask (8) whether the "good practices" referred to by Snowden and Boon can be related to how useful being ethical is for a business. In other words, the critical question that should be debated from the perspective of complicated order, which is potentially "knowable order", is whether ethics in the particular business is considered for its profitability value. This question leads to a final question of: (9) What, if being ethical is not profitable?

Considering these questions, a Cynefin process could point out how a business approaches ethics, and which intrinsic values underlie the "good ethical practices" in an organisation. Ethically, an interesting outcome of such a process could be to see which emergent ethical issues are the outliers that might be ignored, or perhaps suppressed, when following a sense-analyse-respond process in decision-making. Again, Cilliers's point is relevant, namely that: ethical behaviour suggests responsible following of rules, and it would be possible to break rules without invalidating them.[432] This point, however, puts a question mark over the premises of the notion of "knowable order" with regards to ethics, as I will briefly outline below:

Knowable order suggests certain stability in the interactions within a system and the possibility to predict the system's behaviour. However, as Cilliers points out, a critically organised system cannot be called "stable", if stability means that there is a direct relation between the size of the cause and its effect as in the classical definition of the term.[433] According to this definition, namely that "small causes produce small effects" a critically organised (complex) system would be considered unstable. However, as the classical definition of "instability" points to events without any observable cause, in other words, chance events, Cilliers points out that this definition is not applicable to complexity.[434] With reference to Pattee, Cilliers maintains that "it is the interaction of complex constraints that produced interesting behaviour – behaviour that cannot be described as chance events or instabilities."[435]

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[431] Weick *et al*, "Organizing and the Process of Sensemaking", 416.
[432] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 139.
[433] Ibid, 109.
[434] Ibid.
Cilliers refers to Poincaré's probabilistic definition of instability as the classical definition of the term, as referenced by Pattee. (H.H. Pattee, Instabilities and information in biological self-organization. In F.E. Yates (ed.), *Self-Organization: The Emergence of Order* (New York: Plenum Press, 1987), 325 – 338.)
[435] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 109.

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This perspective on the (in)stability of self-organising complex systems, and specifically with regards to ethics and agency, holds serious implications for how the role of business ethics is conceived of in a business's decision-making processes, even when ethics is acknowledged to be a complicated matter.

It challenges decision-makers to question ethics programmes that are based on knowable/ predictable models. It furthermore challenges them to engage critically with one another with the intent to expose and understand limitations in their approach to ethics, and to acknowledge their inability to understand all the possible nuances present when decisions are made that could benefit certain parties to the detriment of others. Mostly, it challenges the attempt to predict the outcomes of decisions and actions.

A Cynefin/Sensemaker™ project can help to map the major constraints related to the business's interactions. With knowledge of the history and the context of the system (i.e. the business and its relational network), some predictions can be attempted, but never with certainty, as it is clear from Cilliers's description of the (in)stability and the (un)predictability related to complex systems. A Cynefin Framework/Sensemaker™ project that is sensitive to generalized complexity would require from an organisation's leadership to acknowledge the multiplicity of views, and the possibility for different perspectives on and versions of what is good or not good, the changeability of signs and meaning, and the unpredictability of the behaviours that are produced by the interactions in the system. [436] It would also require a humble approach to the challenge presented by the aporia of undecidability to get a sense of the complexity of relationships and interrelated events from which ethical dilemmas and aporias emerge. In this regard, acknowledging Derrida's concept of difference/différance would enable an organisation to question and seek out dissenting voices, opening the possibility for differences and multiple voices rather than to facilitate the reaching of consensus on what "good" ethical practices entail. This would mean to continuously seek the unconstructed fragments and antenarratives[437] that displace closure.

In other words, a Cynefin Framework/Sensemaker™ event could help define which ethical questions and dilemmas in an organisation are analysed from a position of "knowable order", and "solved" from a utilitarian perspective. It could also provide a platform from which to question the frameworks and filters used to make sense of these issues, and consider complexities that might not have been acknowledged before.

Being aware of internal contradictions and tensions that are already taking place in our thinking about applying a rule, or defining a meaning before we have acted, as in the point Rasche

[436] Cilliers, Ibid, 43, 109.
[437] Bøje, *Narrative Methods*, 3.

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makes,[438] is an important consideration to keep in mind when defining the rules of "knowable order" or the models that inform decision-making that have bearing on ethical matters. Conversely, ignoring the internal contradictions and ambiguities could, in extreme circumstances, lead to a collapse of sense-making in a system, which verges on the brink of chaotic behaviour. In less extreme circumstances, it can provide too much central control that could make the organisation slow to respond to unpredictable changes. With these considerations in mind, it is also important to acknowledge the fact that an organisational system that adjusts to every superficial change will waste its resources and become unmanageable.[439]

In this regard, it seems that it would be possible to follow a process to map and define the decision-making models or frameworks that are used when deciding on ethical matters. However, it has to be kept in mind that the inherent complexity related to ethical issues and relationships prohibit us to consider ethics only from a "knowable order" perspective as a complicated matter. It is in this regard that Cilliers points to self-organisation, where "control is not rigid and localised, but distributed over the system"[440] and where the ability to discern between necessary changes and those that should be resisted is vital for the system/organisation's survival.[441]

It is to the Cynefin domain of un-order or complexity that we now turn.

Domain of un-order: Complex

The domain of un-order: Complex in the Cynefin Framework describes complex problems as problems where best practices and analytical problem-solving techniques fail to give the right answers (1) as there might be too many variables that prevent analytical sense-making, or (2) when the system might be inherently complex. In this regard, the domain of un-order seems to be an umbrella term for more than one definition of complexity. The first definition, which refers to complexity caused by variability, is defined by Morin as restricted complexity.[442] The second description that refers to systemic complexity as found in self-organising systems is defined by Morin as generalised complexity.[443]

Although this distinction was discussed in the introduction and in chapter 1 of this dissertation, it may serve as a reminder that complexity caused by variables can potentially be reduced[444]

[438] Rasche, "Corporate Responsibility Standards", 275 – 276.
[439] Cilliers. *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 110.
[440] Ibid.
[441] Ibid.
[442] Morin, "Restricted Complexity, General Complexity", 10.
[443] Ibid.
[444] Woermann, "A Complex Ethics," 474.

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through a process of categorisation, classification and articulation. Generalised complexity, or Cilliers's notion of "critical complexity", however, does not allow for reductive processes to make sense of the complex dynamic local interrelationships that exist between parts of a complex system, and which change the properties of the system on multiple levels.[445] Instead, Cilliers points to a complex system (such as a living organism, a growing economy, a social system, et cetera) as a process "whereby a system can develop a complex structure from fairly unstructured beginnings". A complex system in these terms "has to develop its structure and [is] able to adapt that structure in order to cope with changes in the environment."[446] Kurtz and Snowden refer to this emergence as a "different kind of emergent order".[447]

Why this distinction is important is that we have to distinguish between the seemingly complex relationships termed "restrictive complexity", which may turn out to be complicated systems,[448] and critically complex systems. When applied to ethics, this distinction would imply that complexity related to multiple variables could be reduced so that only those variables that make a difference are considered to create the rules or guidelines, whose outcomes, in turn, are predictable and therefore controllable. The question underlying the reductive process is: How much difference provides the required variety?[449] In addition, the question could be asked, how well is the observer equipped or capable of noticing variation amongst patterns?[450] Essentially, the question remains whether social systems could ever be approached reductively.

Restricted complexity can be related to legal, rule-based and auditing processes where rules or laws serve as externally produced constraints of varying degrees, and the intensity of the constraint has a bearing on the reduction it causes. It also points to varying levels of expertise that are necessary to discern between variations. In addition, it implies that a system that has more internal variety will be better equipped to deal with changes. However, as pointed out before, although these reductive processes are part of the governed, managed and institutionalised areas of our environments, they can cater to some, but not all the complexities related to dilemmas and aporias that are inherently part of human relationships. Instead, complex relationships such as complexity related to self-organisation can be better described through Derrida's notion of deconstruction and Morin's concept of "organizational recursion".

[445] Woermann and Cilliers, "The Ethics of Complexity …," 449.
[446] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 12.
[447] Kurtz and Snowden, "The New Dynamics of Strategy", 465.
[448] Cilliers, *Thinking Complexity*. 3.
[449] Ashby, "Variety, Constraint, And The Law Of Requisite Variety", 190 – 207.
[450] Ibid, 194.

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As Cilliers points out, Derrida describes language as an open system, and meaning as developing within a specific context.[451] It would therefore be important to look for the spatial "traces of differences" in meanings of how people, who interact with one another, approach ethical issues and dilemmas. In addition, the temporal deference of meaning related to ethical issues in terms of the repeated use of certain words and descriptions rather than others, and the structures and meanings that are created by these repetitions are also important.[452] In this regard, we *produce* the meanings of our interactions *through* our interactions, while we at the same time *derive* the meaning for our interactions *from* our embeddedness in a social and cultural context. Complexity linked to self-organisation can also be described through the process of group-forming. Woermann describes how a group of individuals organises themselves according to a specific purpose, and coordinates themselves around specific focus areas and goals, in such a way, creating certain boundaries that are particular and inherent to the purpose of the group.[453] Structure is created from within the group through feedback loops, which can be positive (stimulating) or negative (inhibiting).[454] In this regard, recursive interactions amongst components at lower levels of the system allow order to emerge within the system.[455] The question we need to ask with regards to the Cynefin domain of Complex is whether the cognitive process of *probe-sense-respond* is sensitive to self-organisation.

I will first look at the process of *probe-sense-respond* to consider its relevance for self-organisation through Weick's example of the naturalistic development of the battered child syndrome before I turn to a Cynefin sense-making intervention. In this intervention the claim is made that the Cynefin Sense-making Framework provides the possibility to approach problems through different lenses, as it is built on a "foundation of bounded diversity: that all solutions are relevant and applicable within boundaries".[456]

When one looks at Weick's description of the battered child syndrome, it shows a naturalistic sense-making process that involved many small probe-sense-response iterations before a formal, institutionalised response evolved from these interactions. However, if we look at it through a Derridian lens, it is clear that the complexity of the matter is not reduced by implementing laws. Instead, another layer of complexity is added with iteration of the sense-making process, as well as with iterations of a rule in each new situation. Foucault's earlier works about the institutionalisation of knowledge and power also provide pointers to allow us

[451] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*. 43.
[452] Dooley and Kavanagh, *The Philosophy of Derrida*. 38 – 39.
[453] Woermann, "What is Complexity Theory?
[454] Woermann, "A Complex Ethics". 116.
[455] Ibid.
[456] Coles, Blignaut and Heroldt, "Mining Safety".

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questions about the possibility of ethics in rule-directed environments where problems become exacerbated by reductive processes.

As an example of a Cynefin sense-making intervention, I will describe a sense-making process that was followed within the context of complex problems related to people's attitudes towards mine-safety. In this example it is shown how safe-to-fail experiments emerged through the local interactions in a Cynefin intervention. These experiments (tentative solutions to the problem) remained fluid, and could continue to adapt to changes in the situation. It is helpful to take note of what Snowden describes as "retrospective sense-making": the ability to make sense of shifting relationships in retrospect, in other words, by assuming certain patterns of behaviour will repeat in the future. Although these emergent patterns are unpredictable in their details, Snowden proposes that the beginnings (or basic form) of emergent patterns can be detected. Based on our experience or knowledge of other recurring patterns, we are able to make assumptions of the behaviour of new patterns and can strengthen and stabilise them, or disrupt their continuation and weaken them through feedback loops in the interactions between people.

The battered child syndrome

Weick's reference to the "battered child syndrome" case study describes the natural process through which the occurrence and repeated recurrences of child abuse were noticed and a guess made on plausible reasons for the occurrence based on certain behavioural patterns of parents. Weick's description of the sense-making process is similar to the Cynefin process of *probe-sense-respond*: an initial observation by an individual was further probed until sense could be made of a situation that was never before taken notice of. Only then could it be assumed that these patterns of behaviour would repeat in the future, and appropriate responses be made.[457] It is also an example of an abductive process, a natural process of making sense of not-yet-known or complex matters, of working on plausibility rather than hypothesis, and of continuously adjusting and probing to prompt the emergence of more patterns before society takes notice of a problem and creates the structures and policies in response to the problem.[458]

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[457] Weick, *Sensemaking in Organizations*, 4.

[458] An abductive process implies that the process undergoes many iterations and adaptations based on new insights or changes that emerge through the sense-making process. The Cynefin/Sensemaker process suggests that it is through the emergence and recognition of patterns that sense is made and leaders can take actions to weaken negative patterns and strengthen positive patterns, in such a way responding to a problem through the natural interactions in the social or organisational system. In this regard, a Cynefin sense-making project is not aimed at attempting to close the gap between a known problem and a designed, ideal future by implementing command-and-control type solutions to complex problems, but rather at making sense of the current reality and allowing various plausible responses to emerge through the interactions. During the sense-making process, participants get more insight in the problem and adjust

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When the "battered child syndrome" case study is considered through a complexity theory lens, it points to a "complex problem" that was eventually shifted into the ordered domain where it could be explained, expert knowledge developed and rules and/or laws created to manage, to measure and to control it. But is this problem one of restricted complexity (complicated), or rather a systemic complex problem that could be better described through self-organisation? Secondly, would a Cynefin sense-making intervention and process allow for local solutions to emerge?

Following Foucault, it is clear that, the shifting of a complex social problem into the domain of complicated order points to the development of "physico-political" techniques" that are aimed at unbalancing power relationships.[459] In addition, as Rasche points out, rules (and in this case, institutionalised techniques) add new layers of complexity to the situation,[460] which cannot be reduced by adding more rules or laws, or investigating the problem through restrictive methodologies such as empirical and quantitative research methods. As an alternative, or in addition to other methods, a Cynefin sense-making intervention could provide the space for diverse stakeholders, who represent different participant groups, to interact, allowing solutions to emerge from these interactions. If we then repeat the question whether the concept of self-organisation could allow ethical sensibilities to emerge from the interactions in the group, it is helpful to remember MacIntyre's perspective on moral agency, which shows how the social environment plays a decisive role in the development of the moral agent, who can be held accountable for his/her actions to others. In this regard, small interventions and solutions that emerge from the interactions in the group, and the boundaries that are created through the interactions in the group, can be more effective and sustainable than regulations that are created through an external body. What is important to note is that change and learning happens continuously and adaptively through the interactions between people. Furthermore, trust is built through consistency in these local interactions. This is essentially a description of a self-organising system. The question that should drive our attempts at creating ethically responsive and accountable environments is, therefore, how to change people's perceptions and the frameworks through which they consider the world, by strengthening some values and interactions that could become attractors for more ethical behaviours and weakening others through immediate intervention.

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the question/s accordingly. In this way, abductive processes differ from processes aimed at proving or disproving hypotheses.

[459] Foucault, "Panopticism", 206 – 213.

[460] Rasche, "Corporate Responsibility Standards", 274.

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I will now turn to a description of a Cynefin Framework/Sensemaker intervention done in the mining industry where the aim of the research was to find new integrated ways of looking at mine safety, which is an imperative for the mining industry, globally. As the report writers point out, "mining is a people business" where multiple roles and worldviews interact at all times.[461] Due to the high level of interaction, it is not possible to predict order, but it is possible to provide appropriate leadership.

This description of a sense-making process during which participants shared stories and anecdotes[462] about their experiences in and of their personal and organisational lives shows how small "safe-to-fail experiments" could allow for new interactions to take place and leaders to emerge from these interactions. It also shows how these interactions could potentially become positive attractors that could have a significant effect on the emergence of new patterns of behaviour, but would have little negative impact when they failed.

Safe-to-fail experiments

A sense-maker project could follow a process of probing and exploration of the perceptions and mindsets of various people about a current situation as well as the tensions related to regular interventions or action. Illustrating such a self-signification process in the Deloitte case study describing unresolved issues around mine safety,[463] it was pointed out that many of the unsolved issues related to unsafe behaviours were complex personal and societal issues such as "risk tolerance in society", "fatalism" (mining is a dangerous activity and accidents should be expected), and "a policing metaphor" indicating a negative attitude as regards safety

[461] Coles, Blignaut and Herholdt, "Mining Safety", 5.

[462] A Cynefin Framework sense-making project could probe deeper into problems or issues that are persisting regardless of formally instituted programmes, or into issues that are not addressed by these programmes or interventions. During this process, participants share stories and anecdotes about their experiences in the business and "self-signify" (contextualise) their stories. Importantly, questions that are asked to prompt stories should be sufficiently ambiguous to allow participants to tell any story of which they have experience, either in the first person or by observation. This has implications for the creators of a signification framework in that they should have sufficient understanding of the various factors that can influence a mindset: historical factors, a commonly accepted dominant story, a metanarrative or bias influencing mindsets, as well as coherence between the different roles a person assumes as an individual inside and outside a work environment. It would also include an understanding of perceptions regarding governance, laws, as well as what is perceived to be normal behaviour by various, different people.

Self-signification does not imply "interpretation" in terms of assigning meaning to the story itself, but rather in contextualising the story. In this way, a story's plausibility is linked to the context from which and in which it is told, and in which it heard. In a typical sense-making framework, the teller's perspective is clear, whether he/she tells a personal anecdote or recounts a story relating to other people. Self-signification of a story prevents researcher bias as regards interpretation and classification of stories. It also creates a point where the meaning of that particular story is fixed within the time and space created by the storyteller and based on the focus and purpose of the survey.

[463] Choles, Blignaut and Herholdt, "Mining Safety".

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initiatives.[464] Comments that support this perspective included "we are being watched so that we can be caught out and punished, or we are already in trouble".[465] In addition, the language used supported this view, for instance by using law enforcement terms such as: "Safety officer, Conducting investigations, Laying a charge, Assigning of guilt, Penalising, and Safety inspections."[466] Other themes that emerged from the interviews relate to a gap between what people say and what they do, a culture of blaming, and a bias towards expert solutions and incentives.

A key problem was identified, namely an "apparent mis-match between the nature of most unaddressed issues in the current safety landscape and the nature of the majority of intervention methods that are being used."[467] Existing organisational safety initiatives were biased mostly towards the ordered domains, for instance: legislation, compliance to codes of practice, process design, infrastructure maintenance, training, behaviour-based interventions, accident investigations, incentives, information systems and change management.[468] Adding to the complexity of the situation is the cognitive dissonance between what people experience in their personal lives (risky sexual behaviour, non-compliance to traffic rules, dangerous living conditions, risking one's life in a taxi) and the expectations of the workplace.

Choles *et al* quote from an interview with one of the participants: *"It is unnatural to expect someone to change belief systems when walking through the door at work; who I am at home and who I am at work should fundamentally be similar."*[469] The question of how to change the way a person sees the world was the core of the research intervention.

The writers point to different, experimental and "sometimes counterintuitive" projects as "safe-to-fail" experiments. As Choles *et al* point out, these "safe-to-fail" initiatives have not compromised the integrity of the safety codes, such as codes of practice, using protective equipment and regularly maintaining equipment, but rather augmented these programmes.[470] In one such an experiment, the focus remained on training, leadership visibility and risk awareness, but in addition, a spiritual leader who worked with 50 "church leaders" was appointed. These church leaders, all of them miners themselves, intervened in conflict

[464] The case study used is described on the Cognitive Edge website as "A project commissioned by Deloitte applied SenseMaker® to explore the state of mine safety in South Africa using the Cynefin Framework. By collecting narrative fragments from a wide range of industry stakeholders, the research aimed to generate new insights into the complex problem of mine safety so that companies could take the next step towards safety breakthroughs." Sourced from: http://cognitive-edge.com/library/more/case-studies/mining-safety-a-business-imperative/ on 27 April 2014 at 21:27.
[465] Ibid, 13.
[466] Ibid, 14.
[467] Ibid, 12.
[468] Ibid 16.
[469] Ibid, 15.
[470] Ibid.

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situations in order to reduce tension, counselled, supported and encouraged at a personal level, and became the spokespeople with management regarding unsafe working conditions. The role of the church leaders, the case study points out, has not been "codified into best practice and there is no rule book which guides them in their actions. Their care of people is driven by their belief in the importance of people and it appears this has created a 'tipping point' that helped to change the culture on the mine."[471] In other words, their actions focussed on issues related to the humanness of the people, their relationships and their interactions, without compromising governance structures.

In the mine safety case study, it was pointed out how the act of research is entwined with learning, so that understanding of issues and differences emerges through the interactions between people: Through their participation in creating the framework and drawing the relationships between various interlinked elements, participants question, compare, discuss and gain new insights about their own and others' perceptions about the issue under discussion, and in such a way, learn adaptively. This process of probe-sense-respond is a continuous process that happens naturally and continuously. As new insights emerge and the relationships in the interaction adapts, the system evolves naturally; the body of knowledge grows and some small safe-to-fail responses can emerge through the interactions between people. These responses can become attractors that can have a ripple effect throughout an organisation. It would be important to understand however that sense-making is a continuous discursive process through which weak signals of change in the interactions between people can be detected and acted on. It is not a once-off intervention.

This interactive, discursive process itself can be described as a technique of power in the sense Foucault describes the relationship between power/knowledge.[472] In other words, participation in the discursive process can influence interactions between people and their perceptions about one another and the situation, and can therefore contribute to changes in the situation that is explored, either through subtle pressure on people to change attitudes or conform to unwritten norms or through strong differences and debates. In this regard, the *process* of probe-sense-respond seems to be sensitive to a Foucaultian requirement for the development of ethical agency.[473] In addition, an understanding of Foucault's concepts of power/knowledge and governmentality, namely the individual's capacity to consider his/her own agency within these power relationships, could allow the designer/s of a signification framework to ask relevant probing questions about the practices that reflect on power relationships within the

[471] Ibid, 21.
[472] Foucault, "Prison Talk", 52.
[473] Foucault, "Politics and Ethics: An Interview", 374.

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organisation. Similarly, it could contribute to an individual's capacity for self-reflection, a condition for individuals to develop a moral identity in Foucault's terms.[474]

The Cynefin Framework requirement for ambiguity in designing the story prompt of a signification framework could be considered as sensitive to the ambiguity of meaning that Derrida refers to with his concept of deconstruction. However, although these theoretical concepts could add value to the theoretical basis of understanding the concept of complexity, the Cynefin Framework was developed originally within IBM, and Snowden's focus was on constructing "applied methods including tools and practices for analyzing narrative complexity e.g., "Story Circles" and "Knowledge Disclosure Points" (KDPs) in concert with his research program". [475]

The focus now turns to my understanding of the Cynefin domain of chaos.

Domain of chaos

Chaos in the Cynefin Framework is described as a state in which relationships break down and become fragmented, and it is very difficult to connect seemingly random behaviours to specific causes. Causal relationships can only be discovered when an investigation is done after an unanticipated incident. In such a case the first recourse is to act "quickly and decisively" to get a crisis under control, then to "sense immediately the reaction to the intervention so that we can respond accordingly".[476] However, Kurtz and Snowden also point to chaos as "the space that we can enter into consciously, to open up new possibilities and to create the conditions for innovation".[477] In this regard, they point to the Cynefin domain of Chaos which can be entered experientially rather than to a "real" situation in which relationships have broken down.

In real life, when everything becomes chaotic and no sense can be made of what is actually happening in an organisation or social system, the only recourse is to react quickly. A crisis does not allow categorisation or the time for analysis. Interestingly, Klein's research on naturalistic decision-making provides insight into unpredictable and potentially chaotic situations and how experienced people in unpredictable work situations, such as nurses in prenatal wards or rescue workers, often make the right decision when there is no time to waste.[478] Similar to Weick, Klein points out that people with experience can often rely on their intuition about a situation to make the right decision for which action would be appropriate in a life-death moment. This intuition is based on the ability to assess a situation, and recognise the best course of action based on practical knowledge gained through previous experiences that might be related or

[474] Foucault, "Truth and Method 1: What is Enlightenment?", 50.
[475] Browning and Boudes, The Use of Narrative to Understand and Respond to Complexity", 32.
[476] Kurtz and Snowden, "The New Dynamics of Strategy", 469.
[477] Ibid.
[478] Klein, *Sources of Power*.

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unrelated to the situation. Instead of asking, "What should I do?" they ask, "What is going on?" and then take rapid and decisive action.[479] According to Klein, "Recognition Primed Decisions" do not compare options, but are prompted by a situation that involves the recognition of a situation, and matching the most likely action to the situation. [480]

Basing his argument on Klein's research on naturalistic decision-making, Snowden contends that exposure to more facts does not necessarily lead to better decision-making. He points out that humans do not make decisions on rational and logical grounds, but that the perception of patterns that fits our repertoire of our own or collective experiences expressed as stories help us to recognise both similarities and differences between the current event and previous experiences. He also points out that the tendency to form habits enables rapid decision-making, but also causes pattern-entrainment that could cause us to be blind to things that fail to match our expectations. [481]

Snowden's description of pattern-recognition and the ability to discern what we know from what is different to that knowledge shows similarities to what Cilliers describes as a self-organising system's "memory distributed throughout the system as 'traces'", its requirement for change as well as its goals. [482] In this regard, the system's flexibility and adaptability depends on its capability to respond appropriately to change. In other words, a system needs to be flexible enough to "dynamically adjust itself", but also robust enough so that it can selectively respond, and not become overloaded and as such, chaotic in its behaviour.

As it was pointed out before, Cilliers's concept of critical complexity, as well as his concept of a complex ethics, are influenced by poststructuralist thinking, notably by Derrida's concept of deconstruction. The description of "patterns that fit our repertoire of own or collective experiences expressed as stories" could therefore be read as traces of temporal or spatial similarities and/or differences in an individual and/or a group of people's memories. From an ethics perspective, the problem is that the ability to make decisions in difficult or time-sensitive situations does not necessarily imply the making of ethically sound decisions. This remains a dilemma related to having to make a decision, even though there is no clear course of action. It also points to a sense of being accountable for our decisions to others, who can keep us accountable based on our roles and responsibilities within the system.

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[479] Breen, What's your Intuition? accessed from: http://www.fastcompany.com/40456/whats-your-intuition.
[480] Klein and Klinger, "Naturalistic Decision Making", 4.
[481] Snowden, "Managing for Serendipity".
[482] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 46, 118, 119.

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The question of interest for ethics and ethics practitioners would be, however, how to detect patterns leading to a moral or ethical crisis. In this regard, Snowden's metaphor of a funnel is helpful to understand how complacency and oversimplification of problems over time could lead to incorrectly diagnosing a situation and applying known remedies or best practices. Instead of solving such a problem through applying more rigid structure or order, a system can become slow to respond to emergent issues, and could eventually collapse in chaos.[483] By the time management realises they have a big problem, it is too big to manage appropriately. Applied to ethical issues in organisations, this metaphor could relate to big, global ethics scandals such as Enron, or to smaller, local events such as a workforce strike that is managed in the wrong way initially, and then gets out of hand. An exploration of chaos theory could provide more insights about the relationship between order and agency, and how small changes that reduce the variables that contribute to the non-linearity of the system can prevent a system from becoming chaotic.

An example of such a chaotic situation is presented by Weick, who points out in his analysis of the Mann Gulch disaster that there are various elements present in the process through which an organisation unravels, finding itself in a chaotic state. In the first place, he points to a sense of isolation, and through this, a sense of threat and anxiety when order is lost. In the second place, he points to the deterioration of leader-follower relationships, followed by thirdly, a loss of familiar and key roles. The loss of key roles discredits the role system and causes individuals to feel more isolated and distrustful of leadership, of processes and of one another. Fourthly, he points to ambiguity in the way tasks are given. As he says, when these changes are made in a context in which small events can combine into something monstrous, a system becomes chaotic.[484] In such a system, no story is believable anymore.

In Weick's example of Mann Gulch, it is clear that the loss of feeling part of a team could lead to a lessened sense of responsibility to participate in the working of the system, coupled with a desensitising of individuals' sense of accountability to others. This can be related to MacIntyre's perspective on the unity of a person's life within a community. When a system becomes chaotic, the sense of "who I am in relation/relationship to others" is lost.

Connecting the four domains or ontologies of the Cynefin Framework is Disorder, a domain whose description reminds of Bøje's description of the ante – the place where a bet can be made on the meaning, where the meaning is fluid and a story can develop in any direction. Being an "inauthentic space", it also reminds of MacIntyre's description of emotivism. This will be explained below.

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[483] Snowden, "Authentic Action".
[484] Weick, "The Collapse of Sensemaking in Organizations", 628 – 652.

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Domain of disorder

The fifth domain, disorder, is indicated by the dark area at the centre of the Cynefin Framework and is described as an "inauthentic space" in which we don't know what the situation is, how to describe it, or what the relationships between cause and effect are. Sometimes we might not even be aware that we don't know, or of what we don't know. In other words, when people disagree on what the subtle differences are that influence a situation, they tend to interpret issues according to their own preferences.[485] The dark area in the centre of the Cynefin Framework is extended into lines that run through and divide the different domains of the framework. In this regard, the thick line between the domain of Order (simple) and Chaos indicates a "deep chasm" of disorder, which is entered when a system moves from order to chaos. Similarly, the thinner lines running through and dividing the different domains of the framework indicate more "blurry" boundaries between different domains that could perhaps be seen as borderline areas where a specific issue might seem to be, for instance, ordered, but with an inherent complexity that influence the order of relationships.

The space of disorder as it is described in the Cynefin Framework reminds of MacIntyre's description of emotivism where the lack of a common understanding of a moral language could lead people to interpret reality in different ways. For MacIntyre, the finding of a common inner purpose would provide people with the common ground to discuss ethical issues. Similarly storytelling and listening could provide a means to learn from one another and create an understanding of one's role and responsibility to others in a community. In this regard, Kurtz and Snowden's perspective that "a consensual act of collaboration ... is a significant step toward the achievement of consensus as to the nature of the situation, and the most appropriate response"[486] seems to underwrite MacIntyre's sentiment of creating a common ground for discussion before we can lift ourselves out of a space of disorder. Even though reaching consensus is important, the discussion is not devoid of conflict or disagreement, or of an attempt at persuading others to take on a different perspective, or even a change in perspective.

Barth describes the concept of disorder as "agglomerates where people live in different realities – or, [partially overlapping] worlds – that are characterized by heavily socially coded scripts".[487] These complex and composite systems do not respond positively to top-down governance, which could actually be the source of trouble.[488] Disorder can also not be explained by the emergence of patterns. As Barth points out, the material reality of disordered systems points to

[485] Kurtz and Snowden, "The New Dynamics of Strategy", 469 – 470.
[486] Ibid, 470.
[487] Barth, "Introducing Disordered Systems", 69.
[488] Ibid.

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a space in which multiple activities take place at the same time, where actors are "simply together" while "engaged in different, contiguous, or partly overlapping activities" which influence each other marginally.[489] He calls this co-existence "a way of being"[490] and describes it as typical of urban environments where a variety of different people co-exist in the same space, as well as of artificial environments in cyberspace, and even of prisons where inmates merely share a physical space. According to Barth, the challenge of these systems is to understand "the signatures of the system that rather reveal themselves through immergence (patterns of disappearance) than emergence *per se*."[491]

The challenge for business ethics would be to understand how these systems co-evolve in relation, but in relative autonomy, to each other, and influence the social and economic system in which a business operates. What would be important to understand is how shifts happen between states in which actors are receptive but disengaged (open and superficial states) and those where they are engaged and connected (bounded and deep states). Practically, it would require perceptiveness of interactions and their meanings, and awareness of the dynamic shifts of contingencies and the contextual depth of the interactions that take place at the boundaries of parology. In Barth's words, these interactions take place in the "no-man's lands between social worlds where institutions present but one possible regime – or, doctrine – of governance",[492] which makes it difficult to express meaning through dialogue. Furthermore, Cilliers made it clear that responsible judgements require a humble approach, and involve respecting differences and contingencies between agents as values in themselves.[493] This is of particular relevance to ethical issues that are related to the dynamic shifts and contextual depths of unordered systems that are made up of groups of people who have very little in common apart from the space they share. It is important however to keep in mind that some sameness is required in order to make comparisons about who we are in relation to others, or to come to agreements about the meanings of our practices and relationships. In this regard, Woermann points out that, "we cannot relate to the radically other", but that components of the system "must have an addressable identity [i.e. it must be repeatable and] must be interconnected in a meaningful way".[494] It is finding this point of interconnection that would be crucial in the attempt to invite people who are vastly different, but "simply together", to participate in a discourse where meaning can be created, which is not necessarily shared, but,

[489] Ibid, 70.
[490] Ibid.
[491] Ibid.
[492] Ibid, 77.
[493] Cilliers, Thinking Complexity, 140.
[494] Woermann, "Corporate Identity, Responsibility and the Ethics of Complexity," 169.

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as Barth says, is "interoperable". [495] As Barth says, the point is to find out "… how problems are solved at a people-to-people level, *where value is created* and managed [author's italics]."[496]

In summary, the Cynefin Framework creates a distinction between rule-based constructs, which are ordered, and relational complexities that are not easily detected. The distinction can be briefly described as follows:

Governance systems, codes of ethics, policies and other rule-based structures belong in the ordered and complicated domains of the Cynefin Framework. Ethical relationships within these constructs are complex. Discrepancies between people's various roles and attitudes as regard their responsibility in these roles can add complexity to relationships between people and between individuals and the management and governance structures; this can cause problems in the business. When these issues, which are complex in nature, are treated as simple or complicated issues, the complexity of the problems is treated reductively, and issues are separated from the individuals and their relationships. As a result, superficial responses can be made and some of the problems never acknowledged or addressed. If ethical and relational problems are allowed to fester, coherence in relationships collapse and become chaotic.

It is in this regard that a Cynefin Framework sense-making project would allow participants to make collective sense of some of the complexities to the point that it becomes possible to respond to problems in an appropriate manner – even though the interactions in the system continue and the system remains complex, irreducible and adaptive.

In the next part of the analysis some practical considerations when using the Cynefin Framework as an ethics research framework are briefly outlined.

3. Some possibilities and limitations when using Cynefin Framework/ Sensemaker Suite™ for organisational ethics research and intervention

Having different views about the nature or constitution of reality and different ways of making sense of that reality based on our views of how things are organised is part of being human, and specifically part of being members of different social and cultural environments. In this regard, our research is also based on our implicit or explicit assumptions of what that reality is and how we expect it to be. These ontological assumptions determine what we research, and how our research is designed, conducted and presented.[497] In other words, if we consider the social living world as not-yet-deciphered inherent order, we would be tempted to continue to look for the rules and structures that are inherent to the underlying order and to create and implement

[495] Barth, "Introducing Disordered Systems", 81.
[496] Ibid, 76.
[497] Rossouw, *Developing Business Ethics as an Academic Field*, 21.

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those rules with the ideal of making sense of, or of controlling, or at least of managing the complex problems of our world. If we, however, consider the social living world from the perspective of self-organisation, we would look for patterns of behaviour that could be strengthened to enhance positive relationships and behaviours, or weakened to change negative behaviours. In this regard, the choice of a framework or lens through which we perceive, observe or approach the world and create knowledge is an ethical act in itself, as the way sense is made of interactions and relationships contribute to the creation of the world in which we live.

The practical questions underlying ethics research for researchers who work with the Cynefin Framework would therefore be to consider (1) the purposes to which a Cynefin Framework is created, and (2) how these purposes, based on a particular ontology, or various ontologies as regards our embeddedness in organisational cultures, colour our receptiveness and responsiveness to the inherent complexities related to ethics. As Martin points out, "institutional constraints create pressures that push us toward particular theoretical viewpoints and interests".[498] These are the considerations every researcher has to face.

Furthermore, as Rossouw points out, business or organisational ethics research should be based on an "ontology of the economic setting in which ethical behaviour occurs [that] is able to accommodate both the valid contributions of materialist and idealist ontologies, without restricting research to either of them".[499] Organisational ethics research should therefore be "capable of discerning regularities and patterns" as well as accommodate "contingency and human autonomy".[500] As the sense-making process followed in a Cynefin sense-making research project is aimed at discerning regularities and patterns, and pointing out irregularities and outliers as well as border cases, the Cynefin Framework process seems to fit the bill. However, does it allow for contingency, and "the openness and unpredictability that is typical of human behaviour",[501] as well as self-organising systems?

It is in this regard that the focus in the next sub-section turns to the question whether the Cynefin Framework considers complex systems as inherently complex. My question is framed from a poststructuralist view of complexity, specifically looking at complex adaptive systems as self-organising systems. Three aspects of self-organisation to keep in mind is that (1) the system is continuously evolving, (2) reduction causes new complex dynamics to emerge through the

[498] Martin, *Organizational Culture: Mapping the Terrain*, 199.
[499] Rossouw, *Developing Business Ethics as and Academic Field*, 23.
[500] Ibid.
[501] Ibid.

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working of the system and (3) meaning is derived from a system of differences rather than a system of sameness or similarity.

3.1 Restricted or general complexity

The discourse about complexity remains a thorny issue, and in this regard, it would be useful to remind ourselves of Woermann's words where she states: "…those wishing to create unified theories of complexity are of the opinion that complex systems are merely complicated systems. In other words, complexity – in their eyes – is a function of our knowledge (epistemology) rather than an inherent characteristic of certain systems (ontology)."[502]

Simply put, when we consider complexity as a function of our knowledge, it becomes the not-yet-explained part of a complicated system, something like an unruly subsystem in a complicated system. Furthermore, we need to remember that restricted complexity depends on reduction as a principle for explanation, which is related to the separation of cognitive difficulties (disjunction).[503] In other words, if the system is reduced, categorised, classified and articulated according to various domains, it is not considered a self-organising system anymore, as a complex system defies attempts to simplify or reduce its internal complexities. [504] Thinking about complexity from a restricted perspective means that diversity could be considered a problem of "a countless number of factors"[505] that needed to be made sense of, in order for us to respond appropriately to the essence of the matter.

1. *Why is a restricted perspective on complexity a problem for ethics*?

The problem, as Cilliers points out, arises when we use reductive methods and means to find the first principles or simplified descriptions of such a complex system, and believe that that would allow us to describe, manage and control complex issues emerging from the interactions of a variety of elements in the system. Reductive methods could merely reduce the perceived complexity, but cannot reduce systemic complexity with regards to its ongoing relationships and the continuous changing circumstances related to these complex interactions, which make the system what it is.[506] The question we have to ask ourselves is whether the Cynefin Framework as a research framework is aimed at reducing complexity and providing what Cilliers and Preiser call "problem solving tools and solution kits"[507].

[502] Woermann, "A Complex Ethics," 116
[503] Woermann, "A Complex Ethics," 111
[504] Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*.
[505] Ibid, 3.
[506] Ibid, 4.
[507] Cilliers and Preiser, *Complexity, Difference and Identity*, 276.

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2. Is Cynefin Framework aimed at reducing complexity?

The division and categorisation of problems according to different perspectives on the relationship between cause and effect leads to an assumption that the Cynefin Framework would situate itself closer to the scientific view of complexity on the continuum of complexity theory. This means that cause-and-effect relationships ("directed order"[508] in Kurtz and Snowden's terms) would be potentially detectable if we had had the requisite variety and computational power to analyse these relationships.

Furthermore, the suggested movement from complex through complicated to simple systems seems to suggest that certain complex relationships or behaviours can become knowable and later normalised, and formally managed. Despite this, Cynefin Framework does not seem to be situated solidly in the camp of "restricted" complexity, but moves between perspectives. In this regard, Kurtz and Snowden caution against "throwing out the baby with the bathwater".[509]

3. Moving between perspectives: 'Don't throw out the baby with the bath water'

Following Kurtz and Snowden's description of ordered and unordered systems, Cynefin Framework provides a framework that allows users to move between the paradigm of restricted complexity, where reduction and disjunction (in Woermann's terms) are the principles that allow us to make sense of some interactions in the system, and a paradigm of general complexity where heuristics, or intuition derived from experience rather than rules, are followed to make decisions. Kurtz and Snowden caution against changing from one perspective of seeing all things as ordered to another of seeing all things as unordered (emergent). According to them, order and emergence both exist at once, because "in reality order and unorder intertwine and interact."[510] An "artificial separation" between order and unorder, they point out, could however help us understand the different dynamics involved as long as we do not expect to find the one without the other in real life.[511]

If we compare Kurtz and Snowden's description of how Cynefin Framework is intended to be used with Cilliers and Woermann's descriptions of the problem related to reduction of complex issues, the use of the framework does not seem to be in conflict with either general or critical complexity. This means that the intended use of Cynefin Framework in an organisation could well be sensitive to poststructuralist perspectives on complexity. It could very well allow for knowledge to develop through multiple voices and small stories, for discourse, critical questioning and self-reflection to take place. It could also allow for the richness of meaning to

[508] Kurtz and Snowden, "The New Dynamics of Sense-making", 465.
[509] Ibid, 466.
[510] Ibid, 466.
[511] Ibid.

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unfold through the differences between people or signs rather than from the sameness of elements, or the reduction of differences. In this regard, the use of the Cynefin Framework as a discursive framework could be sensitive to self-organisation, but how the research is planned, conducted and presented would depend on the ontological basis of the research design. The important factor would be whether both practitioners and their clients are open to abductive research methods. In other words, the question is whether they would be comfortable with the ambiguity of the research design, and the unpredictability of the research outcomes of a method that is pliable, and not based on a hypothesis that has to be proven or disproven through empirical research methods. In this regard, it would be useful to borrow from Cilliers the term "modesty" to describe a sense-making approach to business ethics research.

4. *Using the framework 'modestly'*

As a framework for discussion, Cynefin Framework could be used modestly, acknowledging the aporia of undecidability and the inherent complexity related to the non-linear interactions between multiple elements, some of them not complex in themselves, but all contributing to the variety and differences between elements, which are essential for the system to continue.

However, it would be important for users of the Framework to remember that meaning, and differences in meaning, lie not only in the differences between people's perceptions, stories and interpretations, but also in the asymmetrical and heterogeneous power relationships between different elements in the system that cannot be simplified. This means that diversity is not something that should be contained or restricted, or a problem to be solved, but a precondition for complex behaviour. Furthermore, in an increasingly global economic environment the domain of disorder will become increasingly important and will present more challenges for business ethics, as "the systemic features of the disordered system are by definition *non-ordered* in relation to each other".[512] In this regard, the agglomerate of heterogeneous worlds or realities would not allow for easy solutions, analysis, prediction or top-down governance.

3.2 Rules vs self-organisation

From the description of the Cynefin domains, it is apparent that coherence, or some kind of order, is indeed implied in all of the domains, however in varying degrees of clarity. In this regard, Kurtz and Snowden point to directed order and emergence as "intertwined" in reality.[513] Snowden further points out that rules are necessary constraints in complex systems, without which emergence would not be possible[514] and that these constraints are not fixed, but can be

[512] Barth, "Introducing Disordered Systems", 69.
[513] Kurtz and Snowden, "The New Dynamics of Strategy", 466.
[514] David Snowden, "Rules is Rules", blog post on Cognitive Edge website, http://cognitive-edge.com/blog/entry/5882/rules-is-rules/

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negotiated by the interactions in the system. As a result of the "artificial" [515] distinction between order and unorder in the Cynefin Framework, the domain termed "Complex" on the Framework can be considered as something like a placeholder for self-organisation, which "emerges through the interaction of many entities" [516] and as Kurtz and Snowden quote from Briggs and Peat, where "patterns … are self-organised". [517]

In the light of these descriptions, Snowden's claim on a blog post on the company web site that "Protecting the weak does not arise from self-organisation despite Anarchist dogma"[518] is contradictory. On the one hand, Snowden describes the relationship between order and unorder as a continuous interaction through which order can emerge. The emergence of order through the nonlinear interaction in the system points to a self-organising system. On the other hand, Snowden's statement seems to disregard the role of emergent order in a system that could give rise to formal structures.

To counter Snowden's statement, one can refer again to the practical example provided by Weick of how child abuse laws were created only after many non-linear interactions in the system. [519] Similarly, in social environments, solutions for problems in a community can emerge spontaneously without external systems of order being implemented. Self-organisation implies that questions arise through the non-linearity of the interactions in the system, and that new structures can emerge, that could well be the impetus that leads to "the creation of rules that protect the weak".

Paradoxically, the frames and filters we apply to perceive and interpret our world lead to the order we co-create as social human beings, but these norms that are created and established as rules remain subject to the complexity of the system. [520] In other words, they influence actions

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[515]Kurtz and Snowden, "The New Dynamics of Strategy", 466.

[516] Ibid

[517] Briggs, J. and F. D. Peat, *Turbulent Mirror: An Illustrated Guide to Chaos Theory and the Science of Wholeness*, (New York: Harper and Row Publishers Inc., 1989).

[518] Snowden, "Rules is Rules", blog entry sourced from: http://cognitive-edge.com/blog/entry/5882/rules-is-rules/

[519] Weick *et al*, "Organizing and the process of sense-making", 416.

[520] Foucault, "Illegalities and delinquency", 226 – 238.

If this thinking is applied to a completely rule-based system, as Foucault describes the carceral system, it is possible to see how a rigidly regulated system not only adds to power imbalances, but also grows in its own complexity through the continuous interactions in the system both inside the institution and in society. Even though it is a closed system, the complexities created through the interactions in the system have far-reaching and uncontrollable societal effects, on families and communities, and as regards "rehabilitated" prisoners who cannot get work to support themselves and eventually return to a life of crime. In this regard, Foucault points out that although the carceral system could be considered a failure in terms of curbing crime, it is hugely successful in producing delinquency, and thus creating new knowledge and power structures as the offender is labelled as a pathologised subject. This provides a rather grim picture of self-organisation and how rule-based structures and trust networks support each other although they are in competition.

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and control responses in a way that they can provide the structure that would allow "formal command structures and informal trust networks [to] support each other" even though they continue to compete with one another.[521] As part of the continuous interactions in the system, they contribute to creating more complexity,[522] and are also subject to change through the interactions in the system. It is by acknowledging this paradox that a general and critical approach to complexity distinguishes itself from a restricted approach to complexity and where the Cynefin Framework seems to be conflicted.

Two interesting questions that emerged from this philosophical analysis of the Cynefin Framework are whether organisations move in and out of different quadrants over time and whether different subcultures are more aligned to some quadrants than to others. By taking a short detour, I will draw some insights from Kurtz and Snowden's article "The new dynamics of strategy: Sense-making in a complex and complicated world",[523] as well as from Bøje's theories on the dance between narrative and story in answering these two questions:

3.3 Do organisations move in and out of different quadrants over time? And: Are different sub-cultures more aligned to some quadrants than to others?

Kurtz and Snowden explain that moving between domains requires "a shift to a different model of understanding and interpretation as well as a different leadership style".[524] The most dangerous shift is the movement over the "known-chaos boundary", where movement can be catastrophic. This shift happens when organisations settle into stable, symmetric relationships and do not recognise or acknowledge changes in the environment until it is too late. Movement in the opposite direction relates to imposition of order on chaos. As Kurtz and Snowden point out, when the situation is catastrophic, people would accept rigid rules that would normally be unacceptable, but that introduce a new stability. This new stability, however, can become more rigid until the order is, in turn, overthrown.

Movement over the known-knowable boundary is related to incremental improvement that can happen continuously and which Kurtz and Snowden describe as "the engine of technological growth".[525] They point out however that it can become pathological when these movements depart further from observed reality.

Movement over the boundary between Knowable and Complex requires a shift in thinking "from two systems of order and from one set of rules to another",[526] according to Kurtz and Snowden. They distinguish between "exploration" (the selective movement from knowable to

[521] Kurtz and Snowden, "The New Dynamics of Strategy", 466.
[522] Rasche, "Corporate Responsibility Standards", 274.
[523] Kurtz and Snowden, "The New Dynamics of Strategy", 462 – 483.
[524] Ibid, 475.
[525] Ibid, 476.
[526] Ibid, 476.

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complex) where central control is removed and trust is important for new connections to form and "exploitation", the "just-in-time" transfer of knowledge from the complex domain to the knowable domain, selectively and as it is needed.[527]

The movement over the complex-chaos boundary, Kurtz and Snowden point out, is something that happens naturally. They distinguish between "swarming" and "imposition".[528] Swarming refers to the creation of multiple attractors (swarming points) around which new patterns form. Those that are desirable are stabilised through a transfer to knowable order where they can be exploited. Those that are undesirable are destroyed. Imposition, on the other hand, is the creation of a single, strong attractor that can lift a system out of crisis.

From this description it seems possible that organisations can move between being more ordered or less ordered over time. Some organisations can, for instance start out as entrepreneurial businesses which are inclined to find innovative solutions to emergent issues and capable of rapid responses to problems. As they grow, they can, over time, move into the more ordered and governed spheres of the economic environment. As a result, they may tend to become more robust, and therefore slower to respond to emergent issues. The case of the mining industry's concern with attitudes towards safety is a case in point where the organisation complies with rules, but loses sight of the differences between people and amongst different cultures: It becomes slow to respond to contingencies. In this regard, certain sub-cultures in an organisation may also be more inclined to follow rules, for instance, groups of people who work in administrative and financial departments where much of the work is routine. Those who work in environments where interactions between people and their environment are non-linear and complex and people's lives might be at risk when rules are followed by the book might be more responsive to ambiguity.

These questions are relevant in terms of how Bøje describes the dance between narrative and story, which shows similarities with the description provided by Kurtz and Snowden about the intertwined relationship between order and unorder, and formal command structures and informal trust-based networks. In this regard, one could perceive a situation where, as trust-relationships are built, behaviours could become more aligned to an organisation's vision and operational guidelines and rules. Kurtz and Snowden point out that even though certain subcultures in an organisation might form as a result of their differences from others, a shared problem or vision could make them bridge these differences. In their words, "individually we could be parent, sibling, spouse or child and will behave differently depending on the context. Collectively, however, we might be 'part of a dissenting community, but in the face of a

[527] Ibid, 476 – 477.
[528] Ibid, 477.

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common threat, we might assume the identity of a wider group.'"[529] In addition, they point out that humans are capable of shifting a system from complexity to order, maintaining it there in such a way that it becomes predictable. In this regard, they point to "intentionality" as a factor in "human patterns of complexity".[530]

Three issues have to be read cautiously in terms of the perspective taken by this dissertation: (1) The alignment with organisational values comes at its own peril, namely that it is possible for behaviour to become entrained if dominant stories are stronger than the antenarratives and counter stories, as I pointed out with reference to Rhodes *et al*.[531] In this regard, Bøje's metaphor of stories that dance through an organisation allows us to lift the possibility of an insular story, a narrative unity that can become dominant and undermine ethical sensibilities.[532] (2) The second statement that creates an internal tension in the description of complexity is that humans can shift a system from complexity to order and maintain it so that it becomes predictable. In this regard, it would be wise to remember that Cilliers, Woermann and other complexity theorists support the general/critical view of complex systems as NOT reducible. (3) At a practical level, "intentionality" would be very difficult to prove or disprove when a person is faced with an ethical aporia when he/she has to make a decision.

3.4 A need for linguistic constraint

Some linguistic constraints and a careful consideration of the various meanings that could be attached to terms that are used to describe the theory and methods of Cynefin Framework would contribute to its elegance and usefulness. In this regard, I want to point to the unnecessary complicatedness created by the various descriptions and definitions for the following terms: Domains/Contexts of Order: Known/Simple and Knowable/Complicated; Domains of Un-order: Complex and Chaos/Chaotic; Domain of Disorder; Ontological states of Order, Complexity and Chaos.

When Kurtz and Snowden describe the Cynefin Framework as a phenomenological framework, they point to two large "domains" ((1) Order/Directed order and (2) Un-order/emergent order) each divided into two smaller domains: (Order: (a) Known and (b) Knowable) and Un-order ((a) Complex and (b) Chaos). Apart from the two/four domains of the phenomenological framework, they also describe three ontological "states" of Order, Complexity and Chaos plus a variety of epistemological options in all three of the states.[533]

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[529] Ibid, 464.
[530] Ibid, 464, 465.
[531] Rhodes *et al*, "'If I should Fall from Grace...' 535 – 551.
[532] See chapter 2: 3.1 Narrative Frameworks and Filters.
[533] Kurtz and Snowden, "The New Dynamics of Sensemaking", 470.

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Snowden and Boon however describe the Cynefin Framework as a framework with five contexts defined by the nature of the relationships between cause and effect. These "contexts" are simple, complicated, complex and chaotic, and the fifth context, disorder. [534] Later in the same article they combine "context" and "domains" with different descriptions: "Simple Contexts: The Domain of Best Practice", "Complicated Contexts: The Domain of Experts", "Complex Contexts: The Domain of Emergence" and "Chaotic Contexts: The Domain of Rapid Response".[535]

These different descriptions make cross-referencing between different articles difficult and add to their obfuscation. Derrida's notion of iteration is of relevance in this regard, as it refers to the possibility of understanding and convincing one another when meaning is transferred from one context to the other through the temporal and spatial repetition of words, concepts, sentences or ideas. Without iteration, every word or concept would be unique and only understandable in the context in which it was originally created. [536] By following the principle of iteration, some of the complicatedness in reading Cynefin literature could be lifted.

4. Practical considerations

Gauging the Cynefin Framework against the first assumption underlying my argument, it is apparent that a relational and responsive ethics can only be possible if the notion of cause-and-effect relationships and order in the simple and complicated domains point to mutually created and adaptable order. In other words, it should refer to emergent order which arises through the self-organisation of the system and not to an ontology of universal order. This means that certain rules and moral codes that would normally be dubbed as common knowledge or based on simple causes and effects, are not universally true, or based on rational principles, but are the knowledge products that develop through the interactions in the system. In this regard, governance systems provide order that is created to maintain and control a specific system, but cannot provide a rule for every possible event, and are not capable of describing all the factors that contribute to different actions, reactions, or attitudes related to the following or not-following of rules. The question we can ask is whether the Cynefin Framework is useful as a method and process to make sense of many, often contradicting perspectives and always emerging thorny ethical issues despite its theoretical basis of multi-ontology.

In my opinion, the Framework provides a useful platform (or storied space), methods and techniques that allow people to share their living stories. Through a process of collection, self-signification and self-categorisation of the stories, a framework for interpretation is co-created

[534] Snowden and Boon, "A Leader's Framework for Decision-making", 2.
[535] Ibid, 2 – 8.
[536] Dooley and Kavanagh. *The Philosophy of Derrida*, 38 – 39.

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and stories are used to provide thicker descriptions of issues that are difficult to define. By involving diverse people in the interaction and remaining mindful of the ante, as Bøje refers to the still fluid stories, a new story, blind spots, problems and differences in meanings could be allowed to emerge from the discussion. The Cynefin Framework is therefore useful to see patterns emerge that could provide the means to develop new perspectives on issues.

The use of "safe-to-fail" responses or solutions that emerge through these interactions makes it possible to make small corrections and adjustments as soon as it becomes clear that a course of action is not beneficial. In this regard, it can relieve some of the angst related to our obligation to act, even though we can never be sure that our decisions are just. In other words, it provides in-the-moment solutions that never have to become grand plans, but can make a difference when people take responsibility for their actions and are there to provide feedback to one another. In this way the Cynefin Framework, amongst other sense-making and narrative techniques, can provide a useful bridge between the aporias presented by postmodernism and our practical need to act ethically and morally responsibly in our relationships with others. However, it can never lift the aporia. Therefore, it remains important to remember that these solutions and new standards that are created in response to the problems are also in dynamical interaction with the environment. These interactions lead to the emergence of new conditions and new ethical dilemmas: To repeat Rasche's words, "To follow a rule is not as simple as we might think. When iterated during applications in different contexts, standards' rules gain new meaning and, in a sense, also preserve their 'original' meaning".[537]

Cynefin Framework is sensitive to the second and third assumptions of the dissertation, namely that storytelling and other narrative activities provide us with the means to make sense of complex situations and understand ourselves and our relationship with others in an open network. As a narrative framework, various types of stories and storytelling interventions can be used to elicit individuals' stories and come to a better understanding of the complexities of the workplace. Where dominant stories prevail, new stories can be created from the sharing of stories told from other perspectives.

Building a Cynefin Framework could contribute to strengthening relationships and understanding between people because they are interacting around ethical problems and issues, and through the stories they share, can become aware of patterns of behaviour that could be beneficial or negative as regards ethical relationships. In Snowden's words, the "primary mechanism for human knowledge transfer is through stories".[538] A single intervention will, however, not make a lasting difference to building an ethically responsive and accountable

[537] Rasche, "Corporate Responsibility Standards", 274.
[538] Snowden, "Tacit Knowledge: State of the Net 2012".

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environment. Furthermore, it would be important to select a diverse group of people who reflect the diversity of the work environment to participate in a Cynefin workshop.

The capability to collect and analyse masses of stories over vast geographical areas is a strong point of the framework and software. In this regard, it can be a useful instrument for global organisations, enabling them to compare patterns regarding attitudes, values and emergent ethical issues in all their operations. A Cynefin Framework could further be useful to understand how an organisation and its management see themselves in relation to their stakeholder relationship network, and to explore these relationships from different perspectives, for instance: Does an organisation see itself as the central node in the network with clearly delineated relationships with stakeholders from an "ordered domain" perspective? Or does it consider itself as part of the complex relationships where the "Other" has a name and a face, and is central to its operations[539] or figures as an important element in its diverse network of interrelationships? Bevan and Werhane suggest that the redrawing of the stakeholder map can change the way organisational role players think about their company, their products and processes. It also has an influence on their perception of their responsibility to stakeholders. Furthermore, it influences their reputation in the economic and social environment.[540] In this regard, a Cynefin Framework/Sensemaker Suite™ intervention can be instrumental in redrawing the stakeholder map, and changing the attitudes that relate to the values underlying the business model of an organisation.

The Cynefin Framework could provide the means for an organisation to come to new perspectives and possibilities when "movements" over the boundaries between the complicated/complex domains are initiated and problems and issues are perceived from different perspectives. Furthermore, as new connections are made and new patterns emerge from these interactions, it would be possible to make sense of behaviours and problems that did not make sense, or were misunderstood, before. In this regard, it would be possible for an organisation to start out as very rule-based in its culture and then become more oriented

[539] Bevan and Werhane, "Stakeholder Theory", 48 – 51.
[540] Ibid, 44 - 51.
Bevan and Werhane point to the centralisation of the firm as being problematic, as other stakeholders (who are the most affected or have the most effect on the company) can be marginalised, even if it happens unintentionally. As Bevan and Werhane point out, "our mental model of corporate governance and corporate responsibility is partly constructed" by the graphical stakeholder map. Decentralising the firm sounds problematic in the face of complex webs of interaction where it is not physically possible to know every other by sight or name, but Bevan and Werhane point out that there are various ways of drawing stakeholder maps, one of which is by placing a stakeholder's name in the centre of the map, or even by placing a photograph of a stakeholder (or representative of a group of stakeholders) in the centre in order to draw attention to a representative group of stakeholders. In this way, they suggest that the "other" should get a name and face. For global companies, they suggest a complex adaptive systems approach through which interactions between diverse groups can be mapped.

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towards creating spaces for individuals to share their stories. This would allow for a new level of understanding to emerge between diverse sub-cultures in an organisation.

When we look at the question about ethical agency and relational accountability which forms the core of this dissertation, it is apparent that Cynefin Framework considers the individual as a node in a network of relationships and not the nominal actor. However, as knowledge is created within the interactions between many people, the relational experience could contribute to the development of ethically sensible and responsive environments where others are factored into decision-making. This is, if the purpose of the organisation, the integrity of leaders, and a true interest and intention to build ethically responsive and accountable environments underpin a Cynefin or any other narrative ethics workshop or intervention. In addition, it would be necessary to be conscious that ethics is inherently a complex matter and therefore require an ongoing discussion. In this regard it would be helpful to remind oneself of Foucault's description of the technologies of the self that can be exercised to continue the becoming of an ethical and morally aware individual, who is also part of a larger group.[541] Comparing patterns for the sake of seeing relationships will only provide a description of issues and cannot in itself lead to the development of ethical agency and accountability. Similarly, stories, interactions, description of phenomena and contextualised decisions do not necessarily lead to morally responsive decisions or the development of ethical sensibilities or accountability.

In this regard, MacIntyre's perspective on the individual as storyteller has relevance to the organisation as storyteller. Similar to the unity of an individual's stories that shows intention and attitudes over an entire lifetime, an organisation's actions and relationships with stakeholders and its attitudes towards the larger economic environment can speak louder than its words, when they are considered over the entirety of its existence.[542] In addition, MacIntyre's perspective on the development of the individual as a practical, critical and participative member of a community with shared values can provide a normative basis for a Cynefin sense-making interaction.[543] To reiterate MacIntyre's words, "one cannot be a moral agent without understanding oneself as a moral agent at the level of one's everyday practice... and ... one cannot exercise the powers of a moral agent, unless one is able to understand oneself as justifiably held responsible in virtue of one's ability to exercise these powers."[544]

For ethical sensibilities and accountability to develop, ethics-related questions must therefore be put in place in the design of a Sensemaking framework. These questions can include

[541] Foucault, "Technologies of the Self", 223 – 251.
[542] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 205.
[543] MacIntyre, "Social Structures", 315 – 316.
[544] Ibid, 314.

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questions about purpose, openness, who we are as individuals and an organisation in relation to others, as well as where power is situated in these relationships. It would be important that the discursive environment, or storied space, allow for critical questioning of one another or of different perspectives. A business that values diversity and difference in opinion and lookout, and believes in the strength of relational networks, will be more susceptible to narrative methods in which various voices are encouraged to ring out, than one that is driven by hierarchical order. This implies that the success of a Cynefin Framework and Sensemaker™ workshop would depend wholly on the attitudes of leaders with regards to the value of common experience. Common experience, in Beauman's words, has always been, "meaningful, interpreted, understood by those steeped in it...".[545]

4.1 Some questions for consideration in developing a signification framework for an organisational ethics sense-making project

An important part of a Cynefin Framework sense-making project is the development of a signification framework. Developing the right set of questions for a narrative intervention is vital as preparation for in-depth story collection and discussion. The types of question direct our thinking and provide the answers on which we act. For instance, if we don't ask critical questions about the normative framework within which we do business, our decisions and actions might lose sight of ethical considerations, as we will make these decisions under the influence of undercurrents that are difficult to discern. Therefore, the questions we ask are important in starting the discussion about ethical relationships, responsiveness and subjectivity within the normative structures we create.

We could, for instance, reframe our perspective and instead of accepting that the business is at the core of its stakeholder network, we could ask: "Who are the members who interact in our stakeholder network?" We could also ask: "Who are the people who are affected by our operations? How do they affect our business and our way of doing business?" Instead of asking, where is power situated in the system, or which systems are governed by rules, we could ask, "How is power exercised through the various techniques, practices and procedures that give it its effect?" Likewise, the question, "How should we comply with the rules and corporate norms, in order to maintain the equilibrium in the organisation?, could be framed to enquire about how personal gain, peer pressure or fear for retribution could be the incentive or coercion for our compliance to rule-based systems. In addition we could ask questions related to maintaining the various relationships that interact with and within the system, as well as accountability for our decisions and actions: For instance, instead of asking, "Who is the authority on the issue?" we could ask what the standards of our practice are that allow us to achieve our common purpose inherent to our practice. We could further ask, "Who else, in the network of relationships, can

[545] Bauman, "Tourists and Vagabonds", 85.

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join the conversation and contribute to the generation of a wider variety of knowledge and meaning?" And, instead of asking, "Can it be done?" or "Is the cost justified?" or "What are the odds that something would happen?" we could ask critical questions for ethics awareness to develop, such as: "What are the unwritten rules that dictate the terms in which success and respect could be earned by employees?", or "What are the possible effect on others?". Finally, to displace closure, we could ask ourselves what we don't know about the issue.

In conclusion, ethical sensibilities, sensitivity and responsiveness can only be developed in a group of people when information flows freely, people are willing and able to listen, to disagree and offer their insights, and to work co-dependently within certain boundaries and standards related to their practices. It is therefore important to keep in mind that a relational ethics implies a continuous process of interaction between various agents in an open, discursive network, and that changes occur through these multiple interactions as well as through other, external influences on the system: As the context changes, the relationships between the different agents in the network change. New relationships are formed in coherence with the standard way of doing, or in opposition to it, but with renewed expectations. This could bring about a renewed sense of accountability by the agent for his/her own actions in the relationship with others. In this way, a relational, responsive ethics can develop as part of a self-organising system.

If self-organisation is considered as the way systems evolve, in other words, when the inherent complexity of the interrelated system is acknowledged, the Cynefin Framework can be utilised as a deeper delve into ethical issues, relationships and actions. Conversely, when it is utilised superficially as a categorisation framework, the Cynefin Framework and Sensemaker Suite™ have limited utility as regards the building of ethically sensible work environments and the concurrent development of individual ethical and moral sensibilities and responsiveness in the work environment.

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Conclusion

This study has been undertaken with the purpose of understanding the implications of complex adaptive systems theory for organisational culture, agency and ethics, and to discover the philosophical questions that can facilitate ethical and morally responsive decision-making in organisations. It specifically looks at complex adaptive systems from a poststructuralist position to make sense of the differences and changes in meaning and knowledge that influence the decisions we make, as well as the way we perceive ourselves and others as participants in various relationships.

Three assumptions form the basis for the study. Based on an assumption that ethical decision-making and accountability in complex systems are responsive to the interactions in the system, the study subscribes to a perspective that business and ethics are not two distinct fields where ethical codes and norms are imposed on business relationships, but that ethical relationships are formed through these interrelationships. At the same time, it challenges the perspective that ethics and accountability are based on universal moral truths that a reasonable person would understand or can be trained to understand, in order to knowingly follow the rules to make ethical decisions.

Instead, it points to a second assumption, namely that ethics is a relational activity in which stories play an important part in engaging with others, in allowing meaningful conversations, as well as in contextualising the complexities we encounter. In this regard I argue that stories help us to understand ourselves in relationship with others in an open network, and contribute to our ability to develop a better sense of what the appropriate behaviour would be in ethically challenging, unexpected or complex situations.

The third assumption is that these stories and narratives emerge through the interactions in the system and can be perceived as emergent patterns that form around certain attractors or values. In this regard, the assumption is that it would be possible to reinforce behaviours that strengthen the moral fabric of relationships, or intervene to influence attitudes and behaviours that pose a risk to the ethical environment by strengthening or weakening these values.

1. Shifting our thinking about decision-making, knowledge creation and meaning

The problem that is described in the first part of this study is that our knowledge of the complexities involved in an interconnected and interrelated environment, such as a corporate environment, is limited. As such, we have to acknowledge the fact that we know in part, and are only capable of perceiving and understanding reality in a limited way. This awareness should be

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enough to make us modest in our claims of knowledge, which includes our approach to the rules that order our communities and organisations.[546]

I argue in this study that we have to think differently about what knowledge is, how we create knowledge, what the meaning of things is, and how we make good or right decisions. Instead of believing that we make rational decisions based on universally accepted truths or scientifically proven facts, we should realise that there are many other pressures that we might not be aware of, but which influence our decision-making. In this regard, I argue that ethical decision-making depends on how much we are aware of our own as well as others' perspectives, and the differences in meaning related to various different perspectives and experiences. I also argue that the way in which we derive our knowledge about the world has to shift to include non-scientific information that is shared in the form of stories, anecdotes, jokes and other metaphoric or symbolic manifestations of how we perceive ourselves and others in our relationships and interactions in organisations.

This argument is based on a critique of excessively rule-based environments, which, I argue, are limited in their effectiveness as ethically sensible work environments. I do not presume that rules or laws are redundant, but rather that, even though governance structures, policies, codes, et cetera, are an imperative for organisations to maintain their internal structures and fiduciary relationship with shareholders, they cannot be considered as the only way of creating ethical environments.[547] I point out that the problem with depending on rule-based structures to create ethical environments is that it is impossible to describe all possible branches of knowledge and all interpretations of truth, on the one hand, and on the other, that it is impossible to create a rule for every emergent property of the system. Lyotard calls this the crisis of scientific knowledge.[548] In this regard, I support the view that rules don't necessarily reduce complexity, but can add to it.

I further point out that, instead of strengthening employees' capabilities for ethical decision-making, excessive rule-based environments can weaken their ability or inclination to act thinkingly, or to accept their accountability for decisions and actions. In this regard, I argue that these organisational relational structures form part of a larger complex environment, which includes struggles for power and status, different agendas, as well as nuances of meaning related to different human issues that might have deep roots in historical issues, or might emerge through the multiple, non-linear interactions in the system.

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[546] Cilliers, "Complexity, Deconstruction and Relativism", 256.
[547] Painter-Morland, "Agency in Corporations", 23.
[548] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*.

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Dealing with emergence is a tough issue in complex environments. When critical, emergent issues are ignored and managed by imposing simple rules on the issue, the system can become unmanageable and lead to chaos. In this regard, Derrida's theory of deconstruction provides a way of dealing with the emergence that is part of a complex environment. It also provides a way to reassess our understanding of rules, regulations, laws and guidelines by acknowledging the rule, but also by pointing out the internal contradictions and tensions that are already in place when we think about applying the rule or defining a meaning, before we have acted. In this regard the rule is not considered to contain its meaning within itself, but is described as being part of a process, which is not controlled by the rule.[549] The exact meaning of a rule, or of language in general, is also elusive and can change over time and place, a "systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences", [550] as Derrida writes. The tension that is described as regards making decisions in emergent situations is therefore a natural effect of dealing with complexity.

With all these differences and nuances of meaning it is difficult to conceive of how we ever succeed in our attempts to communicate with one another, even though we know that relationships are not always in conflict and are fairly stable in most cases. It is in this regard that the notion of context and the concept of iteration provide some way of dealing with the elusiveness of meaning, and in describing how we can understand one another, and agree on certain concepts without the expectation of having final answers for every possible ethical dilemma faced in business.

Following Cilliers, I therefore argue that much of our decision-making happens in situations that are regular and repetitive. It is therefore possible to interpret and respond to these situations correctly if we understand that iterations of an ethical problem, or of a rule to address the particular problem, allow us to recognise some similarities as well as differences. We have to realise however, that, iterations contain traces of previous meanings, and are not exact replicas of what happened before. For ethics it means that historical constructions, such as established laws and rules, should be acknowledged and recognised as such, but that the rule has to be newly applied according to the demands of every new context.

Dealing with complex issues require from us to acknowledge and live with the aporia that we have to act swiftly in certain circumstances, while, at the same time, we can never be absolutely sure that we have made the right decision. This means that every decision places an enormous responsibility on the decision-maker for all possible known or even unknown outcomes related to the decision.[551] This is the ghost of undecidability that hovers over our decisions to act in one

[549] Rasche, "Corporate Responsibility Standards", 275 – 276.
[550] Derrida, *Positions*, 27.
[551] Derrida, "As if I Were Dead", 6.

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way and not in another, and over our decisions to select and include certain phenomena or interpretations of reality and exclude others. In this regard, when we accept responsibility for our actions, we also admit that ethics requires us to favour certain decisions above others, even though we know that we might be wrong.

I argue in this dissertation that various innate human qualities and capabilities can help us be more prepared for the responsibility we take on as ethical agents and ease the tension of the aporias and dilemmas presented by ethical interactions. These include practices such as storytelling, and self-reflection, together with a critical, questioning attitude, as well as being open for different perspectives and experiences to evolve and mature into knowledge. I argue that acknowledging complexity and not attempting to reduce and simplify the complexity of our interactions would allow plausible solutions to emerge through regular interactions in a network of relationships.

Being open for complexity and being part of a network of relationships do not come without its own plethora of difficulties. Most of them are related to being accountable for the decisions that are made or not made to shareholders, the management of a business, employees and clients, as well as the communities, industries and the natural and social environment in which an organisation operates.

Building, or rebuilding relationships when they have deteriorated and trust has been lost, is difficult. Inviting others into the network of relationships require a courageous act of inviting them into the conversation. However, it also requires discernment, a sense of purpose, and of one's own accountability towards others. These "others" could include subcultures in an organisation that never before had a voice, or members of a community that has been affected by an organisation's activities, or even the natural environments in which a business operates.

On the one hand, being accountable therefore implies that we expect the other to enter the discourse and question our intentions; on the other it means that we invite the other into a relationship, however not unconditionally. In this regard, Foucault speaks about the rules of a game of discourse and whoever plays the game plays according to the rules; Derrida speaks about acting hospitably, while we expect the other to be accountable to us as well; MacIntyre speaks about ethics as a practice in which certain standards are accepted as the norms against which practitioners' activities are judged. These conditions under which relational activities take place are not external rules made up to control the conversation, but the rules co-created by the participants in the interaction who subscribe to a purpose bigger than themselves or their business, to engage in ethical business relationships. For this to happen, Cilliers points to being unassuming in our assumptions about knowledge about the world and how it should be.

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MacIntyre's description of the failing of the emotivist project provides a basis for establishing a platform for ethical discourse in which ethics can be established as a practice. When ethics is considered to be a practice, it cannot be aimed at short-term or selfish gains, such as a clean compliance report, to increase performance efficiencies or the profitability of the business, or to conform to legal requirements. When this happens, ethics can become a tool to promote self-interest instead of becoming a way of living or being. The alternative, when an organisation prepares for "the other" as another ethical agent, is to introduce a way of collaboration that is not always consensual, but includes dissent, critical participation,[552] as well as conditions that are laid down by the participants who co-define the rules of the game, so to speak.

Without this purposeful openness, our interpretations of reality can solidify in one-sided accounts of what the reality is, what it means and how it should be for everyone without discerning the differences between people.

2. Ethical agency as a process of becoming

Being ethically sensible and responsive implies participation in the politics of ethical relationships. Considering ethical relationships through a complexity lens means to be closely involved in the power/knowledge interactions in the system. Through Cilliers, I argue that the individual, who is engaged in these power struggles, is not the nucleus of the activity, but an active participant in the network of relationships. Entering the "agonistics of the system" knowingly allows the individual to engage with and within the constraints of the structures in which he/she lives, and to work actively and critically with others in the network. I further argue that, because power and knowledge manifest in and through discourse, we create meaning in and through our discourses. These interactions and the vocabulary we gain through our interactions allow us to frame our reality accordingly, make sense of it, as well as to create systems and processes through which we govern ourselves and others.

Following Foucault, I argue that this critical engagement, as a practice of ethics, does not necessarily mean to be in conflict, even though struggle is not excluded from the process, but rather to maintain a questioning attitude. It also means to actively attempt to understand the historical influences, how power is distributed, as well as conceptual frameworks and institutional practices that influence the way we understand and negotiate our reality. This happens in contrast to being subjected to rigid rule-based systems, what Foucault calls systems of normalisation, where individuals are at the same time subjected to the rules laid down by some other body and also regulated by their own knowledge of the system.[553] I further argue through Foucault's concept of governmentality that the individual's capacity, as well as his/her obligation, to participate in power relationships, takes ethics out of the realm of systemised

[552] Willmott, "Organizational Culture", 75 – 77.
[553] Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, 21.

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norms and makes it a political act, and relational, in the sense that ethical agency emerges through the dynamic interactions of the system.

The constant interplay between power and knowledge and the discourse that flows out of these relationships can enable individuals to consider and reflect on their own subjectivity within these relationships. When self-reflection becomes an attitude or ethos, it becomes a life-long pursuit; in Foucault's words, "a critical ontology of the self" means becoming ethical, unlearning bad practices, becoming aware of others' perspective of oneself, as well as preparing the individual to participate in a life-long struggle against impositions upon him/her. This can only happen in a relationship and in dialogue with others when the other is considered an equal partner who is also free to participate in power relationships and to apply the self-critical practices of the self on him/herself.

In addition to being conscious of one's identity as a "free" agent in relationship with others and interacting within the structures of society, and showing courage and self-discipline in this regard, I further argue through MacIntyre[554] that moral identity is built through responsiveness to ethical challenges based on (1) a consistent living of one's practices as an individual, (2) by taking responsibility for one's actions, and (3) by maintaining credibility in the eyes of other practitioners or participants in the various roles we play in society and business. In this way, ethics is vested in relationships, as well as a sense of self, and the courage to enter into the agonistic interactions of the system willingly. This, however, does not mean that the individual's identity as an ethical subject is central in ethical relationships. Through Cilliers and other complexity theorists, I point out that the nominal subject can be self-centred when not tempered by others. When the subject is decentralised and considered to be part of the relationships in a specific context, it enters the agonistics of a system in which give and take, self-reflection and questioning, being scrutinised and kept accountable, and in turn expecting accountability from others, are at the same time present in each interaction. These interactions include storytelling, as well as story-listening, as important aspects of learning how to become ethically sensible and understand one's own purposes amongst various differences and conflicts in values. Becoming an ethical agent and a moral subject depends on how an individual deals with the demands made on him/her. In this regard, the question we need to ask ourselves continuously is not only about "who I am", but about "who I am in relationship and in response to you and others".

From an organisational perspective, it also depends on how much support an individual gets in living out his or her moral obligation to enter into ethical relationships. Without tension, there is no ethical deliberation, but this tension cannot be dealt with, without displaying vulnerability

[554] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.

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and an expectation that others will respond in a way that contributes to the communal good. I therefore argue that an organisation's leaders have to acknowledge their obligation to provide the platform for employees to become responsive to ethical issues.

Interactions and participation in the changing environment contribute to effecting the changes one wants to see, and can also subtly change attitudes and behaviours of individuals in an organisation and its network of stakeholders. With an internal goal of creating and reinforcing internal ethical values of, for instance, justice, courage, truthfulness and trust in all relationships with stakeholders, ethics, and specifically business ethics, could be considered to be a practice.

3. Storytelling as a human capability through which agents are changed

Based on the second assumption of this study, I argue that implicit as well as tacit knowledge that influence the culture of a business can be made lucid through storytelling, which is a sense-making capability shared by all humans.

Storytelling is influential as the individual's own sense-making capability to frame and order his or her own reality, which is a complex mix of an individual's own experiences and various tacit influences, memories and emotions that act as filters through which new information is selected and synthesised with existing information. All these influences subtly define the way people think about things.

In organisations, storytelling can be used as a practice with the purpose of making sense of various subcultures and hierarchical ambiguities that contribute to an organisational culture, and are sometimes in accordance and sometimes in opposition to one another. I argue that the contrasts and conflicts between tacit and implicit symbolic representations can point out power relationships and tensions in the various interactions. These power relationships and tensions can give an idea of the ethical nature of these relationships. However, what must be remembered is that stories are complex in themselves, and also subject to influences and changes in context and understanding.

Organisational stories are often generated in the managed spaces of an organisation and organised into symbolic representations presented as corporate values, processes or practices with the purpose to influence attitudes. In contrast to these organisational monologues, unofficial stories and anecdotes, jokes, fantasies or inferences often emerge in response to the managed cultural manifestations. I argue that, when telling stories, organisational storytellers and researchers must ask themselves what their purposes are with understanding these relationships: are they aimed at increasing and manipulating operational efficiencies and organisational reputation, or are they aimed at creating the open storied spaces that are necessary for the building of trust relationships?

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A practical consideration for telling stories in organisations is that there are different conceptions about what stories are and what they are not. When stories are considered as unities containing a purpose, plot, and structure of beginning, middle and end, they are limited in their usefulness to understand the emergent properties of a complex organisational culture. Dominant stories are essentially backward looking and closed in their structure. In this regard they do not invite discussion but tell the story as it is or should be interpreted.

I propose an alternative way of looking at stories, through the lens of general complexity theory, which does not attempt to lift the ethical challenges but point out that ethical relationships start by being open to others' stories and interpretation of their experiences. Being more open to other perspectives, I argue, allows us to break through our own and organisational dominant narratives, while we show respect to the otherness of others and acknowledge our connectedness with them as another self in our relational networks.

Because we contextualise our experiences to make sense of them, and have limited view on reality, our decisions are limited, irreducible and contextualised.[555] However, in this regard, I argue that Baskin's concept of storied spaces[556] and Bøje's concept of living stories and antenarratives[557] provide a way to deal with the dominance of organisational stories, as well as with various emergent stories that are told about the same events, but from different perspectives and purposes. Living stories, in contrast, are a social condition in which stories are not told as a one-way process but include listening, analysing, participating, and therefore co-creating, the stories of the organisation both as before-the-dominant-story accounts of events or as a hint or a bet on the possibility of another plot to develop. As such they are never complete.

Living stories have material agency in the sense that the stories that are told can become the vehicles for transformation. Based on a collective memory, they tell about current processes and the organisation of material aspects of the organisation, and in such a way foresee future actions. In such a way, living stories shape the storied spaces and become the drivers for human attractors such as personality or organisational culture, group dynamics and values.

When storytelling is lifted from the boundaries placed on interpretation and meaning by their structures and purposes, it also lifts the paradox related to a narrative unity that could easily become insular and dominating and, as such, undermine ethical sensibilities and questioning. In this regard, stories are powerful. Those that get the attention of employees influence attitudes and behaviours, and are essentially the barometer of the ethical character of the organisation.

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[555] Cilliers, "Complexity, Deconstruction and Relativism", 259.
[556] Baskin, "Storied spaces", 90.
[557] Bøje, *Narrative Methods*, 4.

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Therefore I argue that, as ethical agents, we have the obligation to be self-reflective, self-critical and reflexive when we tell stories. We have to be aware of our own subjective interpretations, as well as of the power relationships that are always present when we frame our world through the stories we choose to tell, and by the experiences, influences and other perspectives we choose to filter out. Stories, both dominant and living stories as an ante to our interpretations, have a place in organisational storytelling if we keep Derrida's statement in mind that each story is, at once, more and less than itself. The argument I hold is that if we open ourselves to other meanings that are still hidden, storytelling can help us to acknowledge our own limitations and at least attempt to take into account the demands of the Other. Our challenge, however, would be to redefine "autonomy" and "accountability" for ourselves, while we acknowledge that the self lies at the intersection of relational narratives, which include our own web of living stories.

Stories are not necessarily ethically good. Stories can never be neutral. Storytelling happens as a natural activity in the living spaces of our lives, in the various discourses in which we participate as human beings. It is through these moments when ideas, experiences, feelings, and interpretations of events and relationships are recounted that relationships are built or broken, and the storied space is shaped. In this regard, storytellers are essentially active in an ethical act, and should be made aware of their own responsibility and accountability to others in their network of relationships for the storied space they are co-creating.

4. Influencing ethical relationships: storytelling and a pattern-based understanding

For a discourse about ethics and how the patterns that emerge through the stories that are told can be influenced to strengthen some attitudes and weaken others, the notion of story adoption is important. Various influences, some formal organisational structures, others related to personal experiences, and a sense of agency and accountability to one another, all affect the extent to which stories are adopted. Related to this is the level of cognitive maturity of an individual or group. A story might therefore be rejected when it is perceived as affecting employees' autonomy, their status, or their relationships with others in the group.

In this regard, I support Weick's argument that establishing the identity of an organisation is an important factor in finding out how it perceives the world. "Who I am" will influence an organisation's definition of "what's out there".[558] It is also important to consider reputation and status (who they think I am, and who I think I am in relation to them), as well as the context in which the story is told and retold. All of these considerations influence an individual or group's perspective on what they are doing, why they are doing it, what matters to them and why it matters.

[558] Weick *et al*, "Organizing and the Process of Sensemaking".

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5. Practical considerations

The practical implication for organisational ethics is that we cannot merely "share" our experiences or "tell" our stories without attempting to understand and considering the perspectives of different groups in the extended stakeholder network. We also need to understand the context of the interaction, and invite the others in the network to provide their stories and their own interpretations of their stories. It also implies that all sense-making is not equal, and as Weick points out, apparent agreements and understandings often lead to misunderstandings because of differences in meaning of words, concepts, intentions and actions based on personal or cultural differences.[559] These difference and disagreements are inherently part of self-organising systems, as the structure of a self-organising system evolves as a "tangle of partly competing, partly co-operating, or simply mutually ignoring subsystems."[560] Dialogue, conflict, bargaining, negotiation and persuasion, questioning, reflexivity and self-reflection, as well as improvisation and bricolage are all methods that could be helpful in organisations' attempts to engage with complex moral and ethical problems as a means to survive and adapt to a complex and changing environment.[561]

In other words, we have to remain sensitive to paradox and should not try to simplify and order different perspectives too quickly according to our own frameworks, as paradox is inherently part of the character of complex systems. If we adopt the idea that organisations are complex, we should be aware that small, local changes can have far-reaching and unexpected effects. We should also be aware that some plausible stories can or will, over time, become more believable and embedded in our histories. They will become the entrained patterns we have to guard against to prevent them from becoming our absolute truths, while others will continue to change, or be rejected, as we change.

For ethicists, researchers, organisational leaders, managers and storytellers, it is vital to consider that organisations comprise many different cultural groups and are spread over vast and diverse geographical areas that include urban, suburban and rural areas. These organisations deal with complexities that range from various outlooks on life and experiences of life, as well as basic differences in their moral reasoning and in their capacity for moral reasoning. Acknowledging this multiplicity is of particular relevance when ethics audits, research interventions and programmes are conducted.

It would be important to understand who these different individuals and groups believe themselves to be in relationship to one another, their immediate environment, as well as within

[559] Ibid.
[560] Heylighen *et al*, Complexity and Philosophy, 124.
[561] Weick, "The Collapse of Sensemaking in Organizations".

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the structure of the organisation. It would also be important to understand how cultural differences can influence various people's frames of what is considered to be fair, right, wrong, good, respectful and responsible, as well as how judgements and decisions are made in terms of those who transgress.

In this regard, it is clear why large scale ethics interventions and typical training programmes are insufficient in their attempt to entrain new habits. Grand plans and rigid rules would make the organisation slow to respond to unexpected feedback loops that challenge it at the core of its ideology. In other words, if management is oblivious of changing attitudes, or ignore rumours of discontent, or manage complex, disordered relational issues in a rigid manner, or when roles or trust relationships interactively disintegrate, it might find itself unexpectedly in a state of chaos.

It is also clear why small, local and positive actions that get reinforced throughout the system might be more successful in influencing unconstructive attitudes, and in building resilience rather than robustness in terms of dealing with emergent ethical challenges. The challenge for ethics practitioners and programmes is therefore to integrate different ways of perceiving and making sense of the world into cohesive but adaptable programmes that acknowledge, respect and speak to cultural differences. This might require a more diverse and adaptable approach to creating moral sensibilities in workplaces and communities than following rigid decision-making models or making one-size-fits-all rules. This opportunity might be provided by a dance of narrative and living storytelling, as Bøje proposes.[562] Entering the space of disorder where people live in different, contrasting agglomerates of realities[563] might require more adaptive, abductive techniques and technologies, such as what the Cynefin Framework methods and Sensemaker Suite™ research software, amongst others, can offer.

In conclusion, being unassuming in our attempts to describe and order our world, as well as embracing attitudes of wisdom and respectful interaction, and listening to the stories of others who might have different experiences or perspectives on the world, are all important attitudes to display when dealing with complex organisational ethical issues. This is of particular importance in the complex and diverse ethics landscape of South Africa.

[562] Bøje *et al*, *Dance to the Music of Story.*
[563] Barth, "Introducing Disordered Systems", 69.

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